



Lake Washington Institute of Technology: Leveraging Technology to Increase Student Success



Lake Washington Institute of Technology, Kirkland, WA

Lake Washington Institute of Technology (LWTech) has a long history as a vocational school and is the only public institute of technology in Washington state. LWTech offers a mix of professional certificates and associate degrees, as well as ten applied baccalaureate degrees ranging from dental hygiene to computer software development.

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- Dr. Ruby Hayden, Vice President of Student Services

Serving Non-Traditional Students

"One of the biggest retention challenges we face is nearly all of our students are nontraditional in some way," said Dr. Ruby Hayden, Vice President of Student Services. With an average age of 32, most of LWTech's students are adults returning to school either for re-training for a new career or advancement in an existing career.

"Many of our students face a choice between continuing their education and putting food on the table for their families," said Dr. Hayden. "They often have to prioritize work over school, even if long term, higher education would result in higher income. As a result, our retention challenges often have more to do with life issues than academic deficiencies."

The Four Connections for Student Success

With a large population of at-risk students, instructional administration saw a need to develop a more intuitive framework for faculty to build more intentional relationships with students. Based off of Odessa College's drop-rate improvement program, LWTech adopted a "4 Connections" initiative as a



30%

Over 30% of LWTech students had an appointment in Starfish in the first 6 months

13%

Higher appointment use than Starfish institutions with similar enrollments

9:1

Kudo to flag ratio by pilot faculty

means of establishing a common thread of connectivity to students. LWTech identifies the four connections as:

- Interacting with students by name
- Checking in regularly to track student progress
- Scheduling one-on-one meetings
- Practicing paradox by communicating expectations while maintaining flexibility

To ensure a strong partnership between divisions, Dr. Hayden and the Vice President of Instruction, Dr. Elliot Stern, decided to utilize Starfish solutions on campus to facilitate the college's four connections work in instruction and start using the same practices in student services.

A Student-Led Movement

Due to budget cuts, the college did not have traditional funding available to use to acquire Starfish. However, Dr. Hayden and Dr. Stern were determined to bring Starfish to the campus. "We knew this technology could really support our 4 Connections and guided pathways work, so we made the decision to present it to the Technology Fee committee within the Associated Student Government, which has the ability to make funds available for software purchases that directly benefit students."

The Technology Fee committee made the decision to utilize a technology fee levied on all students in order

to help the college fund the Starfish investment. During the committee deliberations, student leaders pointed to the disconnect between the college's name and mission, and not having modern technology that allows students, faculty and staff to collaborate. One student remarked "How can we call ourselves an institute of technology?"

"We are incredibly proud to say our students made our Starfish implementation possible," said Hayden. "It was simply remarkable to hear their discussion and vision for the software."

Surpassing Benchmarks Early On

LWTech began its Starfish implementation in the Spring 2018 with a faculty cohort from its Health Sciences program, a population that features a mix of workforce, direct transfer, and baccalaureate programs. "Starfish enables us to share notes so faculty can see what student services is telling students and vice versa." Despite only having gone live a few months ago, LWTech's appointment usage significantly exceeds Starfish's benchmark for institutions with a similar enrollment size. Over 30% of its students have already had an appointment in Starfish.

The college plans to roll out Starfish to the entire campus in Fall 2018, and will implement Starfish Analytics to demonstrate that faculty who use Starfish have higher persistence rates in their classrooms than those who do not. "Starfish's fundamental communications structure has changed the very nature of our advising," said Dr. Hayden.