Starfish

New York University: Using Starfish to Strategically Increase Student Success Metrics

New York University, New York, N.Y.

With more than 50,000 students, New York University (NYU) is the largest private university in the United States. Of the more than 3,000 colleges and universities in the U.S., NYU is one of only 60 member institutions of the distinguished Association of American Universities. The university received over 84,000 applications for the undergraduate class of Fall 2019 – more applications than any other private college or university in the country.

Focusing on Specific Student Cohorts

In September 2017, NYU recognized its need to enhance the student experience and improve its already strong retention and graduation rates. As part of a campus-wide student success initiative, the university brought on Bernie Savarese as its inaugural Assistant Vice President for Student Success.

"When we compared the quality of students that we enroll to key metrics like retention and graduation rates, we felt they weren't where they should be, especially when compared to our peer institutions and the success they've had with students of equal caliber," said Savarese. "When our initiative began, we had a 92% first-year retention and an 85% six-year graduation rate, which would be the envy of many schools. But we believed we could, and should, improve to a 96% rate for our first-year students and a 90% six-year graduation rate."

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An Ambitious Agenda

After analyzing student retention and completion data, the NYU team set out to find a technology solution to help them accomplish their goals to:

- Improve communication, coordination and the ability to help students navigate a large, complex university;

- Ease the transition and improve the student experience for all students;

- Increase retention for all students, but especially targeted populations such as international students and students from outside the east and west coasts, and;

- Establish a single student success platform across the many schools, advising units and student services departments of the university.

"We were looking for a solution that could help us more easily collaborate, see the whole student, and surface actionable data," he said. "Starfish was really appealing because of its case management and communication tools. We also knew we weren't going to be able to pick up our retention rates without being thoughtful about empirical data."

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Over 12,000 advising notes entered into Starfish in one semester

35% increase in raised flags (comparing Fall 2017 to Fall 2018)

Over 2,500 flags and kudos in one semester

94% first-year retention rate in Fall 2018

Embracing Technology

After signing their contract in April 2018, NYU launched Starfish to academic advisors, faculty teaching undergraduate courses, and select student services in early September 2018.

"Our academic advising community is consistently telling us how convenient the Starfish student folders are, as they surface information for people who rarely have the time to go digging," said Savarese. "The open platform with readily available, and customizable, student attributes allows the advisor to see and understand the whole student quickly by aggregating data from a variety of places so information is always at our fingertips."

The numbers bear out his assertion. In just the first semester of use, over 12,000 shared notes were submitted through the system and over 2,000 (manual) flags were raised – numbers that significantly outpace those they were seeing with their former alerts system. NYU's focus on student success is already paying off, with a 94% first- year retention rate in Fall 2018 - a record high for the university.

"Starfish is helping us better identify students in need of assistance, collaborate more effectively across schools and departments, and proactively connect students to campus resources so they can take full advantage of all that NYU has to offer."

- Bernard J. Savarese, Assistant Vice President for Student Success

Looking Forward

Savarese expressed his eagerness to see the student experience improve, and retention and graduation rates rise, as students are introduced into the platform in Fall 2019. "We want to extrapolate the data available through Starfish so we can make student success decisions across the board in a very data-driven way," said Savarese. "Starfish is going to help us get there by identifying students in need of assistance, collaborating more effectively across schools and departments, and proactively connecting students to campus resources so they can take full advantage of all that NYU has to offer."