

Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, New Jersey

Ramapo College of New Jersey is a premier public liberal arts college located in Mahwah, New Jersey. The college serves 6,000 students, and is driven by its mission to provide students a strong foundation for a lifetime of achievement.

Almost 50% of Ramapo's student population are commuter students, while transfers from community colleges continue to increase — two populations that are often associated with lower engagement and retention rates. "We are becoming a more diverse campus and, due to financial realities, more of our students are choosing to commute," said Christopher Romano, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. The college chose to use Starfish to provide earlier outreach to academically at-risk students, with the intention of making a dramatic impact on retention for all students.

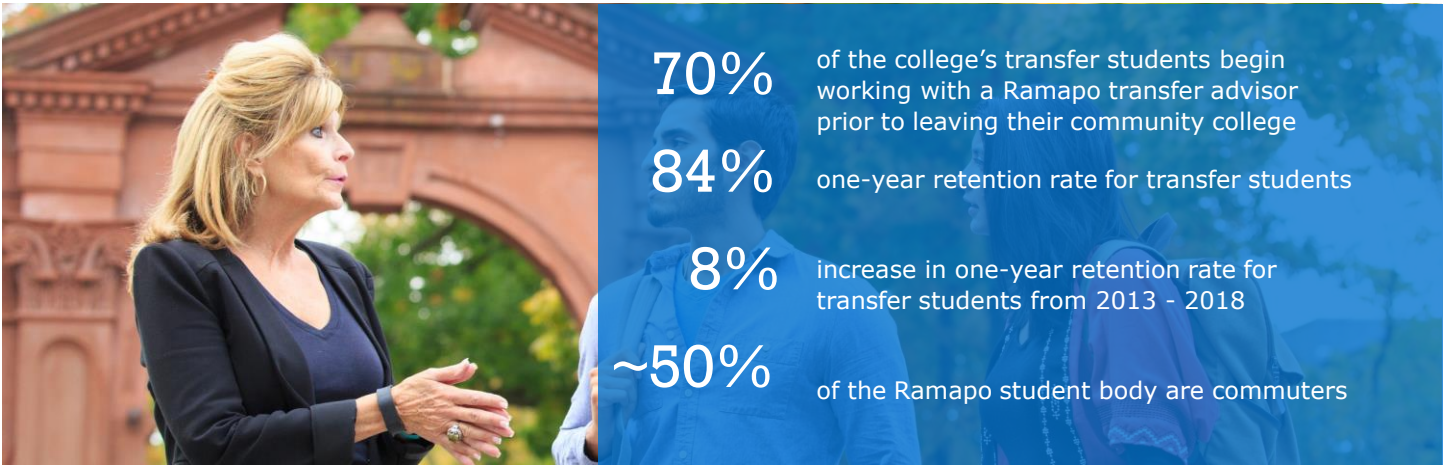
Increasing Transfer Student Engagement

Ramapo College was awarded an EDUCAUSE Integrated Planning and Advisement for Student Success (iPASS) grant in 2015 to continue using Starfish solutions to impact retention and advising goals. After receiving the grant, Ramapo turned their attention to establishing student success initiatives to help at-risk student populations.

"We quickly learned that Starfish gives us the ability to identify at-risk students earlier and prioritize outreach based on the severity of the concern," said Joseph Connell, Assistant Vice President of Student Success.

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“We wanted our transfer students to hear our messaging concerning early registration and hold release,” said Connell. “By utilizing Starfish Early Alert, we have seen significant improvements in the number of holds released by the time the registration window opens.”

Since implementing Starfish in 2013, Ramapo’s one-year retention rate for transfer students has increased from 76% to 84%. “We knew what an increase in transfer retention rate would mean in terms of dollars, and we’ve made tremendous strides in that direction,” said Romano.

In another initiative focused on transfer students, Ramapo partners with community colleges to create prospective student profiles — an idea Romano said he first learned about in a Starfish webinar. Today, 70% of the college’s transfer students begin working with a transfer advisor at their community college before they transfer to Ramapo.

“We now partner with five community colleges to create profiles for prospective students, so if they eventually matriculate at Ramapo, their data merges with our Banner SIS,” Romano said. “That way, our team is reviewing student records containing complete academic information from both schools.”

Inclusivity with Commuters

Ramapo also leverages Starfish to make an impact on its retention efforts with commuter students. The school has made a commitment to ensure commuters receive the same level of support as residential students. According to Romano, that means taking a “more holistic view of the student,” where faculty or others can submit input and concerns about students within Starfish.

Today, Ramapo’s commuter students are connected to what the school calls a “success network” — a group of faculty, advisors and peer facilitators who provide academic guidance and help students navigate college life. “Including every office in the Starfish Success Network in this way ensures commuter students are fairly represented on campus and have access to services regardless of where they live,” said Connell.

“Five years ago, we did not have a dedicated person who was directly responsible for working with commuter students beyond part-time responsibilities,” said Connell. “Now, a full-time employee is part of the student success network within the Starfish system. It’s just one more way we’ve used Starfish to adapt to our changing demographics.”

