Starfish

The University of Toledo: How to Increase First-Year Student Retention with Starfish Early Alert

"Starfish does not replace people or relationships or conversations. It's simply a tool to help us communicate and identify students in need so that we can have those conversations."

-Julie Fischer-Kinney, Ph.D., Assistant Provost for Student Success and Retention at the University of Toledo

The University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio

The University of Toledo is a public metropolitan research university that serves over 16,000 undergraduate students. The university has a high population of first-generation students, and exceeds the state average on PELL eligible students by ten percentage points.

Transforming Student Success with Starfish Early Alert

Faced with only a 68% retention rate of the Fall 2012 entering student cohort, the university introduced a Success Coaching initiative in 2013 aimed at assisting students with issues beyond traditional academic advising. To help success coaches manage multiple students, keep track of documentation, and proactively communicate with students about a potential problem, UT implemented Starfish one year later.

Today, Toledo uses the Early Alert function within Starfish to increase communication and overall student success across various at-risk student populations, including student-athletes, College Credit Plus students and all 1000 and 2000-level general education classes. In addition, other campus areas such as Greek Life, Academic Support Services, Student Involvement, Residence Life, and Financial Aid have been integrated into the system.

"Through the use of Early Alert, we hope to improve the DFW (D/Fail/Withdraw) rates of general education courses as a way of impacting both course and degree completion," said Julie Fischer-Kinney, Ph.D., Assistant Provost for Student Success and Retention. "Through the expansion of users in the system, we hope to tackle other retention issues impacting students like financial obstacles and adjustment issues for first-year students."

Increasing First-Year Student Retention

Early Alert was first implemented in introductory english and math classes. These classes historically have low pass rates, causing students who perform poorly to often change their major, and frequently leave the institution. Fischer-Kinney and her team have been especially encouraged by the results, and have now implemented Early Alert with other at-risk student groups across the university.

"Through early alert progress surveys, we saw how faculty could alert students and their Success Coaches to academic performance concerns," said Fischer-Kinney. "Success Coaches could then offer support and provide referrals to resources to improve academic success."

The success rates after implementing Early Alert for a semester exceeded UT's original goal. In just one year, DFW rates in English Composition I fell by 5%, by 7% in College Algebra, and by 16% in Mathematical Modeling and Problem Solving.

"The results surpassed our expectations," said Margaret Traband, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. "The experience of the math and composition faculty with Starfish will aid its acceptance and endorsement by faculty across other disciplines as we continue to expand the role of Starfish in our student's first year classes. The ability to help our faculty help our students has made our decision to invest in Starfish a smart one," Fischer-Kinney concurs.

Since implementing Starfish and the Center for Success Coaching, the university's retention rate has risen from 68% to 74.5% — the highest retention rate at UT in over ten years.

"Implementing Starfish has been the best decision we've made," says Fischer-Kinney. "We came from a place where the staff responsible for working with students had no access to data and was truly in the dark. Today, we're more effective, efficient, and holistic. It's not an exaggeration to say Starfish has completely transformed everything we do in student success."

74.5%	retention rate - the highest in over a decade
5%	D/Fail/Withdraw rate improvement in English Composition
7%	D/Fail/Withdraw rate improvement in College Algebra
16%	D/Fail/Withdraw rate improvement in Mathematical Modeling and Problem Solving
100%	Starfish usage by Success Coaches

EAB