Starfish

Wofford College: Reaping the Benefits of Using a Centralized Student Success Solution

Wofford College, Spartanburg, South Carolina

Wofford College, established in 1854, is an independent liberal arts college located in Spartanburg, SC. Wofford serves over 1,500 students and boasts one of the highest freshman retention rates among the nation's liberal arts colleges. At the center of their success is Wofford's promise that every college employee, regardless of their job or title, puts student success first.

Increasing Revenue with Increased Retention

Since implementing the Starfish solution in 2015, Wofford College has seen greater success in student success initiatives and outreach. Starfish was implemented with the goal of increasing the college's retention rates, which had dropped to 87% in the years following the 2008 economic downturn.

"Every percentage point we can move the needle on retention equates to roughly a million dollars in revenue," said Dr. Boyce Lawton, Dean for Student Success. "Our first year with Starfish, we jumped right back up to a 90% rate, which meant a $2.2 million increase in gross revenue. Not only has Starfish been a major factor in millions of dollars of saved revenue, it has increased the quality of the individual student experience at Wofford. Their varied concerns are being addressed early and consistently."

Closing the Loop

The "close the loop" functionality in Starfish has been particularly successful at Wofford. When a member of the faculty or staff enters a flag in Starfish, it flows immediately to the relevant party, whether it's the instructor, financial aid staff, or counseling offices. "When someone walks in my office," said Lawton, "I can

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90% Retention rate increase since Starfish implementation

2% Retention rate increase since Starfish implementation

$2.2 Million increase in gross revenue as a result of retention

use Starfish to instantly call up a history of every flag – whether resolved or unresolved – and look for patterns."

As a result, the Student Success team is able to identify sometimes odd combinations of data points that indicate something might be wrong. This has led to an increased focus on the needs of at-risk student populations.

Pell Grant recipients, for example, were identified as Wofford's most at-risk population, with a 10% decrease in the retention of students in their first and second years. However, Lawton noted, "That's actually smaller than the national average, but it's still significant to us."

Reaping the Benefits

One of the most heavily-used features of Starfish has been coordinated scheduling for faculty. They now have the centralized ability to publish office hours, manage appointment scheduling, and establish time blocks for specific classes or advisees. Word of Starfish's benefits for Wofford's faculty and staff has spread quickly. Raymond Ruff, Director of Constituent Management Systems and Process Improvement, notes, "One of the first indications that things were going well was when I was approached by different offices asking, 'Can Starfish do this for me?'" For example, wellness staff supervisors approached Ruff and asked if Starfish notifications could work for medical absences. As a result, healthcare professionals now keep the appropriate faculty informed and in the process, remove teachers from the role of having to determine the validity of health-related absences.

Easy System, Easy Management

"Now, our student success network is beautifully managed in Starfish," said Lawton. "Personalized contact makes a difference in how students thrive and why they stay. Starfish gives us the hard data we need to have those types of conversations." Long after implementation, other benefits of the system are less observable, but just as important. "Our Starfish maintenance is practically nil," reported Lawton. "We don't even need a Starfish support person on staff, even though we're pulling a massive amount of data into the system."

Perhaps the biggest takeaway is that Wofford's retention rate is up 2% since they implemented Starfish. Ruff summed up the chief benefit of Wofford's collaboration with Starfish this way: "We honestly feel like far fewer students are falling through the cracks."

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