Six Roles for Faculty in Student Success

How the academy can support institutional efforts to improve retention and completion

Faculty play a critical role in shaping the student experience but are surprisingly underleveraged as allies in student success strategy. Here are six key ways that academic units and individual faculty members can help students successfully navigate their academic careers.

Departments and Committees

Individual Faculty Members

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1 Addressing Curricular Barriers to Completion

Decisions about curricula are often made within departmental silos, underestimating or even ignoring their institution-wide impact on student success. *How can we equip academic units to enact progression-based curricular reforms?*

Recommendations

Arm Units with Data
On-demand enrollment analytics help faculty to assess the consequences of proposed curricular changes.

Create Role-Based Working Groups
Subcommittees with specific tasks make better use of faculty time (and expertise) than large task forces.

Skip the "Pilot" Phase
Curricular reforms are most effective when treated as full-scale, managed projects, rather than one-off experiments.

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2 Redesigning Academic Policies

Rules and regulations that govern degree planning, course registration, and advising can unintentionally force students off track. *How can we identify and adjust these obstacles?*

Recommendations

Balance Forgiveness with Proactive Advising
Course repeat and probation policies should encourage students to explore alternative pathways to graduation.

Use Degree Plans as Guardrails
Critical course and grade "milestones" can help faculty and staff evaluate students' academic risk.

Incentivize Timely Progression
Students are more likely to graduate on time if attempting (and completing) 30 credits per year is treated as default.

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3 Evolving Academic Advising Models

Helping students register for courses is only the tip of the iceberg—faculty and staff advisors are now expected to counsel, coach, and intervene with struggling students on a regular basis. *How can we prepare our departments for these broader expectations?*

Recommendations

Outline and Differentiate Roles
Faculty time is best spent on mentoring and academic consultation, not transactional or administrative activities.

Leverage Faculty in Advisor Trainings
Involving faculty in regular staff trainings builds mutual trust and collaboration.

Consider Units' Unique Staffing Needs
Moving to a centralized advising model requires an investment in distributed administrative support.

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4 Enhancing the Learning Experience

It's clear that great teachers have an outsized impact on students' success in college and in their careers. *How can we encourage more faculty to innovate in the classroom?*

Recommendations

Harness Grassroots Activity
It should be easy for innovative instructors to apply for course redesign grants and generate scalable pedagogical models.

Reduce the Risk of Adoption
Targeted support and recognition alleviates the pedagogical, technological, and social concerns of instructors.

Focus on Critical Courses
Courses with high failure rates should be prioritized to maximize the impact of funded reforms on student success.

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5 Flagging Signs of Student Risk

By tracking student attendance, performance, and engagement in class, faculty can help inform your early intervention strategy. *How can we build greater awareness and utilization of early warning systems?*

Recommendations

Make It Simple
Early warning systems should be easy for faculty to use, with a single referral point for academic and behavioral concerns.

Make It Flexible
Faculty should be able to determine the time period and performance threshold for early academic assessments, within reasonable boundaries.

Communicate the Impact
Messages about the importance of early alerts in helping to connect students with critical support services should come from senior academic leaders.

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6 Mentoring Rising-Risk Student Groups

Talented, high-achieving students seek out mentorship opportunities on their own, but many don't establish connections with faculty until it's too late. *How can we engage more students in meaningful interactions with faculty mentors?*

Recommendations

Target Less-Engaged Students
Faculty mentoring efforts should be focused on students who aren't already participating in honors programs or living and learning communities.

Monitor Transcript Requests
Students may reconsider transfer to another institution after connecting with faculty in their field of interest.

Conduct Exit Surveys
Information gathered from stop-outs and transfers can help to guide your intervention and engagement strategies.

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