Designing Student-Centered Retention & Graduation Strategies
2019 Institute on High Impact Practices & Student Success

Chris Navia, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President for Student Success
University of Wisconsin System Administration
Today’s Objectives

- **Reflect** on what it means to devise truly student-centered retention and graduation initiatives
- **Explore** the roles data, strategies, and people play in effective retention and graduation efforts
- **Discuss** the notion of a strategic reform strategy and how it differs from a basic activity
- **Review** different retention and graduation models that have been employed by colleges and universities across the country
▪ How many of you would consider the retention and graduation rates of your students to be major issue for your campus?

▪ How many of you feel as though you have the right strategies in place to foster greater student retention and graduation?

▪ How many of you feel as though your retention and graduation strategies need more work?
What does it mean to devise student-centered retention and graduation strategies?

The term **student-centered** often refers to a wide variety of academic support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations or cultural backgrounds of individual students as well as groups of students.

In practice, truly student-centered retention and graduation strategies:

- Take into consideration the whole student—who they are intellectually as well as individually
- Operate from an asset-based mindset rather than a deficit-based mindset
- Are informed by the all-important notion of equity
Efforts to improve student success through improved retention or graduation require attention to three essential components: people, data, and strategies.

- Do we have the right people involved?
- Are we doing the right things?
- Are we using data appropriately?
Though often overlooked, people are the driving force behind most retention and graduation efforts.

Do we have the right people involved?
## Key competencies for student success practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-solving</strong></td>
<td>Ability to facilitate discussions and break down complex and ambiguous problems into manageable pieces and to constantly seek solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship management</strong></td>
<td>Sensitivity, empathy, fairness, cultural humility</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
<td>Basic “numeracy,” the ability to understand, interpret, and draw implications from large quantities of data. For some student success practitioners, deeper proficiency may be required (e.g. use of data analysis software and tools)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback and coaching</strong></td>
<td>A mindset of continuous reflection on, and learning from, one’s own experiences and those of others, and the ability to communicate these lessons in a thoughtful and specific way</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A “delivery” mindset</strong></td>
<td>A key competency in adding value to every student success effort. The individual must have a very strong positive, can-do attitude to push through the many instances when the work can be frustrating and challenging. He or she must also possess an assets-based mindset.</td>
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Florida State established a cross-campus team whose mission was to remove barriers that hindered student success.

Cross-Campus Success Team

Central mission is to remove barriers to student success

Chief Academic Officer

Core Services: Admissions, Registration, Financial Aid, Career Services, Housing, Health Center, Withdrawal Services

Academic Programs: Undergraduate Studies, Honors Program, Undergraduate Research, Library Services, Fellowships

Support Programs: Orientation, Advising & Coaching, Tutoring & Study Skills Courses, Special Programs For Underserved Populations

Student Representation: Student Government Representative
The team operated differently from typical committees by focusing on analysis, action, and accountability.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Typical Committee</th>
<th>Cross-Campus Team</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Charge</strong></td>
<td>▪ Provide analysis and/or identify recommendations for an institutional priority or issue</td>
<td>▪ Remove institutional barriers hindering student success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td>▪ Senior-level administrators, usually several levels removed from students</td>
<td>▪ Rich mix of people who work day-to-day serving students, includes front-line practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>▪ Advisory in nature; outlines the work others on campus are to undertake</td>
<td>▪ Operates as a true workgroup, defining tasks to be done and completing them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td>▪ Vaguely defined, if at all</td>
<td>▪ Defined by measurable and specific changes in student outcomes and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Routines</strong></td>
<td>▪ Convene on an intermittent basis, usually for a finite period of time</td>
<td>▪ Weekly, on-going meetings where progress is assessed continuously</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Data-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Perspective</strong></td>
<td>▪ Not well-defined</td>
<td>▪ Driven by the mindset that all students can succeed; student-centered in their thinking</td>
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</table>
The team met weekly to address key questions, make decisions, and sustain momentum.

**Diagnose Problems**
- Which students are progressing as planned? Which students are not? Why?
- What seems to be impeding student progress or performance?

**Problem-Solve**
- Where should we intervene?
- What can we do that might make a difference?

**Plan**
- What additional supports can we put in place?
- What changes to our policies, programs or practices might we make that would be helpful?

**Evaluate**
- Are our efforts having the impact we intended?
- Do we have the right strategies and supports in place?

**Report**
- What have we accomplished since our last meeting?
- What achievements or accomplishments can we celebrate?

Followed by an **ACTION-** oriented line of questioning

**WHO** will take responsibility for intervening?

**WHEN** will that happen?

**HOW** will our progress be assessed?

**WHERE** we will see results?
Things to keep in mind when it comes to people:

- **Best practices** are often the result of **best practitioners**.

- Bring **varied perspectives and expertise to the work** which can translate into more well-informed and effective strategies.

- **Empower your people.** Let them not only identify the issues for you but give them the authority and resources to implement solutions.

- **Make champions** of your people whenever you can. Celebrate their successes. Whenever possible, reward their effort.
Another essential element is the use of data to determine when, where, and how to intervene on behalf of students.
Data helps foster a clearer understanding of what is going on with your students as well as how you can help them.

- Reveals the myriad of pathways that students follow as they move through the institution and determine where their progress gets stalled or they are taken off-track

- Helps define what your institution has the power to change or do differently for your students

- Shapes the strategies and actions you might take to help students; and

- Provides a basis for the continual monitoring and refining of your efforts.
Turning data into real insight for action is dependent on certain institutional conditions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Access &amp; efficiency</th>
<th>The ease and speed with which data can be accessed or retrieved from campus systems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Actions taken to understand progress on campus goals and metrics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>The processes we use to turn what we learn from campus data into action around campus strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The attitudes and reactions of campus faculty and staff toward making decisions using campus data</td>
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Key questions to consider

**Access & efficiency**
Do leaders and staff have access to relevant student success data? Do data requests proceed smoothly? Do leaders and staff use the data faithfully?

**Monitoring**
Has campus leadership clearly established responsibility for monitoring progress on student success? Are they regularly kept up-to-date of progress according to the data?

**Problem solving**
Do we have a standard process that guides how we use data to inform our understanding of the problems our students are facing?

**Culture**
Does the rest of the campus readily accept the data that is presented? Are they confident in the data systems on campus?
**Problem**
The Honors Program has too few students of color participating in it. No one knew why.

* Testable Hypotheses

**Guiding Questions**
How many students of color do we have on campus?
How many of them are performing at the same level or above the current cohort of students in the Honors Program?

**Data Analysis**
We have more than 30 students of color who could—and should—be in the Honors Program.
Why are they not in the program?

**Identification of Barriers & Solutions**
There is only one “on-ramp” to the Honors Program.
It is dependent on high school counselor nominations.
We need to build other on-ramps and access pathways.
There are numerous analyses you can undertake to determine how your students are succeeding at your institution.

Examples of TOP 10 Analyses

- Tracking the rate of second-year students who achieve sophomore standing
- Analyzing the impact of course withdrawals
- Analyzing success rates in the 25-35 courses with the largest annual enrollment
- Analyzing success rates in the first credit-bearing math course
- An analysis of transcripts
Things to keep in mind when it comes to data:

- **Use data at every step in your student success work**: to identify barriers and problems; determine where best to intervene on students’ behalf; and to evaluate the degree to which you have been able to successfully remove barriers and improve student outcomes.

- **Dig deeply into the data**, disaggregating it to see which student groups are being successful, which are not, and where you can make a difference.

- **Use data regularly** to test assumptions or notions about what is really happening with students on your campus.
There are lots of strategies you might implement to help your students succeed.
There are a lot of strategies you might consider as part of your student success work.

- **Precollege**
  - Summer Bridge Programs
  - High School Initiatives
  - Early College Awareness

- **Momentum**
  - Purpose First
  - 15 to Finish Campaigns
  - First Year Experience

- **Pathways**
  - Guided Pathways
  - Academic Maps

- **Holistic**
  - Emergency Grant Aid
  - Food Pantry
  - Behavioral Health Services
Strategies define what you will do differently in order to achieve your goals.

**Strategies** are:

- Deliberate and coordinated activities
- Manageable in number
- Designed to help you achieve your goal
- Defined by changing the way your system does business by **adding**, **improving**, or **removing** an existing activity
When thinking about strategies, it is helpful to think through four key steps.

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<tr>
<th>Process step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Determine the theory of change</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identify high-impact projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Select and sequence projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Remove the distractors”</td>
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- **Identify the set of interrelated themes** (content areas or implementation models) that focus your efforts on those things most likely to affect the target metric.

- **Examine impact of existing system and campus activities on aspiration and identify potential projects.** Consider adding additional activities based on the theory of change, impact, and alignment with institutional strengths.

- **Evaluate and select from the identified projects** based on three principles: 1) Independently effective; 2) Integrated; 3) Sequenced.

- Leader gives permission to **stop doing previously planned projects**. Staff identifies high cost/low impact projects and recommend ways to “remove the distractors”.
Strategy profiles help you answer key questions when crafting your retention or graduation plan.

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<th>Minimum definition required for prioritization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources required</td>
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<td>Definition of success</td>
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<td>Milestones</td>
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<td>Delivery chain</td>
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<td>Impact</td>
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**Description**
- Describe the strategy and its purpose in a sentence or two

**Goal(s)**
- On which goal or goals will the strategy have a significant impact?

**Rationale**
- Why do we believe it will have that impact?

**Scale**
- At what scale (number of students, educators, etc.) will it be implemented?

**Resources required**
- What people, time, money, and technology will be needed to implement it?

**Definition of success**
- What would success look like for this specific strategy, and by when?

**Milestones**
- What are the most important milestones between now and then?

**Leadership**
- Who is the single person responsible for making sure implementation happens?

**Delivery chain**
- Who will that person work through to reach the field at scale? What are the risks, and how will we manage them? What feedback loops can we set up to track progress?

**Impact**
- What is the estimated impact of the strategy on the goal(s) over time?
A 2x2 will help you prioritize strategies by evaluating potential impact and difficulty of implementation 1/2
A 2x2 will help you prioritize strategies by evaluating potential impact and difficulty of implementation 2/2

- Ideally, having impact would be easy
- But you may need tougher strategies in the mix to achieve your goal
- Small strands of work may not warrant their own strategy
- And you may decide some strategies are not worth the required effort
Exercise: Mapping Your Strategies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Make a list of all of the student success initiatives on your campus</td>
<td>▪ 2x2 Reform Strategy Template</td>
<td>▪ 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Map these initiatives according to the quadrants on the 2x2 template</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Where do you see your retention or graduation effort falling on the template currently?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Are their efforts going on that you might not continue moving forward?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Are their efforts that need more work to move into the high impact quadrant?</td>
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Things to keep in mind when it comes to strategies:

- Ensure that the strategies implemented have an intensive focus on changing the bottom-line in terms of student retention, persistence, and graduation.

- Pay attention to how strategies align overall with the kinds of support students need over the course of their time in college.

- Evaluate strategies on a regular basis to ensure they are being implemented properly and producing the expected outcomes.

- Recognize that a “silver bullet” strategy does not exist. The key is persistence; you have to commit to a strategy over a long period of time.
Closing Thoughts