Retention Summit fosters partnerships

Retention Summit helps create new partnerships to improve students success

During the fall semester, representatives from all areas of campus came together to discuss the current state of the university with regard to resources, data, and programs related to retention.

The goal of this summit was the development of an action plan for improving retention and student success at NIU.

The summit broadly focused on topics such as academic preparedness, enhancing collaboration and improving communication between campus partners while building a connected campus community. The summit yielded valuable and creative ideas for accomplishing these goals.

Following the success of the university retention summit, the OSAS staff was invited to attend an English First-Year Composition Retention Summit in early January that concentrated on initiatives and partnerships that English faculty, instructors, and graduate instructors can engage in to improve the success of students in their courses.

The Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS) is working to implement the lessons from these summits in a variety of ways, including through the building of new partnerships, identification programs, resources for faculty and staff, and assessment of students' strengths as well as challenges.

Identification Programs

Beginning this spring, we are proud to enhance existing relationships with two major campus partners in our MAP-Works program. Thanks to Dr. Weldy and his enthusiastic support of this program, as of the spring of 2014, all student affair's departments are now include in MAP-Works as either Direct Connects or Referral Offices. At a recent MAP-Works training, over 30 new SAEM users were introduced to MAP-Works.

Thanks to department chair, Dr. Amy Levin and first year composition director, Dr. Michael Day, many English instructors and graduate students who teach a first year composition course are now active participants in the MAP-Works program. This includes nearly 60 new users from the English department and connections to over 2,000 first-year freshmen and transfer students.

In addition to MAP-Works, our Early Alert and Referral System has increased partnerships to many individuals including Political Science Department Chair Matt Streb and Music Theory Coordinator Robert Fleisher. Course participation for the Spring 2014 semester rose to 90 courses that yielded 659 student referrals. The Early Alert & Referral System is a collaborative effort between faculty and OSAS to identify students who may be experiencing academic challenges.

Resources for Faculty and Staff

One common theme at the Bold Futures Workshops and Retention Summits was the vast amount of resources that NIU has and that not everyone is aware of them or the services that they offer students or faculty and staff. In addition, individuals were not sure about initiating conversations with students on certain topics. To help with this concern, the OSAS is partnering with the Department of English, the Counseling and Student Development Center, and University Relations to bring a campus referral guide to all NIU Faculty and Staff.

For more information on these initiatives, contact our office.
Money Smart Week® is a national financial literacy public awareness campaign sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago to help individuals of all ages manage their personal finances.

The Financial Literacy Collaborative (FLC) was created in the summer of 2010 as a way to combine financial literacy efforts at Northern Illinois University and in the surrounding community.

This collaboration brings together programs and organizations from the DeKalb County Ca$h Coalition to expand educational programming to the community.

NIU’s Financial Literacy Collaborative partnered with the DeKalb County Ca$h Coalition to expand educational programming to the community.

Money Smart Week® was proud to partner with Goodwill Northern Illinois and the College of Business’ Accounting Department to bring the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program to NIU for the third straight year.

All NIU Students were welcome to get their taxes prepared and filed for free, but a big emphasis of the program this year was to market this service to international students so they knew they had a place to go for help. This year was a huge success with 188 returns filled and 62 of them bring for international students. This is a large increase from previous years.

The events took place in the Founders Memorial Library Student Lounge every Wednesday from February 19 – April 9 & one last session on Tuesday, April 15 from 12:00 – 5:00pm to accommodate last minute filings.

Walk-ins were welcome, but students were also encouraged to schedule appointments.

This event was a great service to the NIU community and will continue for the 2014 tax filing year. Please check the Financial Cents website next year for dates that VITA will be on campus from January to April 2015.

This collaboration brings together programs and organizations from the DeKalb County Ca$h Coalition to expand educational programming to the community.

This year, over 1,400 NIU students, faculty, staff as well as community members attended sessions. This was a large increase from 2013 where 149 individuals attended sessions.

The FLC has participated in Money Smart Week for the past two years, but this year was excited to partner with the DeKalb County Ca$h Coalition. This collaboration brought together many groups across DeKalb County including businesses, financial institutions, schools, libraries, not-for-profits, government agencies, and the media.

Different collaborative representatives, coalition members, and members of the community presented on different topics throughout DeKalb County during the week of April 5-12th.

Many marketing initiatives took place to advertise the events including multiple newspaper articles, radio interviews, an insert in the DeKalb Daily Chronicle that went to 10,000 households. In addition, a full listing of events and descriptions were on the Money Smart Week website.

This collaboration was so successful that the program grew from 18 events in 2013 to 60 events in 2014. The national week of programming covered all facets of personal finance from establishing a budget to first time home buying, estate planning, couponing, and much more.

This year, over 1,400 NIU students, faculty, staff as well as community members attended sessions.

A full report on Money Smart Week, including summaries of sessions evaluations, will be available on the OSAS website.

Make sure to save the date for Money Smart Week 2015 (April 18th-25th).
Welcome to NIU and the Digital Age
Division of Outreach to introduce online orientation for off-campus students

Students coming to study in DeKalb benefit greatly from attending Orientation. They tour the campus, meet staff and advisors and get their class schedule sorted out for the upcoming semester. They receive a wealth of information during their Orientation in addition to a warm welcome to the Huskie family.

But what about students in our off-campus programs at the three NIU regional centers, online, or those taking NIU classes housed in Chicagoland community colleges? How do they gather knowledge about NIU and the processes and procedures vital to their success? Students who will not take classes in DeKalb are not required to attend the Orientation held in DeKalb. Until now faculty, academic advisors, success specialists and others have done their best to fill in knowledge-gaps often faced by off-campus students, such as how to navigate MyNIU, or how to use the NIU library remotely.

All this is about to change! Faced with questions from students who had little or no knowledge of NIU procedures and the tools students are expected to use, the Office of Student Academic Success and the division of Outreach have been developing an asynchronous online orientation for students in off-campus classes and programs. Comprised of eight modules and housed in Blackboard, the Orientation will provide off-campus students an orientation to NIU tailored to meet their needs.

Each module is an animated and narrated journey through knowledge essential to student success at NIU. Beginning with a welcome that introduces NIU and the personnel who will form each students team for success, modules cover a wealth of information including academic and graduation requirements, how to track progress, MyNIU, finances, how to get a student ID, how to use the library, and much more. In addition to the modules themselves, the Blackboard shell will also contain links to resources, information about discussion forums and webinars that are designed to help students connect to the resources they need to stay enrolled and successful. Students will have access to orientation materials throughout their first academic year and will be encouraged to suggest additions and modifications for upcoming versions of the orientation.

The online orientation will be tested over the Summer and given a soft launch in Fall 2014, with voluntary participation from incoming off-campus students. If all goes well, the orientation will be a requirement for all incoming off-campus students beginning Spring 2015.

Success Question of the Semester

Q: How can I get student success data and assessments?

A: Contact the Office of Student Academic Success

There are multiple ways that OSAS is here to help. There are numerous unofficial reports that the OSAS generates that can help you with your data needs relating to student success:

- MAP-Works provides significant amounts of information on first-year students, including top 5 issues, areas of interest, outcome-based data, and factors most closely related to student persistence.
- Leaver Data– Through outreach initiated from transcript request and eligible but not enrolled reports, the OSAS collects information on why students are leaving NIU.
- Appointments: The OSAS also tracks student appointments and interactions from visits to our office.

The OSAS can also generate reports tailored to your individual department’s needs. Having this information allows us to have holistic and accurate data, see if there are trends, and most important, educate the campus community on ways we can improve the student experience.

NIU Freshmen Matthew Quanstrom interested in Student Success

While much of the mission of the Office of Student Academic Success relates to helping students who need assistance getting connected to campus resources, however, another important piece is preparing new professional who are interested in student success initiatives.

NIU freshman Matthew Quanstrom shadowed staff members in the OSAS office on Wednesday, December 11, 2013.

During his visit, Matt sat in on meetings related to generating and distributing retention data to campus partners, MAP-Works marketing, and planning for Money Smart Week events. Matt’s visit was finished with a lunch with staff from the OSAS and the Academic Advising Center.
Professional Development

The OSAS has been looked at as an office of best practices. This year we have many presentations that will share the amazing things we have been doing. Below are some of those events:

**National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Region 5 Conference:**
Assistant Director Randi Napientek and Student Success Specialists Missy Lugo and Ashleigh Sorenson presented on OSAS’ model of Student Success Coaching.

**Adult Student Recruitment & Retention (ASRR) Conference:**
Student Success Specialist Mandy Wescott presented at the Adult Student Recruitment & Retention Conference on the development of an online orientation for off-campus students.

**Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU):**
Director Dana Gautcher, Associate Vice Provost for Engagement Julia Spears, and Vice Provost Anne Birbrick presented on Themed Learning Communities and their use of data, including MAP-Works.

**MAP-Works Summer Conference:**
OSAS Assistant Director Randi Napientek and Research Associate Matthew Venaas will present on training sessions as a way to inspire and innovate campus partners and using data to generate buy-in. Also, the OSAS will be partnering with Jerry Montag, Director of Registration & Records, to present on FERPA and MAP-Works, specifically focusing on how to utilize MAP-Works and student information while ensuring student privacy.

Upcoming events and deadlines

**May**

9 / Friday
Final exams end

10 / Saturday
Undergraduate spring commencement

**June**

15 / Sunday
Last day to apply for summer 2014 graduation via self-service in MyNIU

16 / Monday
Summer term classes begin

18 / Wednesday
Last day for undergraduates to add/drop a first-half-session or full-session course via self-service in MyNIU

**July**

1 / Tuesday
Last day for undergraduates to withdraw from a first-half-session course

**August**

10 / Sunday
End of summer session and degree conferral