Division of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management
Summary of Student Persistence Tactics

The departments encompassed by the Division of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management demonstrate an unvarying commitment to increasing student persistence. We prefer to use the word persistence in lieu of retention, as it goes beyond the idea of simply “keeping” students enrolled; instead, persistence is focused more directly on student success and enhancing their ability to graduate. Guided in part by the core values of the Division, each department supports student persistence through daily tactics and long-term intervention methods. Analyzing persistence initiatives through the lens of the Division’s core values will illustrate the continued commitment of our departments to student-centered service, partnerships focused on student learning, establishing an inclusive community, and actively building collaborative relationships.

STUDENT-CENTERED SERVICE

To provide superior student-centered service consistently, it is imperative to identify and replicate successful practices associated with this core value. The following is a sampling of such efforts:

- Each day, staff members in the Admissions office show their commitment to student-centered service by personalizing each student interaction; “rather than just answering the initial question of the student, our staff goes the next step so that students get the information they really need to apply and enroll at NIU.” Too often, students are not aware of the key questions that they should be asking, so it is our job to teach them those questions and help them get the answers they need.
• Another example is evidenced by the **Asian American Center’s** extension of hours during finals week. This is an intentional effort to adapt the department’s services to the needs of the students.

• As an ongoing initiative to provide student-centered service, the **Counseling and Student Development Center** administers a client satisfaction survey geared towards estimating the effectiveness of counseling sessions. This survey and subsequent dialogue are initiated during the seventh student counseling session and aid in identifying the impact of counseling on persistence and other extraneous factors that may impact student persistence.

• In the **Students’ Legal Assistance** office, financial considerations are a top priority in handling students’ cases. Many students find financial constraints a primary barrier to their education. For instance, the office staff often advocates on behalf of students for lower fines, alternatives to fines, and realistic time frames for payment of fines to make the choice to remain enrolled possible for students.

• Sometimes it is just about letting students know that you care. The **Office of Support & Advocacy** makes it typical protocol to pose a minimum of three questions about their life to every student who enters the office. This personalized approach makes a campus of over 20,000 students seem manageable and friendly.

These examples of departmental commitments to providing student-centered service help to connect students with needed resources. They show how departments format their services for the specific needs of students to create a positive outcome on student persistence and commitment to NIU.
PARTNERSHIPS FOCUSED ON STUDENT LEARNING

Supporting students’ growth and holistic development is the foundation of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management’s commitment to establishing partnerships focused on student learning. Research suggests that students who are more engaged in activities that foster learning are more likely to develop a sense of connectedness to the institution and are subsequently more likely to persist to graduation (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Keeling, 2004; Tinto, 1987). Departments across the Division provide intentional learning opportunities for students. Some examples include:

- The **Women’s Resource Center** partners with **Career Services** to provide for-credit internship opportunities to undergraduate students. Establishing this connection between staff and students helps to create a network of support for students, reducing the probability of student attrition (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Tinto, 1987).

- The development of living-learning communities by **Housing & Dining** is a perfect example of establishing coherence between a student’s academic and out-of-classroom learning experiences (Keeling, 2004). Students who participate in these programs have an increased level of interaction with faculty and staff that results in a higher level of engagement and participation.

- An academic course taught by **Center for Access-Ability Resources** staff is designed for students with disabilities. This course, *College Reading and Study Skills*, provides at-risk students the opportunity to acquire or improve skills that are necessary to succeed in college.

- In **Student Involvement and Leadership Development**, each professional staff member, graduate assistant, and support staff member identifies one student to mentor
per semester. The establishment of mentor-protégé relationships with staff and students has been found to correlate positively to student persistence and academic achievement (Keeling, 2004). Likewise, the Asian American Center and Latino Resource Center have well established peer-to-peer mentoring programs.

- Departments also provide students with opportunities to apply their classroom learning. As adults tend to be more problem-centered than subject-centered in their learning, the immediate application of knowledge results in a deeper understanding of subject matter (Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Planning and Assessment, the Women’s Resource Center, Recreation Services, and other offices provide this opportunity to both graduate and undergraduate students.

Each of these examples illustrates a departmental and division-wide commitment to providing meaningful learning opportunities that enhance the experiences of students and increase the probability of their graduating from NIU.

ESTABLISHING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Initiatives that foster an inclusive community are designed to assist every student in feeling that they have a home at NIU. A network of support for students increases the likelihood that they will persist in their studies (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Tinto, 1987). There is also a positive correlation between a student’s sense of belonging and persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). A feeling of belonging is distinct from a student’s level of involvement and should be treated as such (Hausmann et al., 2007). The following examples illustrate commitments by our departments to creating an inclusive community:

- Housing and Dining recently adapted its programming model to incorporate diverse program offerings that address the needs and interests of various first-year student
populations residing on campus. This approach is of particular importance during a student’s early experiences on campus; we intend for all first-year students to feel a sense of belonging in their new home.

- As student development practitioners, we understand that, while students search for a place to belong, they may make choices that sacrifice their personal wellness. Therefore, the Health Enhancement professionals make an intentional effort to incorporate diversity in terms of intervention development. They recognize that students will be met in different ways depending on their life experiences.

- Programs are also in place to intervene and provide support when an at-risk student is identified. Through the office of Judicial Affairs, any student with a GPA of 2.0 or less has an opportunity to meet with a staff member to discuss academic interests, goals, and difficulties in achieving the grades necessary to maintain good academic standing. The staff members then make appropriate referrals to assure that the students receive the support they need.

- The Scholarship Office helps create an inclusive community by assisting students with more than just their search for financial support. They engage in dialogue with students to help connect them with additional campus resources based on their family situation or background. This initial step in creating a support network and sense of belonging leads students toward feelings of connectedness to the university.

**ACTIVELY BUILDING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS**

Collaborative relationships enhance learning opportunities provided to the student body through our Division. As many departments target specific student populations, these collaborative efforts help broaden the scope of programs. It is important to reiterate that these collaborative
relationships help establish a support network for students that has been found to correlate positively to student persistence (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2008; Tinto, 1987; Hausmann et al., 2007). Departments that create programs collaboratively bring together students who may not interact in other settings. Examples of collaborative partnerships include:

- The **Orientation & First-Year Experience** office extends the reach of its programming efforts through extensive collaboration. A select group of undergraduate students serves as Orientation Leaders. Along with guiding prospective and admitted students through their orientation process, these students act as Peer Instructors in University 101/201 courses. They also act as greeters and marshals for Academic Convocation, are callers for the REACH program (Retention Effort for All in-Coming Huskies), and serve as hosts during First-Year Success Series Events.

- Students who live off campus or are “non-traditional” are often a difficult population to reach. Through clever programming initiatives, **Off-Campus & Non-Traditional Student Services** collaborates with departments to help make this population feel part of the campus community. Good Morning Huskies, a collaborative program with **Campus Child Care** and other campus partners, provides breakfast for student parents as they drop off their children at child care for the day.

- The **Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender Resource Center** collaborates with the **Scholarship** and **Financial Aid** departments to provide pertinent financial resources to its target population. Once again, by addressing the basic needs and concerns of our students, we create an environment in which students are better able to focus on their academic success and career goals.
References


