

**STUDENT RETENTION Working Group for Strategic Goals**  
**DRAFT Report for President Mahony**  
February 11, 2016

**Charge:** Identify the top five to ten ideas to improve first- and second-year retention rates at Winthrop.

**Process:** The initial group meeting with the President was on October 9, 2015. The group met twice as a whole before members self-selected to meet in subgroups to identify major factors impacting retention at Winthrop University. Electronic conversations and the sharing of data and resources, as well as face-to-face meetings, have facilitated the collection of an extensive list of ideas for improving retention. The group's seven recommendations follow the Needs section.

**Needs:** There were four major areas of need that emerged from group discussions (as follows, in no particular order):

*Academic Success*

- Research what attracted and convinced students to enroll at Winthrop and share that information with faculty and staff. Also, review the graduating senior survey data on most common responses for those indicating they wished they had gone to another institution and find a better mechanism for capturing why students are leaving Winthrop early;
- Provide "supplemental instruction" (use of high performing students w/ stipend) for high DFN courses;
- Use technology to provide students and advisors with a user-friendly layout and a single point of access to house links and information for all academic success initiatives across campus, to track completion of required tasks, and to easily access all relevant student data, such as Life GPA, degree progression, course information, etc.;
- Review and monitor course scheduling, availability, sequencing, and transfer-friendly offerings to be sure all students have an opportunity to create a complete schedule each semester that supports/allows for on-time academic progression and degree completion;
- Consider adjustments to the registration time schedule to allow freshmen access to courses and instructors who support high impact practices which assist with student retention and progression, especially during the first year of college;
- Review academic eligibility requirements and consider mandating enrollment in a course for students placed on probation at the end of their first semester, and consider dismissal for those full-time students well below a 1.0 after the initial semester of attendance;
- Review the academic calendar and course scheduling times.

### Advising

- Provide an opportunity for earlier contact with the student's academic advisor during Orientation and consider alternative approaches to Orientation and Welcome Week;
- Assign discipline-specific peer academic advisors in Orientation and in subsequent enrollment terms as needed;
- Provide regular and continuous opportunities to faculty for developing skills for instruction, advising, and student interaction;
- Increase collaboration between faculty and staff to identify and support/intervene with students who are struggling (socially, academically, emotionally, financially);
- Pilot the assignment of ACAD instructors as secondary advisors during the first year. As secondary advisors, ACAD faculty can monitor interim grades, registration, state scholarship concerns, and attrition from fall to spring and the following fall;
- Provide a tangible reward for good advisors and determine an equitable reassignment plan for those whose strengths lie in other areas.

### Wellness Support

- Investigate options to encapsulate the top identified issues students are facing with respect to wellness and emotional resilience by piloting a full- or half-semester wellness course in the fall. Continue to develop a campus-wide culture of support and awareness of the resources available to assist students with various mental health barriers to learning and persistence;
- Consider a Research Council grant with an interdisciplinary team of faculty/staff to develop/acquire the curriculum mentioned above.

### Financial Support

- Increase **need-based** scholarship support for new and continuing students;
- Develop a Financial Distress Monitoring system for students prior to fee payment deadlines and set up a network of counselors to work with students in need to develop funding plans;
- Coordinate efforts to assist students in danger of losing scholarship support, which jeopardizes their ability to be able to return to Winthrop;
- Investigate Summer Course fee reductions and increased offering of required courses in summer;
- Continue expansion of the financial literacy information model and promote access to all students.

## Top Recommendations & Cost Estimates

(Please note: the working group determined that a holistic approach is necessary to improve retention; therefore, the recommendations below are in no particular order):

1. Appoint a member of the institution's current senior or mid-level management team to serve as Chief Retention Officer immediately. Retention can no longer be "owned by everyone and no one." This individual's responsibilities and priorities will need to be reviewed and aligned/modified such that retention becomes their number one priority for the foreseeable future. Other responsibilities and workloads may be impacted and adjusted to accomplish the work of the institution. The CRO will need to have the authority to:
  - a. assemble work teams across divisions (from the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular constituencies of the University ) and **propose allocation/re-allocation of resources** to senior leadership for approval – personnel and financial; and
  - b. inventory the multitude of retention efforts currently underway, assess their impact, and recommend immediate action steps to effectively and efficiently improve retention and graduation of currently enrolled degree-seeking undergraduates.

**No immediate new costs unless the need arises for faculty/staff reassigned time coverage.**

2. The Chief Retention Officer should be charged with immediately soliciting and recommending individuals from the campus community to serve on a data work group. A better understanding of why students leave can aid in identifying and assisting at-risk students in a more timely manner, as well as helping inform institutional admission and recruitment efforts. Direct assessment needs to occur on current and proposed initiatives to determine their impact on retention. It is envisioned that the CRO would work with a cadre of faculty and staff volunteers who possess quantitative and analytical skills to develop a scheme to:
  - a. identify the data currently available for analysis;
  - b. seek potential data sources on campus as yet untapped to help inform why students leave the university; and
  - c. assess the level of impact current retention initiatives provide to the various segments of the student population.

**No new costs unless the need arises for faculty/staff reassigned time coverage.**

3. Increase **need-based** scholarship support for students and increase the % of financial need met.  
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4. Given the increase from in recent years of the observed decline in student resiliency and wellness issues among Winthrop students (a national pattern), allow research to begin immediately on development of a course (format and delivery as yet defined) for piloting in the fall with new students, focusing on the topics that are significant for the emotional well-being of Winthrop students.

**New costs associated with proprietary curriculum and staffing pilot offering - \$2,500 (estimate).**

5. Continue to review and define the role of University College and the Office of the First Year Experience in retention efforts targeted for first year students. Investigate the potential benefits and barriers of moving new student orientation under the umbrella of Enrollment Management to become the final stage of the recruitment process.  
**No new costs.**
  
6. Prior to early registration in April, analyze current data to determine what can be done during registration to ensure students can obtain a full schedule and have available selection of the proper sequencing of courses to progress and graduate on time. There has been a good bit of anecdotal information shared which indicates the need for in-depth analyses to determine adjustments that may need to be made prior to the beginning of early registration for Fall 2016. This recommendation relates to the needs of traditional age, as well as non-traditional age students, in planning their academic career paths and balancing work and family commitments.  
**No new costs.**
  
7. Charge Academic and Student Life leadership teams with immediate review of options for Summer 2016 Orientation and Welcome Week activities to provide for more interaction with faculty advisors and better access for students (and advisors) to the information stored in Banner related to academic success and requirements.  
**No new costs to undertake review.**

<b>2015-16 Membership</b>		
<i>Name</i>	<i>Classification (Faculty/Staff/ Administrator/Student)</i>	<i>Area/Division</i>
Jackie Concodora	Staff/Administrator	Student Life, Health & Counseling, Director
Anthony Davis	Staff/Administrator	Student Life, Assoc. Dean, Student Conduct
Leah Kendall	Staff/Director	UC (First-Year Exp., ACAD)
Adria Belk	Staff/Director	CAS, Student Services Director
Josh Bistromowitz	Staff	AEM (Recruitment)
Maria Linn	Staff	AAAS, Dir. of Decision Support
J. W. Barrera	Student (undergraduate)	CAS (BIOL)
Asa McMullen	Student (graduate)	CAS (ENGL)
Shelley Hamill	Faculty	COE (PESH)
Cliff Harris	Faculty	CAS (CHEM)
Bob Stonebraker	Faculty	CBA (ECON)
Frank Pullano	Faculty/Director	CAS (MATH), UC (LEAP)
Tom Stanley	Faculty/Administrator	CVPA, Dept. Chair, Fine Arts
Karen Jones, Group Leader	Vice Provost	Provost's Office