

DESIGNING,
IMPLEMENTING AND
ASSESSING A
COMPREHENSIVE
STUDENT SUCCESS
PROGRAM

Loralyn Taylor, Ph.D.

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Loralyn Taylor, Ph.D. As director of institutional research and registrar for the past 10 years, Loralyn has focused on increasing the institutional effectiveness of Paul Smith's College. She helped design and implement the college's highly successful Comprehensive Student Support Program, winner of the 2013 Lee Noel, Randi Levitz Retention Excellence Award and the Starfish 360 and an inaugural winner of the University Business Models of Excellence Award. Demonstrating improved student success through increases in percentage of students in good academic standing, increased graduation rates and generating over \$5.8 million in increased student revenue due to improved retention in four years, the PSC program includes both proactive and reactive early alert strategies, the targeted use of data analytics and is assessed by multiple key performance indicators. Loralyn's interests include using data, innovative technologies and change management to bridge the gap between research on best practices in student success and actual, boots-on-the-ground initiatives.

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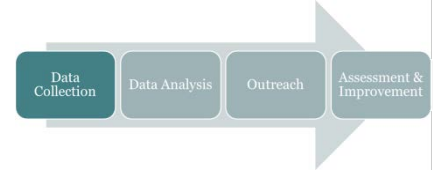
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ARAB ACRAO Conference 2015

Peer Learning Activities

Designing, Implementing and Assessing a Comprehensive Student Success
Program Pre-conference Workshop

Loralyn Taylor, Ph.D.



1. Assess the state of your current early alert program.

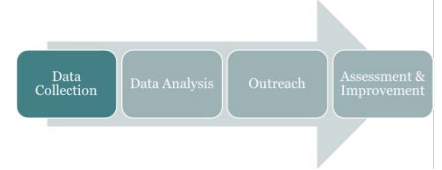
Does your Early Alert Program:	Not sure	Not really	Kind of	Yes
Have high visibility on campus				
Have high stakeholder participation				
Have multiple points to evaluate student performance				
Automate data collection through your LMS				
Generate automatic EA Surveys				
Collect enough data to quickly identify at-risk students				
Collect enough data to correctly identify at-risk students				
Incorporate proactive identification strategies				
Incorporate reactive identification strategies				
Automatically send real time emails/communications				
Have a clear, intuitive design so that people know what to do and when to do it				
Prioritizes students for effective outreach				
Get the right information to the right people at the right time to help the right student				
Has an information hub where everyone with a relationship to the student has access to the latest information				
Include early, middle and late stage key performance indicators				
Increase student success?				
Increase net student revenue?				

2. What one thing do you like the best about your current EAP?

3. What one thing do you like least about your current EAP?

4. What one thing would you like to change the most about your EAP (add, remove or modify)?

5. What one thing are you hoping most to learn today?

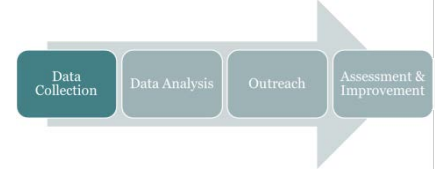


Part 1a: Data Collection

Think about what you know about your students—who is successful, who is failing and who is leaving. What student success factors play the biggest role for your students? Is there a particular model of student success that is followed by the support offices on your campus?

What data elements would be of most use to you in identifying high risk or at-risk students on your campus? List the data elements in the first column and list the data providers in the second.

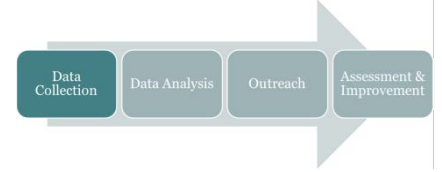
Data Element	Data Provider



Part 1b: Data Collection prioritization table

Please use the following table to indicate the relevant importance of the data and whether it is currently available, can be obtained in the near future or will take longer to implement.

How important are the data?	How soon can the necessary data collection processes be implemented?			
		Now	Soon	Later
	Critical			
	Important			
Nice				



Part 2: Implementing

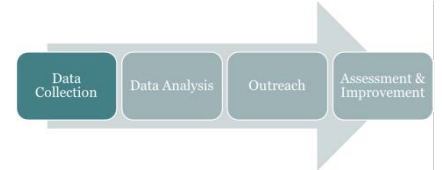
Think about the steps necessary to begin planning to collect the data you have prioritized above. As you start to develop your plan, think about the following questions:

- Take a look at your data provider column. Who do you need to involve?

- Are they likely to be resistant to providing the data? How can you gain their support in collecting these data?

- How can you reduce the burden on your data providers by automating the data collection? Are the data collected through normal business operations, ex. through your SIS?

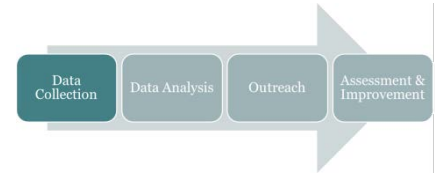
- Do you need to establish new processes or procedures to collect these data elements?



Reactive Strategies for EAP

Reactive strategies collect student performance and other data that indicate the student is becoming at-risk of academic failure or attrition.

Strategy/performance point	Timing of data collection	Data collected
Ex. EA Survey	4 weeks	Instructor concerns about low grades, attendance, missing work, social/personal concerns



Proactive Strategies for EAP

Proactive strategies identify students at high risk of academic failure or attrition prior to the start of the semester, or even, prior to enrollment.

Strategy/performance point	Timing of data collection	Data collected
Ex. Pell Eligible student	Prior to enrollment	Is student Pell eligible.



Early Alert Program Action Plan:

1. Improving Data Collection

	Goal	Who?	Action Steps
Immediately			
This year			
Future			

2. Improving Communication and Information Flow

	Goal	Who?	Action Steps
Immediately			
This year			
Future			



3. Improving Analysis and Prioritization

	Goal	Who?	Action Steps
Immediately			
This year			
Future			

4. Improving Assessment

	Goal	Who?	Action Steps
Immediately			
This year			
Future			



5. Improving Stakeholder Buy-in

	Goal	Who?	Action Steps
Immediately			
This year			
Future			

6. Demonstrating Program Value and Requesting More Resources

	Goal	Who?	Action Steps
Immediately			
This year			
Future			

Beyond Retention: Why Student Success Matters

“Retention is a data point in time. Success is the student’s actual goal.”

Why student success? For many years, institutions have focused on improving student retention. Programs, offices and committees have been added and tasked with increasing retention rates. Decades worth of literature has been written, read, reviewed, and lists of best practices compiled and yet, for many, retention rates have not improved and audible groans can be heard when the word retention is mentioned.

Words matter. They shape how we frame a challenge, how we react to it and how open we are to changing it. Words frame the story of who we are as a campus culture. The use of the word retention to address the challenges faced by our students has boxed us in, limited our thinking and actually reduced stakeholder buy-in.

Retention does not resonate with students. They do not want to be retained; they want to successfully achieve their goals: their goals, not ours. They may want to complete one class or an entire degree. Their goal is never to be retained; their goal is success.

Retention does not resonate with faculty. The causes of attrition are not easily linked to specific practice by specific faculty; and thus, faculty can easily overlook its relevance to them. An administrative drum beat of retention, retention, retention is too easily heard as, “you want me to lower my standards to keep students here who do not belong in my classroom.” In addition, non-student friendly practices may be defended as helping students learn responsibility and accountability. Clearly, faculty don’t want their students just to persist; they want their students to learn. Indeed, they want their students to succeed.

Retention does not resonate with institutional culture. Institutional culture, at a fundamental level, is comprised of the stories we tell each other about who we are and what we value. It is difficult to tell a story about valuing and celebrating retention. Merely keeping a student does not reflect a community goal or value. How does the campus community know how to align their actions to value retention? The answer is not intuitive. Members of our institutional cultures want to tell a collective story of success. We are all successful when our students succeed.

Retention does not resonate with external stakeholders. Parents don’t want their students to stay; they want them to succeed. Corporate leaders, economic development officials and politicians want outcome measures. How well are your students learning the skills they need to be productive workers and citizens. Are your students successful?

For all of these reasons and more, it is time to change our focus. Traditional retention efforts focus on identifying and intervening with high risk student groups, but some high risk students will do just fine and some low risk students will become at-risk during the semester. In addition, as institutions identify more sub-populations that are at high risk of attrition, programs to address each population’s specific problems tend to proliferate, resulting in multiple program silos acting without coordination, reducing

both efficiency and effectiveness.

Why student success? Student success is a holistic approach that supports the individual goals of each student. Student success resonates with internal and external stakeholders.

Student success is a student goal. Students want to be successful, but their definition of success varies widely. Students are motivated to pursue their goals, not institutional goals. By linking specific behaviors and skills to the student's goals, we can motivate students learn strategies and behaviors that enhance their success. We can best support students by partnering with them to develop an individualized plan to reach their goal. Students who are succeeding are motivated to stay and complete their goals; thus, increased retention is actually a by-product of success.

Student success is a faculty goal. Faculty want their students to learn. Reframing the discussion from retention to student success creates a partnership between faculty and student support staff by supporting the common goal of student learning. Resistance to new initiatives can be reduced by explicitly linking the initiatives which improvements in student success. It is culturally difficult to express a reluctance to improve student success and learning.

Student success is both an institutional and national goal. Successful students become successful alumni. Stories of student success and achievement attract both new students and new donors. Increasingly, accreditation decisions and funding from state and federal governments as well as foundations are based on measures of student success. A demonstrated culture of student success will soon be a pre-requisite for state, federal and foundation/grant funding. Witness current proposals in state legislatures, the President's proposed ranking system and the USDOE 2012 rulemaking process on both ranking teacher education programs and tying these rankings to student eligibility for federal financial aid to attend these programs.

And so let us focus on student success while relegating retention to the status of one key performance indicator out of many. Let us measure success by the student's goals, not ours. Let us support all of our students by developing multiple pathways to support students who enter college in different ways and progress at different paces.

Beyond Retention: Building a Bridge between Research and Action

An Integrated Data and Information Flow Model for Student Success

For more than 30 years, higher education has developed a rich, research-based literature of student engagement and retention; and yet, many colleges continue to struggle with helping their students succeed. A number of support programs have demonstrated impacts on student success, contributing to a growing list of research-based best practices. Paul Smith's College implemented many of these programs—supplemental instruction, TRiO SSS, peer mentoring, accommodative services, and a retention office supporting at-risk students to name a few. And yet, after five years, we had failed to impact either retention or completion.

Like so many institutions, we had fallen into the research gap—the gap between knowing what best practices should be implemented and knowing how to implement them. As we implemented program after program, each targeting a specific high risk demographic, the integration and coordination of our efforts were lost. Some students had multiple offices reaching out to help them, while others fell through the safety net without notice. Clearly, we could not improve student success without solving the underlying problem of data and information silos. We had to rethink how we created and used data and information on our campus and how we engaged and motivated our campus stakeholders to participate in yet another change effort.

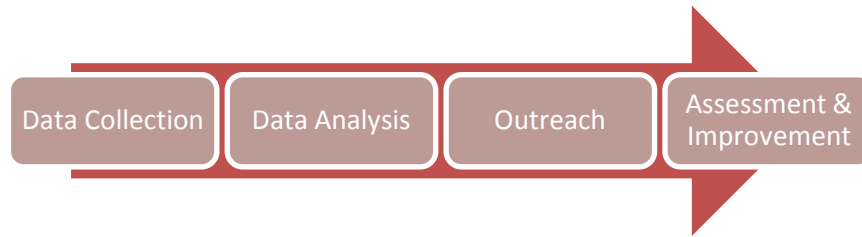
In January 2010, Paul Smith's College went live, campus-wide with our new Comprehensive Student Support Program. In the four years since, we have generated over \$5.8 million in increased net student revenue due to increased retention. Results include a 10% point (17%) increase in FTFT retention, an 11.4% increase in term gpa > 2.00, a 38% decrease in students on probation or suspension, a 53% decrease in withdraws, on-time graduation rates have increased 34% for associates (2 year) and 19% for baccalaureates (4 year) and we have won two national awards for our program.

Our approach is different, not a specific program or a prescriptive model, but a wholesale cultural change from a more traditional retention model focused on high risk students to a more holistic student success model pursuing the success of all students. This shift allowed us to create a positive framework for the changes we asked of our stakeholders. In addition, we rethought the pathways of data and information flow on our campus, developing a model to break down silos to integrate all of our support programs into a cohesive whole. We realized that no matter how effective our student support offices were, if we could not get the right student to the right support office at the right time, we would lose that student. Thus, our model does not focus on the support offices per se, but on the underlying data and information flow that they need to operate effectively. We also implemented new technology, Starfish Retention Solution's EARLY ALERT program, to manage and automate this new data and information flow providing a more comprehensive, data driven picture of our students.

In summary, our approach consists of three critical pieces: 1) a shift to a campus-wide culture of student success, 2) a four step model for integrating data and information flow, and 3) the utilization of change management principles during implementation to generate stakeholder buy-in and reduce resistance.

We incorporated Kotter's Eight Stage Process for Creating Major Change (*Leading Change*, 1996) into the design of each step of our model. A key consideration is the intentional use of language that resonates with our stakeholders instead of putting them on the defensive—a focus on student success, not retention; high challenge courses not high failure rate courses, etc. Additionally, we use techniques from behavioral economics and the science of motivation to ensure stakeholder buy-in, motivation and adoption of new required behaviors. By taking a deliberate, integrated and comprehensive approach to the design, implementation and assessment of our student success framework, we both plan for and ensure our success.

The Integrated Data and Information Flow Model



Our Integrated Data and Information Flow Model (IDIF) identifies four critical steps in the design of any comprehensive student success program. The use of technology to automate as many pieces as possible is important both for ensuring that the steps are tightly coupled in real time and to ensure that staff and faculty time is spent on high value activities such as building student relationships and engagement.

1. Data Collection: To consistently identify the right student at the right time, data from early alert sensors must flow into the system without being impeded by silos or other obstructions. As not all students will become at-risk in the same way, multiple data inputs are needed and should be customized to each institution's student population. Both proactive and reactive strategies for collecting data are needed. Proactive strategies focus on the earliest indicators that a student may be at high risk of developing academic difficulties. Reactive strategies focus on actual student behaviors (or lack thereof) during the semester to determine who is actually at-risk of failure. One key consideration is to maximize actionable information, while minimizing the amount of data collected, thus reducing the burden on data collectors and helping to reduce resistance.

2. Data Analysis: Data collection and analysis must be tightly coupled in real time and should be automated to the extent possible at each institution. The goal of data analysis is to identify and prioritize the right student for outreach at the right time. Not all high risk students will become at-risk and some low risk students will become at-risk during the semester. Setting appropriate prioritization thresholds is critical to avoid overloading and demotivating the support services staff.

3. Outreach: The goal of outreach is to successfully contact the right student and get them to the right service for the right intervention. In order to impact student outcomes, data collection, analysis, outreach and intervention must occur as quickly as possible to help the student remediate their situation prior to actual failure. Not all students are engaged at the institution in the same way. Information on the student's situation must reach all possible points of engagement so that the person with the highest likelihood of success can reach out to the student. Automating the first outreach attempts can increase the numbers of students who self-correct prior to developing more difficult issues and also saves staff time which can be spent on higher impact practices such as building one-on-one relationships with students.

4. Assessment and Improvement: The goal of assessment is to measure what matters, when it matters. Performance measures must consist of both implementation measures (are people implementing the new behaviors) and program measures to assess if the program is having an impact. Programs can fail because they don't work or because people failed to adopt the new behaviors (implementation failure). Early, middle and late stage indicators of student success must be used to demonstrate short term wins, ensuring continued stakeholder buy-in and motivation.

The IDIF model provides institutions with a framework for both designing and implementing a coordinated, comprehensive student success program. Though understanding how data and information needs to flow between and within various constituencies and support offices, research-based best practices can be translated to effective institutional actions. And most importantly, by identifying the right student at the right time and getting them the right intervention, institutions can dramatically increase the success of all of their students.

ARAB ACRAO Conference 2015

Design Considerations for Early Alert Programs

Designing, Assessing and Implementing a Comprehensive Student Success
Program Pre-conference Workshop

Loralyn Taylor, Ph.D.

Design considerations for Early Alert Programs (EAP)

Early Alert Program Structure

Four basic parts:

1. Data Collection
2. Data Analysis and prioritization
3. Outreach and intervention
4. Assessment & Improvement

This workshop will focus primarily on the first two parts.

1. Data Collection

In a basic EAP, data collection may consist of an early alert survey of instructors at 4 weeks into the semester, the reporting of midterm grades (either on all students or a subset, such as freshmen or only D and F grades) and possibly class absence reporting. Please note that basic does not preclude being highly effective, in fact simple, straightforward EAP can outperform more complex programs because they encourage compliance through ease of stakeholder participation and the efficiency of collecting and utilizing the data.

To consider when determining what, when and how to collect:

- Be intentional. Only collect data that will be helpful and, most importantly, used.
 - Ask data providers what information they have and are comfortable sharing at what time—i.e. many faculty do not feel comfortable assigning a grade at 4 weeks but will share concerns.
 - Ask data users what information would be helpful in identifying at-risk students or giving context and scope to the student's situation.
- Use technology to automate EA surveys and other data collection (ex. LMS integration)
 - Decrease staff time preparing, collecting and reminding people to complete surveys.
- Less is more.
 - Minimizing the time burden on your data reporters increases your compliance rates.
 - If your EAP calls for continuous monitoring of student performance (i.e. faculty reporting problems when they occur and not waiting for the EA survey or midterm grades), the easier it is to provide the data, the more data they will be willing to provide.

Defining high risk vs. at-risk students:

Students may be considered high risk based on demographic characteristics or previous scholastic achievement (or lack thereof). Strategies that identify high risk student groups are called proactive strategies as they can be used prior to the start of the semester or even prior to enrollment to identify and target students for intervention. It is important to remember that not all high risk students will

become at-risk students. Some of high risk students will manage just fine, while other low risk students may become at-risk during the semester.

At-risk students have demonstrated through their behaviors, or lack thereof, such as lack of studying, lack of homework, lack of attendance, that they are actually at-risk of imminent academic failure or attrition. Reactive strategies are utilized during the semester to quickly identify and intervene with these at-risk students.

Comprehensive EAP rely on a mix of proactive and reactive strategies to maximize effective identification of high risk and at-risk students and to efficiently outreach and intervene with the student to get the right student to the right service at the right time.

Both proactive and reactive strategies will be discussed in more detail in “Improving your Early Alert Program with Proactive and Reactive Strategies”.

Common data collection problems:

- Too little data or too few indicators utilized
 - Hard to identify all at-risk students, students may fall through cracks.
 - Hard to prioritize students, may not be outreaching to most at-risk.
 - Hard to refer student to the right service for their primary issue.
 - Trying to collect information on too many indicators can cause compliance issues.
- Too few data providers participating
 - Failure to achieve stakeholder buy-in.
 - Low compliance means too little data
 - In more advanced EAP, automated data collection through learning management systems, student information systems and “digital exhaust”—i.e. data generated by routine business and learning activities replace data reported manually by data providers.
- Too late
 - The later in the semester you collect performance data, the more accurately it reflects the student’s likely final grade, BUT the LESS likely you are to be able to intervene and improve the situation!
 - EAP must balance the need for accurate information (too avoid false positives and missing actual at-risk students) with the need to intervene before the student is unable to recover.

2. Analysis and prioritization

After collection, the data must be converted to actionable information, i.e. at-risk students must be identified and prioritized for outreach and intervention.

While technology is great for data collection, automating the analysis of the data and the prioritization of the students is critical and allows for tremendous time gains which result in earlier interventions and

better student results. For example, Paul Smith's was able to go from hoping to start student outreach during week 6 in response to EA survey results, to beginning outreach at the end of week 4, while the EA survey was still open! We doubled the time available for tutoring or other interventions to work prior to midterm grades!

Critical issue: Information flow and communications management problems can reduce or eliminate the effectiveness of otherwise solid EAP. Problems in the ease and timing with which information is exchanged between ALL of the offices that have necessary information to either build an accurate picture of the student's situation or have a relationship with the student that can lead to an effective intervention are often the unrecognized root cause of EAP failures.

For example, the office responsible for giving the CSI survey to new students often lamented that advisors were not using this information during class scheduling. A retention committee review of data availability revealed that the results were getting to the faculty one week after their meetings with the students.

A common response to retention challenges is to target high risk groups with their own specialized program. This "risk group of the month" syndrome leads to a proliferation of programs which tend to remain in their own silos, reducing or preventing effective information and communication flow. With each group serving a different population, it becomes very difficult for faculty or staff who want to report a student concern to know how to address the problem. When busy people do not know exactly what to do, they often end up doing nothing. Complexity in an EAP or in the structure of your student support offices will increase the amount of training which must be provided to data providers while also reducing their compliance and responsiveness.

3 components in an information flow and communications management plan:

1. Permissions
 - Who sees what, when
2. Communications
 - Who gets what, when and how do they get it
3. Action hierarchy
 - Who does what, when
4. Implementation
 - Stakeholder understanding and adoption of plan

Yes, I said three components but without this critical fourth step, the first three will not matter. Many well designed plans sit on shelves gathering dust, without an effective step 4. Implementation, specifically, using change management theory to provide a framework for reducing stakeholder resistance and increasing adoption rates is discussed in "Implementing Early Alert Programs: Change Management". John Kotter's *Leading Change* (1996) is recommended reading for its clear framework and extensive real-world examples of its application.

1. Permissions

- While FERPA practices vary across campuses, in general, any college employee whose job description includes an expectation to work with students they have a relationship with (advisor, instructor, support office, etc.) relating to student success issues, either academic or non-academic, is allowed under the educational need-to-know standard to have access to the information they need to perform their job.
 - The more difficult job is to determine what information is helpful to the student and which information may be prejudicial at certain points.
 - What information is needed, what is sufficient, and what can negatively impact the student.
 - Sometimes timing is the only difference between information having a negative or positive effect for the student.
 - The balance between student privacy and need-to-know should change as the student's situation deteriorates.
 - Ex. at Paul Smith's College, instructors cannot see whether a student in their class is on academic probation because that information may be prejudicial to the student. However, if the student is about to be suspended because of failure to comply with their academic recovery program requirements, everyone with a relationship to that student, including their instructors receives an email asking them to intervene with the student and direct them to the Academic Success Center. At this point, the information is critical to helping prevent the student's suspension. It is also likely that the student is already failing or having difficulties in class.
- Ask data users what information would make their jobs easier, what information is critical, and information they could live without if necessary or could get at in a different way.
 - Remind them gently that they likely will not get everything they want.
 - Having stakeholders help design your plan, gives them a stake in its success and increases their understanding of the big picture.
 - One on one individual meetings to start are crucial.
 - Later group meetings can be used to revise the plan and allow different users to negotiate compromises on the information they need. This also allows everyone to work together toward a goal of simplicity for the data providers.

2. Communications

- Automate as much routine communication as possible with email or text templates.
- Automate initial the initial student outreach attempt.
 - Both the information provided and the tone of the email or text are critical.
 - Students without a solid college-going identity such as first gen or underrepresented minorities may be sensitive to a message that they are failing or unable to succeed.
 - In the anonymous words of a student, "No one wants to hear it

implied that they are a hot mess!”

- Promote receptivity to help by expressing concern but confidence that the student can be successful.
- Use social norming data to indicate that a large number of students use tutoring and other support services and the range of grades that they earn in the class.
 - Actively work toward removing stigmas attached to using support services if present.
 - Demonstrate that tutoring is not just for students making F or D grades.
 - Hire tutors who were themselves tutored in classes.
 - Reinforce a culture of academic success among students.
- Provide information about steps students can take for themselves to remediate their situation.
- Using technology to automate communications free faculty/staff to focus on building student relationships.
 - Faculty/staff don't have to remember to go to a location and get the information, it is pushed to them.
 - Faculty/staff can review information on daily digest and only log into program only if they need more information.
- Allow faculty/staff to receive most communication in a summary email or morning digest of the previous day's information.
 - Distinguish critical information by having it sent outside of the normal handling, by sending immediately as a separate email consisting of just that student's information.
 - For example, while most information is sent to faculty or the support offices in a daily digest form, a concern indicating that a student is in danger of suspension within a short period of time, is sent as an individual email as soon as the concern is raised.

3. Action Hierarchy

- Identify who is expected to outreach to and intervene with which students.
 - Make clear/explicit who is responsible by using the role name in the name of the flag/concern. Ex:
 - 3 Academic Flag Warning—Support Action
 - 6 Academic Flag Warning—Support and Advisor Action
 - Student Health Concern—Health Services
 - Support offices for special populations like TRiO, accommodative services or transitional students can work with their own students.
 - Models for unaffiliated students depend on institutional structure.
 - Student Success Center, Professional Advising Center, Faculty Advisors,

etc.

- Who is leading the outreach and intervention may change depending on the concern expressed.
 - If behavioral, social/personal or wellness concerns are indicated, student counseling or health services may be a more appropriate outreach than a faculty advisor.
- If the student is in deeper academic or other trouble, multiple offices may be called upon to outreach at the same time.
 - Not all students are engaged with the college through the same offices, faculty or staff.
- Setting appropriate thresholds for action
 - Where you set your thresholds for identifying and prioritization is critical and may require must adjusting to get right.
 - Too high and you will miss intervening with students who could have been helped.
 - Data providers will not see results of interventions and will wonder why they are working to provide the data if not much is being done.
 - Too low and your support staff will be overwhelmed and demoralized by the number of students they are expected to intervene with.
 - Data providers will see a large number of expected interventions that are not happening and see this as evidence that the EAP is not a priority.
 - When setting thresholds for identifying high risk or at-risk students, consider:
 - The number of staff available for outreach and intervention
 - The amount of time staff have available during different times of the semester
 - Differing time requirements for the most common outreaches and interventions
 - Your student response rate to outreach
 - The quantity and quality of the data coming into the EAP.
 - If you have lots of good data, you can make a better informed decision about whether the student is really in trouble.
 - Less data (such as a low response rate from faculty) means potentially intervening with students who are actually doing ok and missing some who are failing.
 - For example, we set our threshold for considering a student high risk due to our proactive strategies lower than we set our threshold for action in response to our EAS data.
 - Prior to and during the first weeks of the semester, our student

support staff have more time and can outreach to more high risk students and try to bring them into the program. Many of these students may only require a meeting or two to ensure that they are on track and many will not accept our offer at all.

- By the EAS during the 4th week of the semester, the support staff have less availability and we set the bar higher for identifying at-risk students to keep their workloads manageable. Students in trouble at this point may need more help including quickly setting up tutoring or help developing skills to help remediate their academic situation prior to midterm grades.
- At midterms and later, focus is on mitigating gpa damage for the semester and building the relationship and long term skills that will help the student be successful in the next semester. Faculty advisors are also busy with pre-registration and have less time available for student interventions, but they can incorporate conversations about seeking tutoring.

Effectively combining Permissions, Communications and Action

Permissions, communications and actions must work together as a cohesive whole to effectively manage the large amount of data coming into the EAP, analyze the data, identify and prioritize the right student and efficiently communicate the resulting information to both the student and the right faculty/staff to help the student.

When implementing a technology solution to act as an information and communications hub for an EAP or student success program, there is a real danger of going from too little data/information to total information overload accompanied by a resulting sense of frustration and paralysis.

To combat this, Paul Smith's College designed a three level hierarchy of warning flags/concerns: Informational, Action and Urgent flags. This design was simple, clear and easily understood by all campus stakeholders. Each successive level indicates an increasing level of concern and carries a different expectation of response or action.

More information on our flag system, including a short video explaining it can be found at:
<http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/beyond-retention-using-targeted-analytics-improve-student-success>

Flag Level	Description	Examples
Informational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> notification about a student concern does not necessarily rise to the level of calling for specific action provides important and accurate information about a student's progress faculty/other data providers understand that not all informational flags will be addressed/cleared 	Low Grades Attendance Concern Missing Work MidTerm Grade Below a C Academic Probation Financial Aid Hold Did Not Pre-Register
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies students in need of intervention carries an expectation of outreach the name of the office responsible for outreach is used in the name of the flag prioritized by both the flag level and by the number of active flags on a student's profile. All action flags will be addressed but will only be cleared when student responds to outreach 	3 Academic Flag Warning—Support Action 6 Academic Flag Warning—Advisor and Support Action Student Development—Private Health Concern—Private
Urgent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> calls for immediate intervention student in danger of suspension within days everyone with a relationship to the student is expected to outreach to the student. 	Suspension for Non-Payment Academic Recovery Program Suspension Warning Health Services Suspension Warning Financial Aid Loss of Funding

Keys to success

- Maximize information while minimizing need for data and manual effort.
- Be intentional
 - Avoid paralysis by analysis
 - Make a plan that is at a minimum a sound framework which can be modified in response to stakeholder feedback
 - If the data point does not contribute quality information, don't collect it.
 - Set a higher bar for data that providers report manually or that takes more effort to report.
- Simplify
 - Can you reduce the number of concerns or warning flags that are available to data providers? If they have to scroll through a list of 20 options, many will choose not to report.
 - Simple plans require less training and increase compliance
 - People want to help, make it easy on them.
- Be clear
 - Use clear names, terms and simple descriptions –your intentions don't count, their understanding does.
 - Ex. our No Show Flag (concern) was meant to be used by faculty to report a student

who had never attended class, but was often misused to report an absence.
Solution: change name to Never Attended.

- Clarity makes it easy for stakeholders to comply and reduces their need for training.
- Set appropriate thresholds for action
 - Faculty/data providers must understand that not every flag/concern they raise will not be addressed or cleared and why.
 - If this is not clear, they may see that their flags are not cleared and feel that providing the data is not worth it because nothing is done.
 - Make sure that the system for prioritizing students for intervention is understood, so that data providers know that ALL of their input is vital to the effective functioning of the system.
 - Recognize and thank your data providers for providing the information.
 - It is easy to forget how motivating a thank you can be.
 - Do not overwhelm support staff/advisor or other data users with too many high priority students.
 - Help them keep a manageable workload to avoid burnout.

3. Outreach and Intervention

Clearly student outreach and intervention needs a full day workshop on its own, but here are some considerations to keep in mind.

- Successful outreach and intervention is all about building personal relationships based on mutual trust—period.

True, but here are some other helpful considerations:

- Prioritization of the student for outreach must be tightly coupled to the actual outreach and intervention
 - Technology can be used to make this one step—i.e. automated email or other notification to student of the issue/concern and steps to remediate.
 - Each student support office must have agreed upon expectations for the timing of the follow up. How quickly will the office begin additional outreach attempts to the student?
 - The more critical the student’s situation, the faster these additional outreach attempts should occur.
 - PSC Ex.
 - 1—automated email template to student expressing concern about situation and steps students can take to remediate with information and about relevant campus services.
 - 2—use Starfish technology to send Come See Me! To Do inviting student to make an appointment to see a success counselor. Has a

- due date associated with it.
- 3—phone call or text message follow up, more personalized individual email, or other attempt (call to instructor, advisor, etc.) at contact with student.
- With an Urgent flag, while an email does go out to the student, everyone who sees the student is expected to speak to them about the situation and what they need to do.
 - When a student has had an urgent flag, they often complain to the office that raised the flag that “Today, EVERYONE told me that I had to come see you right now!” That is exactly what we are looking for!
- Use technology to create an information hub where the person or people intervening with the student have all of the information needed and can be kept on the same page during the process.
 - Both efficiency—ensuring that multiple people or offices are not outreaching to the same student while others fall through the cracks—and effectiveness—having the information needed to identify and help solve the student’s actual issue, are dependent on having the right information available at the right time.
- As discussed above, setting the appropriate prioritization thresholds, is vital to ensuring maximum effectiveness without overwhelming or demoralizing the support staff.
- After the intervention occurs, at least minimal information about the result should be returned to the data providers
 - Ex: Student is having difficulty understanding topics X and Z. Student is signing up for tutoring and will be contacting instructor for help before the next test.
 - Even a short note shows the data provider that their information was valuable and acted upon. This helps improve trust between data providers and support services and also increases their motivation to continue to provide data.

ARAB ACRAO Conference 2015

Improving your Early Alert Program with Proactive & Reactive Strategies

Designing, Assessing and Implementing a Comprehensive Student Success
Program Pre-conference Workshop

Loralyn Taylor, Ph.D.

Using Proactive and Reactive Strategies to Improve your EAP

Definitions:

1. Proactive strategies:
 - Allow for identification of students who are considered at high risk of developing academic issues that may hinder their success.
2. Reactive strategies:
 - Allow for the identification of students who are either becoming or currently are at-risk of academic problems due to their behaviors (or lack thereof).

Because reactive strategies are more common, and thus more familiar, let's start with them.

2. Reactive Strategies

These strategies typically occur during the semester and the data collected are based on student performance or behaviors. Many EAP consist entirely of reactive strategies.

Examples of reactive strategies include:

- Early alert surveys
- Attendance reports
- Midterm grade reports

While many reactive indicators are academic in nature, multiple campus areas can provide vital information:

- Academics:
 - Attendance, grades, homework submission, class engagement/participation, behavior
- Social/Co-curricular
 - Participation or lack in clubs, sports, gaming, residence hall activities, student government
- Disciplinary
 - Violations, residence hall behavior, off-campus issues
- Wellness
 - Health, drugs, alcohol
- Bursar/Financial Aid
 - Outstanding balance, bounced checks, declined credit cards, requests for advanced refund checks, failure to file FASFA, parent PLUS loan denial, failure to accept fin aid award or sign master promissory note

Important considerations:

- Cast a wide net
 - Multiple indicators from multiple sources create clear, accurate picture of who is most at-risk and allows for the right intervention by the right office at the right time.
 - Can you handle the fish?
 - Set appropriate intervention thresholds to avoid overwhelming staff outreaching to students.
 - Thresholds may be different depending on the challenges facing the student.
- Don't just rely on faculty/academic performance data
 - Many students become at-risk due to non-academic issues long before academic issues become a problem.
 - Waiting for actual academic problems to surface may be too late to save some students.
- Prioritize data based on actual student behaviors over data based on student demographics or other indicators
 - At-risk students are a higher priority for intervention than high risk students.

More often overlooked sources of reactive information that may be both available and helpful:

- Degree audit data: are students on track graduate?
- Course drops: is there a pattern of dropping high challenge or courses required for graduation?
- Tutoring or advising information: are students utilizing, missing scheduled meetings?
- Pre-registration status for next semester: did the student pre-register, on-time, with correct load?
- RA or residence hall director concern: can they submit EA concerns?
- IT metrics: are students logging into their email account, your LMS, your student portal at appropriate times?
- LMS metrics: learning analytics is a growing field and can provide an incredible wealth of student performance data including:
 - Course engagement: time between course log ins, page views, time on page, click through rate to resources
 - Grade information: if faculty keep online gradebook, automated concerns and interventions can be triggered by failing or borderline grades, late work submission, etc.
 - Predictive models can be developed over time to allow both a student to see whether their course grades and behaviors are putting them at risk of performing poorly in the course and allow an instructor and or student support to easily see which students are at-risk.

1. Proactive Strategies

These strategies typically occur pre-semester or even pre-enrollment and provide the earliest possible early alerts. Proactive strategies can be used prior to enrollment as early as the applicant stage of the admissions process to begin to identify students who will be at high risk of academic struggles.

Data used for proactive identification can include:

- Demographic information
- HS grades
- Test scores
- Admissions funnel information
- Financial Aid information
- Student surveys such as the BCSSE, CSI, etc.
- Choice of major
- Enrolled in high challenge course(s)
- Testing into remedial course(s)
- 2 or more lab courses in semester
- Total credits enrolled
- Distance of home from college

Proactive data on returning students:

- Large gpa drop between last two semesters completed.
 - During a review of suspended student transcripts, we noted that a significant proportion of suspended students were not placed on probation prior to their suspension.
 - Reviewing transcripts revealed that these students had achieved a 2.5 to 3.5 first semester gpa, had a significant gpa drop in their second semester, but their overall gpa was too high to be placed on probation. When these students failed again in their third semester, their gpa was now low enough to require their suspension.
- Students earning below a 2.00 term gpa in their last semester regardless of overall gpa.
- Probation students.
- Students that did not pre-register or who pre-registered just prior to the new semester.

Incorporating proactive strategies into your EAP often involved befriending your IR office or Registrar. The quickest way to start identifying the characteristics that put your students in a high risk category is to collect student information with final first semester gpa attached along with the information above.

While compare retained and non-retained students, attrition is a multi-causal problem and it can be difficult to identify difference based on retention status. If student success is the ultimate goal, using whether or not the student ends their first semester in good academic standing is variable to utilize. Further, after the first semester, academic success becomes a bigger predictor of continuing retention.

For these reasons, using good academic standing (gpa >=2.00) is the recommended variable to use.

For example: Quick and easy comparisons between groups

Gender	% ending first semester in good academic standing (gpa >=2.00)
Males	
Females	

HS GPA	% ending first semester in good academic standing (gpa >=2.00)
3.5-4.0	
3.0-3.5	
2.5-3.0	

Looking at the results from these analyses can help you identify students who should be considered at high risk of developing academic issues. You can also combine these analyses into help identify sub-groups at even higher risk, thus increasing your accuracy and reducing the total number of students you would prioritize for outreach.

For example: Dialing in on a high risk subgroup

	Gender	
Remedial coursework	Male	Female
Yes		
No		

Doing without data:

“While the plural of anecdote is not data, it is an educated guess.”

Given pressures from external stakeholders, higher ed no longer has the luxury of failing to act while waiting to collect the necessary data. If you cannot gain access to the data required to help target students, you can still act. There is an extensive research literature identifying student groups who are at high risk of academic issues and failure to complete college. Combining these findings with discussions with student facing offices on your campus can provide enough information to begin using proactive data to improve your EAP by intervening with students prior to academic problems developing.

Some advanced proactive strategies:

- Using nationally normed student surveys
 - Nationally benchmarked surveys can provide good information to start identifying your high risk student populations. Bearing in mind that your student population may or may not be similar to the national group surveyed.

- Developing custom risk factors using student surveys
 - Once you have experience with a nationally normed survey and the results for your student population, you can utilize the survey data to create a more customized risk factor score to help you be more specific in identifying high risk students based on their characteristics.
 - Ex: PSC has utilized the Noel Levitz College Student Inventory for many years, based on a solid understanding of our typical student that becomes at-risk, we identifies 6 CSI scales that we believed were particularly important. We scored all incoming students as high risk (assigned a value of 1) or not high risk (0) on each scale. Students who totaled a 5 or 6 out of 6 were considered high risk students and a flag/concern (CSI Risk Factors) was place on their profile. This gave them 1 academic flag toward the 3 Academic flag warning before the semester even started. In addition, success counselors outreached to these student prior to and during the first weeks of the semester to encourage them to opt in to our success counseling program.
 - The threshold score of ≥ 5 was determined purely by the number of high risk students that our success counselors could handle.
 - At the end of the semester the high risk group was compared to the low risk group on a variety of variables. As seen below, the high risk students clearly performed worse even with our offers of help than the low risk students.

High and Low Risk Students identified by CSI Risk Factors			
	Low Risk	High Risk	% Change
Average GPA	2.74	1.60	-42%
Probation	14%	39%	179%
Withdraws	3%	11%	267%
% in Good Standing	79%	40%	-49%

- Predictive Modeling
 - Predictive modeling is powerful technique for identifying both the characteristics that put your students at high risk but also for understanding how these characteristics interact with each other.
 - We modeled three years of first time, full time student data to predict end of first semester gpa. While it can be tempting to try modeling retention or attrition, attrition is multi-causal and be difficult to model effectively. Modeling end of first semester gpa is a better choice and more appropriate for promoting student success.
 - Threshold choice: after developing the model, we used the model to score the previous fall's class to test how well the model would behave and how many students would be identified. Based on these results we decided to use of threshold of a predicted gpa of ≤ 2.15 . This missed the fewest number of students who would become at-risk, while keeping our numbers for

intervention reasonable and avoid identifying too many students at high risk.

- Again, a High Risk flag/concern was placed on the student’s profile starting them with 1 (or 2 if they also had a CSI risk factor flag) flag toward the 3 flag warning prioritization.

High and Low Risk Students identified by Predictive Model			
	Low Risk	High Risk	% Change
Average GPA	2.87	1.78	-38%
Probation	10%	38%	280%
Withdraws	3%	8%	167%
% in Good Standing	84%	45%	-46%

- Compare your proactive approaches; are they identifying the same students?
 - Does the intersection of your high risk groups identify a sub-population of students that are at extremely high risk? For us, the answer is clearly yes.

Probation Rate		
	CSI Risk Factors	
Predictive Model	Low Risk	High Risk
Low Risk	8%	25%
High Risk	30%	44%

Withdrawal Rate		
	CSI Risk Factors	
Predictive Model	Low Risk	High Risk
Low Risk	3%	0%
High Risk	3%	15%

% Achieving Good Academic Standing (GPA≥2.00)		
	CSI Risk Factors	
Predictive Model	Low Risk	High Risk
Low Risk	87%	56%
High Risk	55%	34%

Early Alert Program Design Take-homes:

1. The earlier the early alert, the better.
 - a. Utilize proactive strategies.
2. Get the biggest information bang for your data buck.
 - a. Work toward both efficiency and effectiveness.
 - b. Automate, automate, automate.
 - c. Follow a simple, clear, and intuitive design aesthetic.
3. Cast a wide net.
 - a. Use a variety of sensors to identify at-risk students quickly.
 - b. Create a comprehensive, campus-wide network.
 - c. Don't let students fall through the cracks.
4. Set appropriate thresholds for action.
 - a. Don't overwhelm your response team.
 - b. Increase time for building student relationships through the use of technology.
 - i. Automate routine communications, initial outreach and feedback.
5. Don't wait for perfect information to inform your actions.
 - a. Avoid paralysis by analysis.
 - b. Don't wait for data to act, collect data to revise your action strategies.

ARAB ACRAO Conference 2015

Implementing Student Success Programs: Change Management

Designing, Assessing and Implementing a Comprehensive Student Success
Program Pre-conference Workshop

Loralyn Taylor, Ph.D.

Using a Change Management Framework

“Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas.”

--Michael Fullan

While project management focuses on the individual steps that need to be accomplished to complete a task, change management focuses on people and the social and psychological infrastructure needed to help people adopt new behaviors or processes—i.e. to change.

Most change management frameworks employ roughly the same process of preparing and motivating the organization to change, actually implementing the new behaviors and processes, and ensuring that the new behaviors are institutionalized.

Kotter’s Eight Stage Process of Creating Major Change (*Leading Change*, 1996) provides an accessible, easy to use framework for implementing your new initiatives.

The first three stages involve creating a climate of change:

1. Establish a sense of urgency
2. Creating a guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy

The next three stages involve engaging your stakeholders and enabling the change to occur:

4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short term wins

And the final two stages finalize the implementation and work to sustaining the change:

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

It is important to realize that change does not follow a pure progression from one stage to another. More likely, your implementation effort will straddle several stages at once. While it is possible to make progress in the short term by focusing more effort on the middle stages and neglecting the initial steps, your implementation will almost always quickly run into resistance and problems resulting from the failure to establish a firm foundation for the change effort. Indeed, if you encounter sustained resistance when attempting to engage your stakeholders in the change effort, revisiting your strategies from the first three stages is in order.

Stage 1: Establish a sense of urgency

Urgency is usually generated by helping people both see and feel a need for change. This combination of both a rational buy-in to the need for change and also an emotional buy-in is critical for actually motivating your stakeholders to undertake the hard work of changing their behaviors. The culture of

higher education often works against some stakeholders, such as faculty, seeing and feeling the need for the change.

Often the case for the urgency of the change is generated by identifying and discussing external threats, crises or potential crises facing the institution. In recent years, identifying both external and internal threats to higher education has become quite easy. In spite of this, however, complacency can remain quite high. It is easy to retreat to the day-to-day work of teaching or office work and to literally shut the door on worrying about the larger threats to your institution or higher education in general.

An alternative method for generating change which may be a better match for the culture of higher education is through using Appreciative Inquiry, a strengths-based approach to generating motivation to change is briefly discussed at the end of this paper.

To effectively build your case for change in student success, you need to effectively utilize your data to convey the scope of the problem as well as to help your campus understand the numbers. Instead of stating your retention or graduation rates, help the numbers come to life. For example, can you have 100 students come to a faculty senate meeting? You can have 30 of them leave the group to indicate your first year attrition, then you can have them leave in groups until the number of actual graduates remain. Could you have your faculty and staff play the students and go through the same exercise?

Stage 2: Creating your guiding coalition

To champion your change effort, you will need a guiding coalition that has the positional power, expertise, campus credibility and leadership ability to ensure success.

Important questions to ask:

- Are the key players on board?
- Do you have the positional power to overcome likely sources of resistance?
- Are all of the areas involved in the change effort represented or do you have representatives that have relationships with each area? If you can include an area expert that has a known tendency to be resistant to change, incorporating them into your coalition can help bring them on board and give them a stake in your project.
- Are the members of your coalition trusted and do they have reputations for doing the right thing?
- Are they proven leaders? While a mix of managers and leaders are needed, change efforts need more leaders to develop and convey the vision of the change effort.

Stage 3: Developing a vision and strategy

A vision helps direct, align and inspire the change: *here is how our environment is changing and here are the reasons why we need to meet these new goals which will improve what we are doing.*

A clear vision of the desired future state both motivates your stakeholders—wouldn't it be great to be

there?—and allows stakeholders to clearly see which behaviors are consistent with the new vision and which ones need to change. An effective vision should be simple, compelling, achievable, and easily understood.

While a vision provides the direction of the change effort, the strategy is where the rubber hits the road. Without operationalizing the steps of the journey to the vision, nothing gets done. Once the vision has been agreed upon, the guiding coalition must work together to determine the strategies and actions needed at each step to continue moving toward the vision. Remember that while hope is important; it is not an actual strategy!

Stage 4: Communicating the change vision

Having a vision while a necessary condition, is not sufficient. You must communicate the change vision to your stakeholders, while engaging them in a dialogue about how best to achieve the vision. This dialogue helps build institutional commitment to engage in producing the change.

Develop a compelling story: why are we changing, what is changing and how is it going to change? Like the vision itself, the story of the vision must be a story of the future that is both persuasive and emotionally appealing. Fortunately, helping students be more successful through implementing an early alert program or a student success program lends itself to compelling, emotionally charged stories.

Common mistakes at this stage include not communicating enough. Your change vision message is easily overlooked in the barrage of emails and communications that people receive each day. It may seem like overkill for each member of your guiding coalition to work in communications about the change vision every day, but it is critical to raise the visibility and importance of your project. Communications using multiple modes to multiple stakeholder groups is also important. Actions, especially the actions and behaviors of your guiding coalition, are an often overlooked communication of your commitment to the change process. Real or perceived hypocrisy between actions and public communications about the change process will kill your change effort.

Stage 5: Empowering broad-based action

There are 4 main barriers to institutional change: 1) institutional structure, 2) lack of necessary skills, 3) organizational systems, 4) resistant leaders and managers. To empower the changes necessary to support your initiative, institutional silos may need to be removed. While this may involve organizational restructuring, often it involves bringing siloed areas together to break down barriers to information and communication flow. Positional power may be needed to ensure that staff receive the message that failing to cooperate and share information in a timely fashion is not an option.

Do your stakeholders have the knowledge, skills or abilities to perform the new tasks assigned to them? Resistance to change can be defensive, particularly if a faculty or staff member is uncertain or anxious about their ability to perform the new task. Ensuring that stakeholders have sufficient training and time to acquire new knowledge or skills can be critical to the success of your change effort.

Align your performance reviews and other processes to reward successful completion of the new tasks and behaviors. Recognize and reward innovative changes that are aligned with the change vision even if they are not all successful. Remember that you are asking people to move out of their comfort zone. Recognize them for taking the risk.

Common problems encountered include individuals who: withhold critical information or resources or provide them too late to help; undermine the credibility of the guiding coalition; refuse to participate; try to create an us vs. them culture. Most resistance can be dispelled by time: taking the time to communicate effectively, taking the time to listen respectfully, and giving people the time to adjust to what the new changes mean for them. Allowing stakeholders a meaningful role in determining how to achieve the vision is a good way to increase buy-in. People believe and have a stake in achieving what they have helped design—which is another reason why an Appreciative Inquiry process can work well.

Stage 6: Generating short term wins

Change is a long and difficult process. People are more comfortable with their day-to-day reality than an unknown future state. Short term wins provide proof that the changes you have asked people to make are working. It increases your credibility and undermines resistance by demonstrating that the institution is moving in the right direction. Tangible progress also provides stakeholders a moment to catch their breath and pat each other on the back. A common mistake during a change process is to continue to look forward toward all the change that still needs to be done without pausing to look back

Because short term wins are critical to both maintaining the momentum of the change and generating the buy-in for more change, they are too important to leave to chance. When choosing your key performance indicators, you will need to establish multiple measures that are likely to change in the first 3 to 6 months of your change effort. Ideally, these indicators will be relevant to all of the stakeholder groups involved in the change. The measures must also be an unequivocal indicator of the success of the overall strategy and demonstrate progress toward the vision.

A critical error at this stage is passively waiting for improvements instead of actively generating short term wins. In the Paul Smith's College student success program, it took almost two years to see an increase in first time, full time retention rates (and then it increased by 17%!). If we had not relied on multiple KPI, including measuring a 14% jump in sophomore to junior retention in the first year along with decreases in suspensions, probations and other indicators of student success, our program would have been in danger of being declared a failure instead of being rightfully celebrated as a campus success.

The importance of demonstrating short term wins every 3-6 months to your campus community cannot be overstated. At Paul Smith's, we have three all campus meetings each year and we ask the president for 10 minutes at each meeting to present our findings, discuss new initiatives and most importantly, recognize outstanding contributions to the program and thank the entire campus community for their support.

Stage 7: Consolidating gains and producing more change

While you want to celebrate your short term wins, you do not want to declare victory. Declaring victory means that everyone can go back to what they had been doing. Until the new way of doing things becomes “the way we do things around here,” you have to keep driving new change to reach your goal. The successes of your short term wins increases your credibility allowing you to attempt new changes that may have been too big or too imposing to tackle at the beginning of your effort. Stakeholders have a reinforced belief that the change is moving in the right direction and are more engaged and willing to buy-in to additional change efforts.

Continue to listen to stakeholder experiences with the change effort, learn the lessons and refine both your vision and strategy for achieving the vision. Ensure that campus leaders remain committed to the importance of the initiative. Do NOT allow senior administrators to think that problem is solved and move on to the next problem. Calculate a return on investment and make a case for investing new resources in your effort.

Stage 8: Anchoring the new approaches in the culture

A common mistake during a change effort is not to explicitly link the improvements seen to the changes made. While this linkage can seem obvious to members of the guiding coalition who have worked hard to bring them about, stakeholders can attribute the improvements to admitting a better class of students, the personality of a new support person, or an external event. When communicating your short terms wins, link them specifically with the changes. For example: “We had a 36% reduction in students on probation because 95% of faculty completed the early alert survey which allowed us to intervene with at-risk students prior to their digging a hole they could not recover from. This response rate demonstrates the commitment of our faculty to a culture of student success and these data allow us to get the right help to the right student at the right time.”

An institution’s culture is built on the stories it members tell each other and themselves about their common values, goals and vision. Reflecting a stakeholder group’s values back to them, as in the above example, moves the group’s culture into closer alignment with the change vision.

Your initiatives are not institutionalized until they become not just what we do, but who we are.

Appreciative Inquiry: a strengths-based approach to change

In addition to focusing on the strengths of an institution, appreciative inquiry (AI) follows a collaborative, story-based process to generate change. An important facet of AI is the use of positive and affirming language. For instance, if an institution with a low student retention rate were to use an AI process, they might rephrase the problem of student attrition as “we are able to successfully retain these types of students, so how we can use our strengths in those areas to help us engage and retain even more students.” In this way, challenges or threats to the institutions become opportunities for the institution to apply and expand its strengths and core competencies to improve (Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S., 1987)‡.

The 4 steps of the AI process:

1. Discovery
2. Dream
3. Design
4. Destiny

Step 1: Discovery (sometimes referred to as Inquire)

AI is strengths-based, the discovery step is about using a collaborative process, usually pair interviews to appreciate the best of an institution. Typically pairs of people interview each other asking their partner to tell a story of a time when they felt particularly engaged and successful in a situation. The interviewer prompts for more details using unconditionally positive question prompts.

After the pair interviews, the pairs combine to form small groups of 6-8 people who share their partner's story with the group. The group is instructed to list common themes that emerge from the stories. Then each group reports the themes that they identified to the whole group and these are written for everyone to see and a representative story is shared from each small workgroup with the whole.

Though this process, the group is able to identify common cultural values, engage in respectful conversation and recognize the commonalities in high performing situations.

Step 2: Dream (Imagine)

Here the groups are asked to envision what is possible. To imagine what it would be like to return to your job in a year or two or five. How would you want it to be different? What would it ideally look like? What would your ideal vision of the future look like?

Results from this stage are to get people to express their ideas with a heightened state of creativity and to hear what they and others see as possible.

Step 3: Design (Innovate)

If you were to make your ideal world a reality, what would you have to do? What steps would you have

to take to create this new future?

Results of this stage include feelings of empowerment, motivation and energy to change, confidence and a feeling of ownership in the future.

Step 4: Destiny (Implement)

How can you apply or adapt your strengths to make this future happen? What new skills might you need to learn?

By helping design the vision of the future, individuals are more motivated, open to change, and energized to find more ways to have high functioning experiences—i.e. to be more productive. Further, by sharing their stories and hearing the stories of the group, the strengths and values of the institutions culture are reflected and reinforced for the group.

‡ Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S. (1987) Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In Woodman, R. W. & Pasmore, W.A. (eds) *Research In Organizational Change And Development*, Vol. 1 (129-169). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.