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Transformational U: Everyone Counts in Recruitment and Retention

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Utah State University

Institutional Description

- The mission of Utah State University is to be one of the nation's premier student-centered, land-grant and space-grant universities
- Fostering the principle that academics come first
- Cultivating diversity of thought and culture
- Serving the public through learning, discovery, and engagement
- Carnegie Doctoral/Research Extensive University
- Located in Logan, Utah “A traditional college town of about 100,000 in the broader community.”
- Total student enrollment nearly 24,000
Utah State University
Situational Analysis Prior to Fall 2002

- Enrolled traditional-age students, homogeneous population, mostly from Utah and Southern Idaho
- Selectivity 2001 at 98%
  - According to the Board of Regents policy a maximum of 5% can be admitted as serving needs of local community, and talent to the university. 11% of entering freshman were marked as “General Registration.”
- Average ACT 22.8 and not seen as a “First Choice”
- Losing fully 1/3 of freshman class & 20% high ability
- Five year graduation rate 32% and six year 44%
  - 85% of students note membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which indicates high percentage will take two-year leaves for missions, marry earlier (50% by graduation) and have children earlier than national norms.
Enrollment Goals Outlined

- Enrollment should increase from 23,000 to 25,000 over next five years
- Selectivity should decrease to 85%—peers at 73%
- Average ACT increase to 24 by 2004 and 25 by 2007—peers 24.2
- First Year Retention Rate increase to 70-75%—peers retain 85%
- Six Year Graduation Rate increase to 52%—peers graduate 64%
- Utah State will operate on the principle of recruiting very good students not necessarily the very best
Transformational U: Enrollment Management’s Role

- Administrative reorganization of EM units to Provost Office--Support from central administration
- Building partnerships between academic affairs and student services
- Raised expectations and standards of excellence in all units
- Historic ethic of care and personalized practices
- Enrollment Management has served as an institutional CHANGE AGENT in helping our campus understand their role and contribution

“Everyone counts in recruitment and retention”
Transformational U: Admissions and Recruitment

- Raised the admissions standards
- Developed reports to track applicant, enrollment, and yield data [http://www.usu.edu/admissions/](http://www.usu.edu/admissions/)
- Intentional active student recruitment underlies our retention efforts

  “Retention Begins with Recruitment”

- Emphasize “fit” between student and our degree seeking programs
- TM outreach, campus wide programming and yield activities, integrated marketing and communication flow
- Seek best prepared students—we care about admitting, enrolling and GRADUATING our students
Transformational U: Student Success and Retention

- Creation of Retention Specialist Position
- Identification of Leavers
- Proactive Tracking and Advising
  - Cleaning up the data and marking the cohort
  - Creation of Matriculation Advisor position
- Follow-up Practices
  - E-mail reminders [www.usu.edu/usucares](http://www.usu.edu/usucares)
  - Exit interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Retention Scholarship
Student Success and Retention: 

*Leave of Absence*

- **Goals of tracking USU students through Leave of Absence (LOA)**
- **Process**
  - Students must complete a Leave of Absence form
  - Student must meet with the Matriculation Advisor prior to departing
    - Goal is to give each student a meaningful exit interview to facilitate his/her return (see attachment)
    - Also to retain students who are considering completely withdrawing from USU
- **Tracking**
  - Reason for leave
    - Important to note as well as learn of problems, and work to solve them (e.g.—find retention money for deserving students)
Student Success and Retention: Leave of Absence Continued

- **Tracking**
  - Semester of Return
    - Important to note so that students can be recruited back at the right time.
  - Place a hold on the registration
    - Make sure we are their first point of re-entry

- **Additional Information**
  - Students cannot drop their last class online
  - Advertise the service, and create an incentive for filing (students don’t have to pay a readmission fee, can keep their USU e-mail account, etc.)
  - A report is run to find students who ‘walked away,’ and those students are personally contacted
Student Success and Retention: Recruiting Back LOA Students

- Prior to registration for the return semester, each student will receive at least one letter and an e-mail, welcoming the student back
  - Certain populations (Honors, athletes) will receive another targeted recruiting effort
- Post-registration, un-registered students will be contacted again
- LOA Communication Flow Chart
- Student indicates return
  - Hold is cleared
  - Student is directed to an academic advisor, financial aid, and on-campus housing
Student Success and Retention: 

Benefits of LOA Tracking

- Better understand *Departure Behavior*
  - USU large populations of students who take time away from their education path for Humanitarian Service and/or to take care of family responsibilities
    - Military service, financial and medical reasons and academic difficulties
  - Tracking these populations has allowed USU to become more student centered in our programs and policies

- Make students aware of *Time to Degree*
  - LOA process can help modify the behavior of the students; they can’t simply ‘walk away’ from the institution
  - Helps the student be conscious of his/her decision to leave, and make a plan for return, thereby retaining more students

- Documentation for IPEDS reporting exclusions

- Track trends and make adjustments
Transformational U: Enrollment Management, Student and Academic Affairs Partnerships

- Created a central Advising Center and added six professional advisor positions [http://www.usu.edu/advising/](http://www.usu.edu/advising/)
- Redesigned our Freshman Seminar, and added peer mentors to each section
- Students received a weekly “What’s up on campus” e-mail [http://www.usu.edu/connections/](http://www.usu.edu/connections/)
- Created course clusters and priority registration for first-year students who deposit by May 1 [www.usu.edu/soar/clusters/fall](www.usu.edu/soar/clusters/fall)
Transformational U: *Enrollment Management, Student and Academic Affairs Partnerships Continued*

- Instituted a new Graduation Guarantee Program that ensures student graduation in 8 semesters —or the University pays the tuition [http://www.usu.edu/graduate/](http://www.usu.edu/graduate/)
- Partnered with Athletics on student success initiatives
- Instituted a campus wide FYE Committee to discuss and coordinate appropriate initiatives [http://www.usu.edu/fyi/](http://www.usu.edu/fyi/) and [http://www.usu.edu/arc/fyeprof](http://www.usu.edu/arc/fyeprof)
- Retention is always a part of the discussion
Transformational U: *Partnership with the Honors Program*

- **Re-thinking the High Ability Student Experience**
  - New Honors Pathway—introduced gateway course, Scholars Forum, sample honors “risk free”
    - [www.usu.edu/honors](http://www.usu.edu/honors)
  - Centralized scholarships — moved to 4-year awards and renewal at 3.5 GPA
  - Created the “Research Fellowship” the most prestigious incoming student award
  - Pairs students with faculty mentors
    - [http://www.usu.edu/vpr/students/fellows.asp](http://www.usu.edu/vpr/students/fellows.asp)
  - FYE Connections course and Honors Fellows
Transformational U: Collaborative Partnerships

- 2004-2005 Review of Academic Warning and Probation practices by CAD
- Revamped Readmission Process and Academic Appeals Committee
  - Personal Statement, Academic Inquiry Form and Interview
  - Broad mix of representation
  - Contracts
Transformational U: Collaborative Partnerships Continued

- AAA to track exclusions
- Network and Computing Services
  - E-mail open at admissions and left open while students are on leave
- Intentional and Proactive Advising Initiatives
- Retention Specialist and Matriculation Advisor
Results and Outcomes

- First Year retention rates moved from 66% in 2001 to 75% in a three-year timeframe
- Retention of high-ability students moved from 80% to 90% in a three-year timeframe
- Retention of student athletes increased significantly, and time to graduation for student athletes is in the top 10 most improved in the nation
- Suspensions decreased from 174 in 2002 to 74 in 2005
- 80% of Re-admitted Students met their contract agreements
Results and Outcomes Continued

- Fall 2004 met the average ACT 24.1 and for 2006 currently holding at 25.3
- USU is lead author of *Retention and Time to Graduation: A State and Institutional Imperative* --Board of Regents presentation in April 2005, and Fall 2005 action plan—March 2\textsuperscript{nd} System Symposium
- Received the 2005 Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award
Potential Program Adaptation

No simple answers

- Self-study both of what is working, as well as recommend changes and actions to improve what is not working.
- Senior administrative leaders must provide a strong commitment and resources to focus on Enrollment Management initiatives not only on the recruitment and admission of qualified students but on those that will promote student success.
- Intentional recruitment, leave/withdrawal processes, exit interviewing, proactive tracking, re-admit contracts, intrusive advising, high ability student initiatives, FYE seminar course, --to name a few.
- Goals, action plan, progress report, and assessment.
Transformational U: Requires an Institutional Commitment to College Choice and Student Success Initiatives

- **Intentional** student recruitment
  - **Intentional** retention and student success initiatives
  - **Intentional** follow-up and recruitment of leavers

- According to Tinto (1987), “*institutional commitment is the part of each and every member of the institution.*” One person can make a difference. Faculty and staff are not only crucial in the college choice process but play an essential role in a student’s decision to persist.
Questions?

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