The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Lake Erie College

Project Details

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1: Project Goal

A: This project will include the development of a college retention committee designed to study and propose changes that increase college-wide retention. Tasks will include the review/analysis of current data and practice, and the establishment of a comprehensive retention plan. The primary focus will be academic. However, other aspects of retention will be addressed (student life, financial aid packaging, etc).

2: Reasons For Project

A: Our current retention rate is 71% (below the CIC rate of 75). In addition to increasing retention, we also must improve our data management and reporting to meet accuracy and consistency of retention information.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, Registrar, Admissions, Academic Advising and Learning Centers

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Tracking and reporting of retention data, retention-related programming, assessment of academic support and related services, and the development of a retention profile key. We also hope to determine best practices for attracting and retaining specific populations.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Given the wide scope of this project, it will likely take the entire year to analyze data, change practices (both service/programming and data management) where necessary, and then assess the new and existing practices.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Semester and yearly reports from new Retention Committee and campus support services will be shared with VPAA and VP for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Outcome measures will include the completion of a comprehensive tracking and reporting plan, increase in retention rate of 5%, development of a retention profile key, and identification of specific programs or experiences that demonstrate a clear link to retention

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status
Lake Erie College formed a new Retention Committee to review and analyze current data and practice, and the establishment of a comprehensive retention plan. The committee met regularly beginning in the fall of 2010. The Retention Committee will continue to meet regularly to review retention progress and identify new or additional retention issues. Several policies and processes have been reviewed, updated or created to provide a more accountable system based on institutional data and trends as well as those noted in national research findings. New or updated policies and procedures include the following:

- Update of Admission standards and admission exception policy (approved by Academic Standards Committee)
- Creation of the Accepted Student by Tier Report (reported monthly)
- Funding rationale and assessment plan for the newly created Academic Learning Center, Math Lab, and Writing Center
- Creation of Academic Learning Center services communication plan
- Identification of "at risk" profile tiers for research purposes
- Assessment of tier-based early intervention plan
- Programming and communication plan for students with documented disabilities
- Student Athlete Study Table coordination plan
- Hiring and training practices for all retention support staff, tutor, etc
- Identification of specific retention data fields, reporting needs and reporting schedule
- Creation of Academic Directions Learning Communities
- Update of program plan for Scholars (Honors) Program
- Increased scholarship funding for Scholars

**Institution Involvement**

The Associate VP for Academic Affairs and the VP for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management selected the members of the Retention Committee based on their level of expertise or role in retention services on campus. Committee members included the Associate VP for Academic Affairs, VP for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, VPAA, Director of Advising and Academic Learning Centers, and the Dean of Students. In addition to reviewing data, reports, policies and procedures, the committee members consulted with staff in the Registrars Office, Admissions, Athletics, Student Success Center, Deans and faculty.

**Next Steps**

The following recommendations were made by the committee:

- Ensure Admissions practices that align more closely with the success profiles of graduating class, those showing higher levels of achievement with specific types of support, etc.
- Continue programmatic funding of the new Academic Learning Centers, given the demonstrated success rates
- Invest in development and programming for targeted profile programs. (Learning Communities development, and Honors Program upgrades have been proposed)
- Invest in scholarship/aid funding for targeted profiles
- Continue research related to undecided or "exploratory" students and "major changers". (Consider more deliberate advising and programming for exploratory students)
Review programming opportunities related to diversity, as well as performance and satisfaction indicators for first generation and minority students

Continue proactive measures to assist "at risk" populations

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: One of the policy updates that resulted from work on this Action Project was the Admissions Exception process. A new committee was formed (Director of Admissions, VP for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Associate VP for Academic Affairs, Director of Advising and Academic Learning Center, Dean of Students and a faculty representative from the Academic Standards Committee) to allow for a more timely approval process. The committee was also charged with decision making that is informed by our "success profile" data as well as our general retention research. As of our last meeting in July, the incoming freshman class profile had improved (both H.S. gpa and ACT equiv.). The retention and persistence data for the "exception cohort" will then inform adjustments to admissions standards for the next year.

5: Project Challenges

A: Although we have increased our retention rates and continue to provide a variety of retention related services, like other small colleges, we are faced with very tight budgets. There is also the reality that tightening the standards to upgrade the profile (which have influenced our retention efforts) may influence enrollment revenue in negative ways. Consequently, we are dealing with a fine balance.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The College has established its data collection needs with a number of new procedures for identifying data and creating new reporting fields. That the new Retention Committee can identify thirteen new or updated policies and procedures reflects the work that has gone into this project and the vastness of the original project statement. The College has made good progress toward its goal of retention.

2: Institution Involvement

A: Obviously, this is a committee that includes major administrative figures working with all aspects of the campus. The strength of this committee is that it has the ability to create change and to get questions answered. Yet the committee lacks a certain breadth of scope that could ensure buy-in from the College community as a whole. Rather than just consulting with the Registrars Office, Admissions, Athletics, Student Success Center, and faculty, the committee could have a representative from each area on the committee. A representative who is acting as the communication link to that area could help to create a more positive response from that area for any possible changes. Part of valuing people is to include them in any decision-making process that affects their job performance (AQIP Category 4). This would also encourage more collaboration between the front-line departments that deal with students and encourage them to be proactive problem-solvers (AQIP Category 8 and Category 9). It was not clear how data collection and reporting fit into the overall structure of the committee (AQIP Category 7).

3: Next Steps

A: The recommendations were very reasonable, although it was unclear how the actions that had been taken had led to the creation of these steps. There should be more emphasis on fact-based information gathering as the underlying process of decision-making. How do these new steps reflect analysis of specific support strategies that helped students to be retained and to graduate? This appears to be a one-year project, yet the implementation of a fully realized action plan would seem to indicate a longer time commitment to create a truly embedded process of improvement. For the College to create an atmosphere of continuous improvement will require continued data collection and analysis to pinpoint specific actions for long-term student success and retention (AQIP Category 3,
### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: A very workable plan to review the Admissions Exception process has been put into place, which emphasizes collaboration (AQIP Category 9). This committee reviewing admissions exceptions is using data and research that has resulted from the Action Project, verifying a process of using research-based decision-making. This is an example of an effective use of data, which can be replicated. Well done.

### 5: Project Challenges

A: The College has very accurately stated the double-edged sword of wanting to increase revenue by increasing enrollment while wanting to increase retention and graduation rates by putting in place measures to ensure student success. Although there are no easy solutions, realizing the problem is the first step toward a solution. How does the College plan to embed data-driven decision-making to continue its retention efforts? One piece that has gone unmentioned in this update is the role the College’s mission plays in establishing enrollment priorities. When times get tough, an institution focused on and committed to its underlying mission can use that mission to discover the right thing to do (AQIP Criterion 1).

### Project Outcome

#### 1: Reason for completion

A: Original goals were met. Continuous progress plans are now in place.

#### 2: Success Factors

A: The creation or updating of over a dozen different processes or policies related to retention based on a thorough analysis of extensive internal data and external research finding/benchmarking.

#### 3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: We continue to balance the fiscal need for increased enrollment and implementation of the new or updated policies and procedures. Although we are making dramatic improvements in several areas (improved student profile, more academic programming, etc), we still must attend to some conflicts in priorities.