

Report on Undergraduate Student Retention 2021-2022

Western Carolina University



Undergraduate Student Retention Task Group

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I. Introduction

A. Role of Student Retention in WCU Mission and Alignment with WCU 2020 Strategic Plan

The WCU mission (*WCU mission statement*) states, “The university focuses its undergraduate [...] programs to sustain and improve individual lives.” Strategies to improve student retention and persistence not only improve degree completion rates but also connect directly to this mission. Improved retention is integral to our core values and guiding principles of “teaching and learning” and “responsible stewardship and organizational effectiveness,” and it plays a role in “Organizational and Environmental Sustainability” as well as “Cultural Diversity and Equal Opportunity.”

Improving student retention is an important part of WCU’s Strategic Plan, *Honoring Our Promise*, contributing to the stated priorities of academic excellence, student experience, inclusive excellence, and responsible stewardship. One of the more obvious connections is to Goal 1.6, in which the institution will “Continue to coordinate WCU’s student enrollment and retention strategies to ensure strengthened balance of access, diversity and student success, institutional mission, and sustainable revenue sources.”

Successful retention strategies will directly result from the comprehensive work to “enrich the student experience” (Strategic Direction 2, *Honoring our promise, 2021*). Additionally, the 2017 *Higher Expectations Strategic Plan for the University of North Carolina* calls for all UNC (University of North Carolina) system schools to increase low-income and rural student enrollment and completion and to improve five-year graduation rates and overall undergraduate degree efficiency. Retention strategies will be critical to WCU’s success in meeting the UNC system’s new performance metrics.

Retention and persistence for undergraduates involves decisions that start with the admissions process, continue with student success programs and initiatives, and culminate with the successful and timely completion of a specified degree program. Our students’ successful completion depends upon careful planning by collaborative professionals, attention to detail and to predictive analysis, efficient administrative processes, best practices in teaching and programming, effective and responsive student support, and diligent assessment of learning outcomes and success markers (Tinto, 1993, p. 4):

[R]etention should not be the ultimate goal of institutional action, though it may be a desirable outcome of institutional efforts. Instead, institutions and students would be better served if a concern for the education of students, their social and intellectual growth, were the guiding

principle of institutional action. When that goal is achieved, enhanced student retention will naturally follow.

B. History of Student Retention at WCU

Retention and persistence were an integral part of the 2016-2020 Commitment to Student Success, a comprehensive Strategic Plan written in 2016. The First-Year Student Retention Task Group, comprised of faculty members and professional staff from Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, was formed in September 2017 to recommend strategic initiatives that would support first-year student retention and persistence. This was supported by the ongoing work of the Retain and Graduate Committee.

The conclusion of the 2017 *Report on First-Year Student Retention* was not that WCU needs to implement additional programs to support student retention, but that the university needs to focus its efforts in three primary areas:

1. Enhanced data collection and analysis to illuminate the myriad factors that influence students' decisions to remain at WCU or to leave.
2. Improved strategic planning and assessment practices that will allow us to pinpoint those programs and services that make the most impact.
3. Increased communication across departments to avoid duplication of services and to ensure an adequate allocation of resources to programs that have a proven ability to move the needle on student success and retention.

C. Status of Student Retention at WCU

In *Blog for Enrollment and Student Success*, Wick (2015) proposes that campuses identify “retention champions” to lead efforts focused around these seven retention strategies:

- Implement early warning systems.
- Initiate social connections between freshmen and other students.
- Foster interactions/connections between freshmen and faculty in their major.
- Make sure parents are informed about campus resources for students.
- Ensure that support services are easy to find and navigate.
- Use data to evaluate programs, target retention efforts, and use predictive modeling to understand characteristics that correlate to success and attrition.
- Continue sustained data analysis beyond the first year to allow rapid and effective response to challenges faced by upper classmen.

Participation in the National Symposium on Student Retention in November 2021 confirmed that WCU already has in place most of the programs and initiatives that other schools are currently implementing.

D. Purpose and Scope of This Document

The Strategic Planning and recommendations found in this report emerged from an analysis of the following information:

- WCU enrollment and retention data since 2017.
- Recommendations of the 2016 and 2017 reports.
- Current and planned programs and practices that support the academic success of WCU students (see Section III).

Although the Office of Student Retention, formed in 2020, maintains primary responsibility for retention, many people work on retention strategies across all levels of the campus. This report organizes undergraduate retention efforts into a comprehensive framework that includes current and recommended programs and initiatives, the units responsible for those programs, assessment of outcomes, and responsive action plans that will allow the university to capitalize on successful initiatives.

II. Strategic Directions for Student Retention

A. STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: Identify and Support Academically At-Risk Students

Early identification and intervention are critical to student retention, persistence, and performance. Supporting students who are at risk to help them succeed pays multiple dividends: benefiting the student, fulfilling the core mission of the institution, enhancing financial vitality, and strengthening the image of the institution, which attracts more new students to Western Carolina University. As this plan expands to consider the full spectrum of undergraduate students, identification of at-risk students is a crucial first step. How does the university define, identify, track, and report on these populations so that it can best support them, and who is involved in the discovery process? Replacing the Enrollment Planning Committee with a new Enrollment Strategies Committee, which includes a supporting data committee and task teams, will aid in identifying students and fulfilling initiatives. The Undergraduate Retention Task Group will be particularly instrumental in addressing initiatives.

1.1 Utilize predictive analytics to identify risk factors

1.1.1 Collect and Analyze Data to Determine Risk Factors

In 2019, WCU Student Success forged a relationship with Institutional Research (IR) in the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE) to develop retention models. The goal of the work was to identify at-risk students, defined as new students to WCU who had a high probability of not being academically successful during their first year of studies at WCU, where success was defined as a student who earned 12 credit hours while maintaining a 2.33 GPA (*Institutional data*).

IR worked with Student Success to identify variables which could be tested to predict the statistical likelihood of retention during the first year of studies for new first-year and transfer students. Some of the variables tested were HS GPA, ACT scores, SAT scores, previous college course performance, NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) data, Student Datamart, family adjusted gross income, family demographics, and student debt.

The first level model developed was called CATIREAM (Catamount Institutional Research Adjustment Model). The model was developed to provide a score for each student which would predict their WCU GPA for their first semester. If the model predicted WCU GPA of greater than 2.5 GPA, the student was called low risk. If the model predicted a 2.0 to 2.5 GPA, the student was called medium risk, and any score less than 2.0 was high risk. The first use of the model was in the Fall 2021 to Spring 2022 academic year.

Recommendations

- a) Continue to examine research findings related to risk factors and identify particular risk factors that may be useful to improve CATIREAM.
- b) Use DPI data to get additional information about high school students.
- c) Implement a pre-enrollment instrument to collect data from future students that is not included in application materials but might provide insight into academic preparedness.
- d) Develop, deploy, and analyze specific pre-enrollment math and writing readiness assessments.
- e) Assess enrollment patterns of those who do not qualify for admission into STEM programs.
- f) Assess the effectiveness of WCU transitional courses and student engagement programs which increase the statistical probability of student success.

1.1.2 Collect and Analyze Data Regarding High DFW Rate Courses and Course Combinations

A study included in the *WCU Report on First-Year Student Retention* (2017, p. 25) identified “Killer Course Combinations.” According to the report, “[w]hen taken together, these courses have a higher number of students who are not retained when compared to the other class combinations that enroll first-year students.” These combinations include entry-level chemistry, math, biology, and physics courses. Since the time of that report, curricula have been revised (e.g., CHEM 133 is no longer a requirement for the nursing program), advising strategies have changed, and new supportive teaching strategies have been developed (particularly due to teaching modalities implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic). In addition, the Math Pathways project that the UNC System undertook shed light on some of the performance challenges and barriers students have faced within math, specifically, and has shaped changes intended to affect positive student outcomes. Nonetheless, work remains regarding support for other subjects and combinations of courses that confound student achievement. Assessing course and curriculum hot spots needs to move from being an ad hoc process to a continuous, integral part of an intervention strategy.

Recommendations

- a) Review historical data on “killer course combinations” and provide an update on any statistical changes.
- b) Create a metric for identifying current courses with high DFW rates (e.g., statistically lower grade in two or more courses relative to semester GPA). Identify specific high DFW rate courses and/or course combinations. Determine if there are commonalities among the courses and/or students earning DFW grades.
- c) Explore correlation of student success with Learning Management System (LMS) usage.

1.2 Provide targeted academic support and intervention for at-risk students

1.2.1 Expanding and Improving Academic Support Interventions

Early identification of at-risk students and high DFW rate courses is a first step in student support, but it must be followed by targeted academic support and intervention. Data analysis in Direction 1.1 allows creation and expansion of interventions for students to support retention. Because first-semester success is critical to student outcomes, pre-enrollment data and identification of high DFW rate courses can be used to create initial course schedules. Another opportunity to support at-risk students is after the 5th week grades are reported. Currently, students identified as at-risk after 5th week grades do not engage with the support offered. As an early intervention, the Academic Success Program (ASP) offers an opportunity for conditionally admitted students to get a jump start to college during the summer semester with intensive academic support and peer mentoring.

Recommendations

- a) Develop and implement a pre-enrollment interest inventory to aid advisors as they build initial schedules and conduct initial meetings with students.
- b) Communicate with advising teams about high DFW rate courses and be strategic in advising students not to take certain courses in their first semester, if possible.
- c) Develop a coaching strategy for students identified as “at-risk,” particularly those identified early by low 5th-week grades. Expand reporting for these students.
- d) Provide retention-related training and support for faculty advisors. Develop strategies for providing one-on-one advising for students enrolled in majors with high student-to-faculty ratios.
- e) Consider the overall effectiveness of the ASP requirement to begin in summer.
- f) Investigate continuation of a case management model through the first year for ASP students.

1.2.2 Faculty and Classroom Supports

Most, if not all, metrics of student success depend upon students’ performance in their classes. The ability of instructors to influence student success should not be underestimated given the amount of time they spend with students and the relationships that can be built in the classroom. In certain courses, additional support for students as well as instructors may be needed. These include courses with historically high DFW rates, first-year courses, and transition courses. Additionally, instructors may encounter at-risk students or students in danger of becoming at-risk in any course yet are unprepared to provide needed interventions. Supporting students in the classroom can be achieved through aid to faculty in their roles as instructors, modifications to transition courses, additional support in critical

areas, and assistance to department heads and program directors to manage course schedules and class sizes.

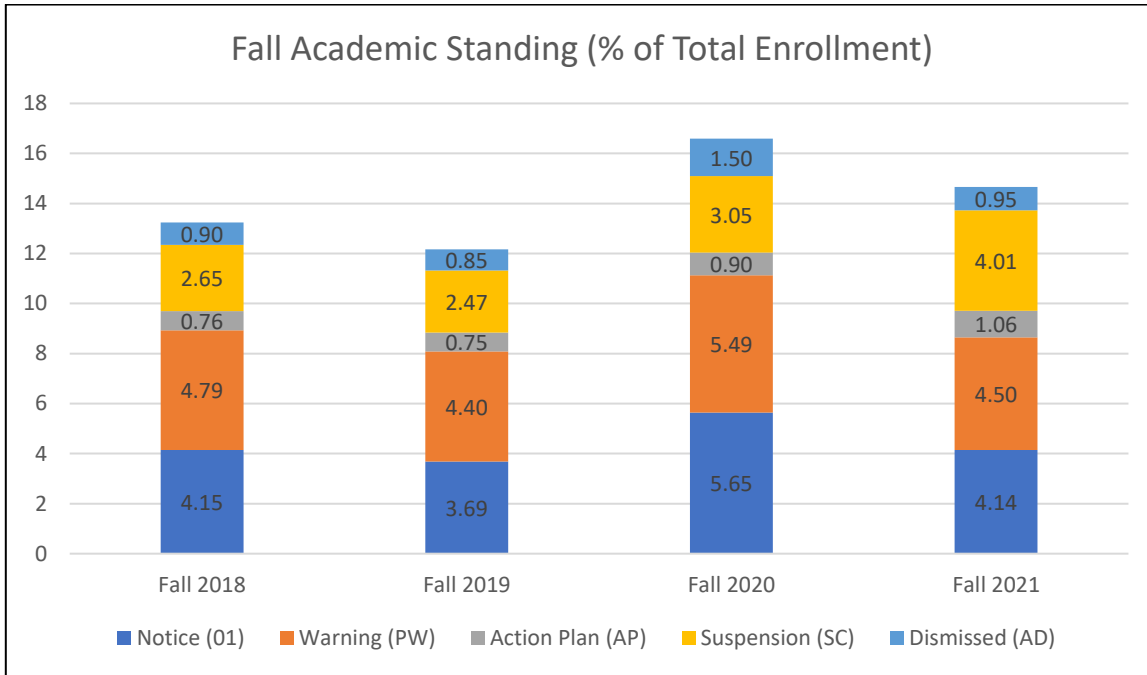
Recommendations

- a) Expand the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, specifically targeting courses identified as high DFW rate courses or course combinations in Direction 1.1.2.
- b) Provide training for faculty on intervention strategies and support for at-risk students.
- c) Explore the possibility of revising the content of transition courses to be academically focused, outsourcing many of the current core elements to online modules.
- d) Provide retention-related training and support for faculty who teach first-year courses and courses with high DFW rates. Consider faculty readings of *Small Teaching* (Lang, 2016) for these courses.
- e) Provide non-credit opportunities for students to sharpen mathematical and writing skills.
- f) Explore exceptions to courses with high DFW rates to determine if any similarities (course time of day, course instructor, credit hours, etc.) might be indicators of success that could be adopted more broadly. Other patterns that result in higher failure rates could be avoided.
- g) Work with department heads and program directors to carefully consider instructor qualifications and class size for high DFW rate courses and other entry-level courses. Lean on external models or on-campus demonstrations of success.
- h) Examine use of early alert systems and determine if additional promotion of usage is necessary.

1.2.3 Students Not in Good Academic Standing

Students who are not in good academic standing easily fall under the “at-risk” category. This includes students on academic warning, with an academic action plan, or who were academically suspended or dismissed (Figure 1). Students on academic notice are in good standing; however, their most recent semester suggests that they have struggled to make progress toward their degree. All these students have demonstrated that they need additional assistance to be successful.

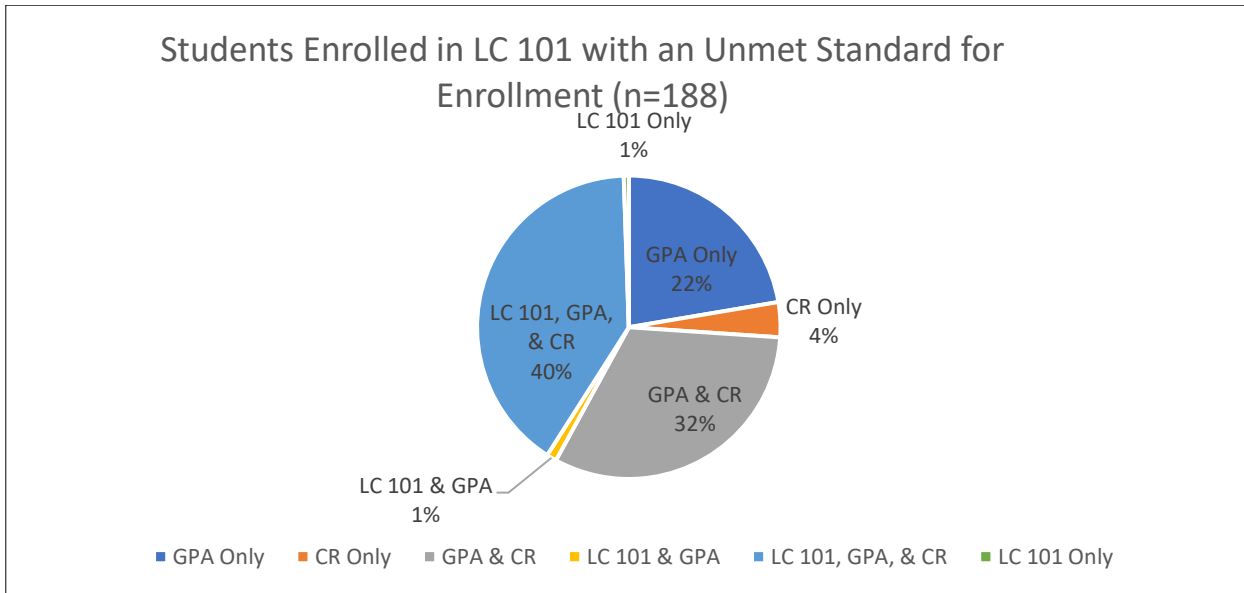
Figure 1: The percentage of students in each academic standing category. The percentage is of total enrollment for that semester as of the official census date. Academic standing is calculated at the end of the semester.



The Learning Contract program (LC 101) is designed to support students who are not in good academic standing. Currently, students who are on academic warning after their first semester with a GPA below 2.0 and students who return to the university after being suspended or dismissed with a GPA below 2.0 are required to take the LC 101 course. These students must make progress to meet the terms of good academic standing, or they will face academic suspension. In the 2020-2021 academic year, 41% of LC 101 students did not meet the academic standing terms to continue enrollment based on internal assessment data. These students must meet the following criteria (*2021-2022 undergraduate catalog*):

- Satisfactory grade (S) in LC 101.
- 2.3 semester GPA or 2.0 cumulative GPA.
- For academic warning students, a semester and cumulative completion rate of 67%.
- For academic action plan students, a semester completion rate of 67%.

Figure 2: The percentages of students enrolled in LC 101 in 2020-2021 who did not meet the terms to continue enrollment, separated by the unmet standard: GPA requirement, Completion Rate requirement, LC 101 requirement, or combination.



An analysis of LC 101 was completed as part of the 2020-2021 Continuous Improvement Report for the Office of Student Retention. This analysis looked specifically at the reasons why students did not meet the terms to continue enrollment. GPA was the most significant factor; 96% did not meet the GPA requirements to continue enrollment (Figure 2). This is not surprising for this population. They start with below a 2.0 GPA and then are required to achieve at least a 2.3 semester GPA. Many do not have the academic skills to make that kind of transformation, and the current LC 101 structure (five meetings with an academic advisor) is not enough contact to build these academic skills. Further, these students need additional academic advising before the end of add/drop to ensure they are in the most appropriate classes. An additional advising session could encourage them to repeat failed courses or to select courses that optimize rebuilding their GPA.

Recommendations

- a) Propose changes to the Learning Contract course (LC 101) structure and requirements.
- b) Assess academic action plans to determine if additional criteria are needed for students to earn good academic standing.
- c) Consider necessary support for students on academic notice.
- d) Create and implement a plan for additional academic advising to occur between final grades and add/drop for students below good academic standing.

1.2.4 Students Below Minimum Program Requirements

Several high-demand degree programs have minimum requirements that students must satisfy before being allowed to take higher-level courses in the major. These requirements often include a minimum GPA in a set of prescribed entry-level courses. Students who fail to meet these requirements frequently delay academic progress while they attempt to improve their academic standing to enter or continue the desired major. Rather than becoming risks for retention because they cannot get into their first choice of major, these students could be advised to consider other related major and career options.

Recommendations

- a) Develop a mechanism for identifying students who are failing to meet minimum entry requirements for their desired major.
- b) Develop a targeted outreach program for these students that provides advising information on alternative related major and career options.
- c) Create parallel academic plans for majors that have minimum entry requirements.
- d) Develop career counseling for undeclared students with a GPA less than 2.5 after their first semester.
- e) Identify majors with courses that would support a different major to facilitate judicious changes of major.

B. STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: Evaluate and Address Opportunity Gaps for Underserved Student Populations

Western Carolina University's Strategic Plan (*Honoring our promise, 2021*) commits to offering curricular and co-curricular experiences that foster an inclusive community and retain a diverse community of students. To achieve these goals, the university has a responsibility to capitalize on opportunities for progress when pertaining to historically underserved student populations—especially where differences exist in student success measures such as retention, graduation rates, and GPA. WCU, in accordance with its Strategic Plan to promote academic excellence for all students, should bear the onus to improve the overall academic and social experience for historically underserved and/or underperforming populations. Below are recommendations for developing a university-wide plan to assess and close the equity and performance gaps.

2.1 Utilize demographic data as analytics to inform student services and support

2.1.1 Definitions, Metrics, and Targeted Demographics

Before developing a plan to address opportunity gaps, the university must discover where these gaps exist, and which student populations are included. Additionally, all stakeholders must consistently understand which students fall into the targeted demographics. For example, the university tracks multiple versions of gender, first-generation status, and race/ethnicity; these versions vary by definition and data collection methods. The university has made improvements in creating dashboards and methods of data-sharing to support student success since the *Report on First-Year Student Retention* (2017). However, available data can be expanded, combined, and simplified to improve data-informed decision-making across the university. For example, EAB Navigate, the university's advising and tutoring system, provides valuable information regarding early alerts, advisor interaction, and tutoring utilization that can help contextualize student performance over time. Research has shown that students of color are up to two times more likely to receive an early alert through Navigate (Fairfax, 2021). The university should utilize all available data to understand the full student experience.

Recommendations

- a) Target students of color, men, rural students, low-income students, and first-generation students for further data analysis and interventions (See figures 3-4 for current data on opportunity gaps for these populations).
- b) Investigate disaggregated DFW rates, graduation rates, year-to-year retention rates, GPA, registration holds, early alerts, etc. to determine additional populations for targeted intervention.
- c) Analyze advisor interactions, tutoring utilization, early alert reporting, and progress/attendance reporting to determine gaps in student support utilization.
- d) Develop unified definitions of each targeted demographic across all dashboards and departments.

Figure 3: Differences in cumulative GPA between students of color (Diversity Composition includes American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, and Two or More Races) and White/other students (Non-Diversity Composition includes White, Unknown, Non-Resident Alien, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander).

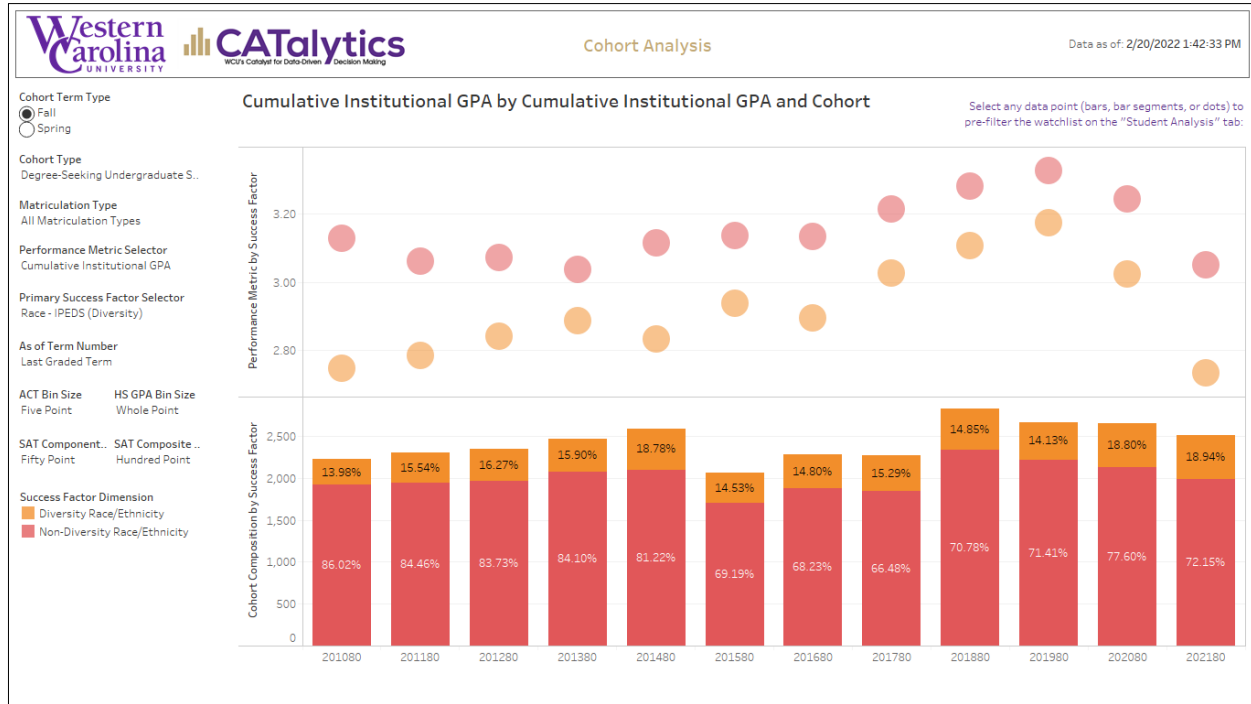
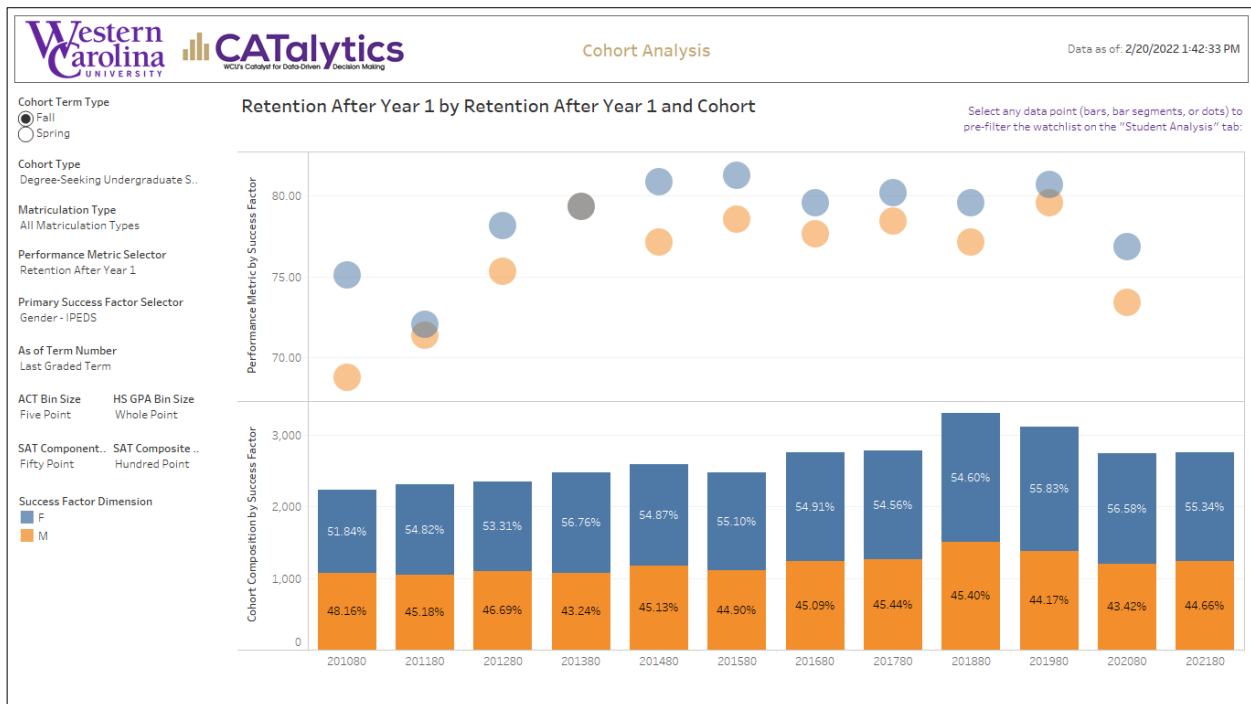


Figure 4: Differences in retention after first year between male and female students.



2.1.2 Data Reporting

Currently, data on targeted demographic opportunity gaps is found across a wide array of dashboards, reporting structures, and platforms. Different data dashboards are developed for different stakeholders and findings are scarcely shared, creating silos of understanding and data analysis. This separation of data access makes it difficult for the university to create an integrated plan to address differences in achievement. WCU should develop a unified data distribution plan that combines information across sources and departments, addresses targeted demographics, and is easy to understand and share.

Recommendations

- a) Include targeted population filters in internal data dashboards.
- b) Develop a continuous reporting structure to share results and recommendations with campus stakeholders and to track changes over time.
- c) Utilize the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Using Data community of practice as a campus-wide network of stakeholders to review data and collaborate to create solutions to close opportunity gaps.

2.2 Enhance programs to support students in marginalized, underserved, and underperforming populations both in and out of the classroom

2.2.1 Diverse Classroom Experiences

Students from diverse and minoritized backgrounds often have more trouble engaging in a classroom setting for several reasons. Students of color often report a higher need to prove their academic abilities, meanwhile being disproportionately affected by racial tension on and off campus. Social stereotypes of either underperforming and overperforming in academics contribute to anxiety and lower grades. Eurocentric content taught by an overwhelmingly white and upper-middle class faculty invalidates minoritized students' experiences and makes learning excessively harder (Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015). These challenges outline the importance of creating diverse classroom experiences and positive faculty-student relationships, particularly for targeted demographics.

Recommendations

- a) Implement mandatory training for new faculty and staff to increase multicultural awareness and diverse academic content.

- b) Review existing curricula to ensure faculty are using culturally inclusive academic content, starting with first-year seminars and courses with high DFW rates in targeted demographics.
- c) Include diversity in the curriculum and faculty training for all first-year transition courses.
- d) Provide additional support for the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty.
- e) Define criteria to support hiring faculty with the skill set, ability, or experience to create and develop diverse classroom experiences.
- f) Incentivize excellence in diversity programming through faculty/staff awards.

2.2.2 Inclusive Co-curricular Experiences

In addition to academics, the social experiences for minoritized students affect retention and success. Research connects student involvement in co-curricular activities outside of the classroom with improved grades, belonging, and retention (Harper & Quaye, 2007). At Predominately White Institutions (like WCU), students of color are far less likely to engage with campus life compared to their peers at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This difference in engagement is often attributed to negative campus environments and a lack of campus activities that reflect minoritized students' cultural interests (Quaye et al., 2015). First-generation and low-income college students are also at risk for lower rates of engagement compared to their peers at the same institution (Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013). WCU should strive to create a campus environment that encourages engagement across all student populations, particularly among student demographics that have opportunities to improve in academic areas.

Recommendations

- a) Implement a campus-wide climate and engagement study to determine student attitudes around belonging, academics, involvement, and retention in relation to their identity.
- b) Enhance leadership programs for students from diverse backgrounds.
- c) Engage underrepresented students early in career development.
- d) Expand programs that specifically support underrepresented groups' belonging on campus.
- e) Implement cross-cultural training for leaders of student organizations on campus.
- f) Include student voices on further strategic planning initiatives.
- g) Expand peer mentoring opportunities for populations beyond ASP, Catamount Gap, and Project CARE.

2.3 Develop means to reduce financial strain on student retention

2.3.1 Financial Education

The burden of the increasing cost of higher education leads to anxiety and poor academic outcomes, especially among more vulnerable populations. Britt, Canale, Fernatt, Stutz, and Tibbetts (2015) lay necessary groundwork, proving that financial counseling is essential for students and their success, especially students with average-to-high debt. Over 90% of WCU students are currently receiving some type of grant aid, but only about 25% have an institutional or outside scholarship. WCU should ensure that students have access to adequate financial education and take advantage of all potential financial resources. The Office of Financial Aid can also partner with other campus offices to expand their outreach and develop more meaningful experiences for students.

Recommendations

- a) Develop and expand programs and activities to provide information and guidance for monetary management, especially managing debt.
- b) Expand strategies to encourage early Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, particularly among low-income and homeless students.
- c) Develop financial aid materials that promote resources available to our diverse community.
- d) Engage campus entities such as the Center for the Study of Free Enterprise and Homebase on economic research and education initiatives.
- e) Minimize indebtedness by emphasizing grants and scholarships.

2.3.2 Removing Barriers through Funding

Students who worry about college expenses score an average of 4.5% lower on final grades than those who do not, and students who work long hours receive poorer grades and are more likely to withdraw from classes or drop out before graduating (Bennett, McCarty, & Carter, 2015; Mulhern, Spies, Staiger, & Wu, 2015; Kara, Orhan, Bagheri, & Tolin, 2009). Additionally, students from minoritized identities are more affected by the accumulation of debt and concern about paying for school. WCU requires that students complete the FAFSA by January 1 each year to be considered for need-based scholarships; however, students' situations may change after this deadline, or they may not qualify for scholarships or aid sufficient for their needs. Vulnerable populations like homeless students, low-income students, and first-generation students may not have access to funds to be able to continue in college without proper support (Gupton, 2015; Kezar, Walpole, & Perna, 2015).

Recommendations

- a) Obtain funding to support non-work study student employment or develop scholarships for experiential education opportunities.
- b) The Student Emergency Fund and the Faculty Senate Student Emergency Fund are available to cover immediate financial hardships resulting from extenuating circumstances. Additional research could reveal how students learn about these funds to assess if equitable access to the funding exists.

C. STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: Promote On-time Progress Toward Degree Completion

Degree completion is a priority for Western Carolina University students and stakeholders alike. Ideally, degree completion occurs on a four-year timeline for full-time students whether they are first-year students starting their career at Western or transfer students starting at another institution. “On-time progress” refers to the measurable progress toward a degree marked by credit completion, GPA requirements, registration for consecutive semesters, and completing degree requirements that align with prerequisites/corequisites. This Strategic Direction focuses on developing and enhancing programs that support students’ on-time progress toward degree completion and explores the barriers and roadblocks to degree completion to create more proactive measures. In addition, student populations with opportunities for promising retention gains are identified with recommendations to meet their specific needs.

3.1 Analyze barriers and roadblocks to success

3.1.1 Time-of-Departure Data

Additional data is needed to understand why students leave the university before earning a degree. Currently, there are two sources of data that capture why students are leaving: the Change of Academic Plans survey and the University Withdrawal form. The Change of Academic Plans survey is directly shared with students who have not re-enrolled for the next semester. For the 2020-2021 academic year, this survey had a 13% response rate of all students who were not re-enrolled for the Fall 2021 semester, excluding graduating students. The University Withdrawal form is required for all students who complete a full withdrawal from all courses. These students complete the form with a representative from the Office of Student Retention. Several questions on the form relate to why a student is leaving. While the current information is helpful for understanding the reasons students

leave, the recommendations below intend to capture information from a wider sample size of students leaving and to increase the depth of information gathered.

Recommendations

- a) Assess the Change of Academic Plans survey for updates and necessary changes.
- b) Assess the University Withdrawal form for updates and necessary changes.
- c) Enhance and systematize the tracking of additional data for stop-outs (clearinghouse data, tracking transcript requests, and transient permission forms to identify where they are enrolling and what they are taking elsewhere).
- d) Conduct focus groups for students who are not registered for the next semester to gain a deeper understanding of why they are leaving or the barriers to their registration.
- e) Create a re-enrollment outreach plan for students who indicate a desire to return in the future.
- f) Analyze time-of-departure data on an annual basis.
- g) Create a continuous improvement process to address issues presented in time-of-departure data.

3.1.2 Registration Holds Policy

Registration holds are a barrier to timely student registration. The delay in registration has an impact on retention, enrollment, and accurate planning for seats needed in course sections. These registration holds are seen as a final option to draw students' attention to a requirement that needs to be completed. However, registration holds not only block future registration but also affect options in a student's current schedule, such as completing a course withdrawal. This may also have both an immediate and long-standing impact on a student's GPA. Many offices can place registration holds, and there are different time frames in which holds are placed with varying requirements to have the holds removed.

Recommendations

- a) Create a list of the offices that can place registration holds, including the period when holds are placed, requirements to remove the holds, and the forms of outreach with the number of outreach attempts that are made before the hold is placed.
- b) Implement a centralized student outreach response about registration holds that will work in conjunction with the outreach attempts being conducted by other offices.

3.1.3 Removing Students from Courses where Prerequisites are Not Met

Prerequisite courses are in place to ensure a student is prepared for the next course in a sequence (*Information for faculty and staff, 2022*). Students are allowed to register for a course with a prerequisite if they are currently enrolled in that prerequisite course. However, there are situations where a student may complete a course withdrawal, not pass the course, or fail to achieve a high enough grade to satisfy program requirements for the next course in the sequence. When this occurs, the student should not take the next course in the sequence as the prerequisite has not been met. The process for removing a student from the next sequence course is not implemented consistently and can vary from program to program. The course is not dropped automatically; a department must request that the Registrar's Office drop the student. If the course is not dropped, this can have an impact on a student's timeline to graduation as they will have to go back and take the course again and on their academic standing due to taking a course for which they are deemed unprepared.

Recommendations

- a) Streamline the process for removing students from courses for which a prerequisite is not met.

3.1.4 Beyond Four-year Graduation

Historically, WCU has graduated approximately 20% of each first-year cohort within the five-to-six-year period. To increase the four-year graduation rate, we can examine the roadblocks and barriers faced by these students. What caused them to extend their time to graduation? Did they change majors? Did they take time off or become part-time? Could the university have better supported them to graduate in four years?

Recommendations

- a) Collect and analyze data on students graduating in more than four years and make recommendations based on data analysis.

3.2 Develop and enhance programs that support students' on-time progress

3.2.1 Eight-Semester Plans and Finish in Four

Each academic program maintains an eight-semester plan outlining the specific courses needed to graduate with a degree as well as a suggested sequencing that accounts for prerequisite and corequisite requirements. Liberal studies requirements are built into each program's plan. In addition,

some programs include minor requirements, especially when a minor is required for the degree (*Major program guide for B.S. Communication, 2018*). Currently, the formatting of these plans varies widely across disciplines. Likewise, course sequencing based on prerequisites and corequisites in some majors can significantly delay degree attainment (*B.S. in Engineering*). In our current eight-semester plans, no notation is required for these course sequences.

Eight-semester plans are not the best tool for students who are “off-sequence.” Off-sequence students include undeclared students or approximately 14% of incoming students (*Student flow dashboard*), transfer students or approximately 24% of incoming residential students in Fall 2021 (*Student body profile—Fall 2021*), and students who switch majors or approximately 28% of enrolled students in Spring 2022 (based on internal data). These students need adaptable, flexible plans to stay on track for graduation. Communication has created an advising checklist which serves as an outline of all major and concentration requirements (*B.S. degree in Communications advising checklist*). For off-sequence students, such a checklist can assist the advisor and student in creating a unique plan for students to stay on track for graduation.

The Finish in Four initiative, created in 2013, was designed to outline the student and university requirements to stay on track for graduation. Unfortunately, Finish in Four is inconsistently implemented across the university. To emphasize four-year degree attainment, WCU should revamp the marketing efforts of the Finish in Four initiative. One important aspect of the Finish in Four initiative is for students to maintain 15 credit hours each semester to stay on track for graduation. WCU currently tracks enrollment from semester-to-semester, but the number of credits to ensure the student is meeting the 15-credit hour goal is not monitored.

Recommendations

- a) Standardize formatting of eight-semester plans across all disciplines. This should include notations for courses that must be sequenced in a specific order (courses with prerequisites/corequisites). Additional requirements should be included in the new format (minor requirements, GPA requirements, etc.).
- b) Create an advising checklist to assist advisors in creating “off-sequence” plans. This checklist should include sequencing notations for prerequisites/corequisites, courses offered during fall or spring semesters only, and liberal studies requirements.
- c) Revamp marketing efforts for Finish in Four to ensure students understand their role in the promise to finish in four.

- d) Create a method of monitoring student enrollment that identifies part-time vs. full-time enrollment as well as students enrolled in 12-14 credits prior to the add/drop deadline. An advisor's view of this information should be available to allow for early intervention prior to the add/drop deadline.

3.2.2 Summer Session

When students fall off-sequence or are behind their scheduled eight-semester plan, summer session offers the best opportunity to catch up or get ahead on credits for four-year graduation. One of the challenges with summer session is its affordability. Historically, NC Promise has not applied to summer session, but starting in Summer 2022, NC Promise will apply, making it more affordable to enroll in summer courses. There is a summer scholarship fund, but the scholarships are awarded based on credits that move students from one class to another (senior to graduate, junior to senior, etc.). The current model does not account for the financial needs of the student. Students must pay for summer classes before scholarship decisions are made, and then scholarship recipients are refunded the scholarship amount. Students who need the scholarships may not be able to afford the upfront payment and therefore are dropped from classes before scholarships are awarded.

Additionally, summer session must offer the right courses to ensure that students can catch up on credits for graduation. A thorough review of summer course offerings can ensure that courses meet the needs of current students. Unfortunately, a student must decide very quickly if they want to drop a summer course due to the timing of add/drop. The add/drop deadline is the second day of each summer session, allowing a student at most two class sessions to decide.

Recommendations

- a) Review summer course offerings to determine if current courses meet student needs to get back on track for their four-year degree attainment.
- b) Review summer scholarship funding to consider a needs-based model.
- c) Review summer scholarship disbursement so that students who are awarded scholarships are not required to pay for classes before scholarships are disbursed.
- d) Review the add/drop deadline for summer session courses.

3.2.3 Advising Day

Advising Day takes place each fall and spring semester. This is a day where classes are cancelled for students to meet with their faculty advisors to discuss registration and receive their alt pin. An effective

Advising Day for a student prepares them for registration and progress toward timely degree completion. Advising Day activities vary by program, from individual meetings with faculty advisors to group advising sessions to social gatherings. Some programs or faculty advisors may distribute advising across the whole week of Advising Day. Thus, there is no consistency in how students are advised for registration. Communication about Advising Day is widespread, but each program's plan is not readily known or available. Outreach attempts to collect Advising Day plans for each program produce limited responses and result in students being referred to their programs for guidance.

Recommendations

- a) Assess the effectiveness of Advising Day, identifying best practices for student support.
- b) Market and reintroduce the purpose of Advising Day and its importance not only for students' registration but their timeline to degree completion.
- c) Encourage programs to provide Advising Day plans.

3.2.4 Academic Calendar Review

The Academic Calendar for each academic year is established by the Provost's Office and designates the start and finish dates for each term (fall, spring, and summer), the timing of breaks and holidays during and between terms (e.g., fall break, spring break, Advising Day), and administrative deadlines such as add/drop deadlines, registration dates, and graduation application dates. The types, frequency, and durations of breaks as well as the timing of administrative deadlines can create unintended obstacles and barriers to student academic success, timely progress toward graduation, and student retention. As a result, the Academic Calendar should be reviewed to identify and mitigate factors that may negatively affect student retention and progression.

Recommendations

- a) Evaluate the survey data currently being collected by the Academic Calendar Committee.
- b) Identify opportunities for changes in the Academic Calendar that can promote student success.

3.3 Focus on student populations for promising retention gains

3.3.1 Distance Learning Students

Distance learning students are a growing population for WCU. They are typically adult students managing work and family responsibilities on top of academic responsibilities. The Change of Academic Plans Survey results indicate that family and job responsibilities are the biggest individual factors for

why distance students do not re-enroll. This survey also indicates that distance students are more likely than residential students to take a leave of absence but are less likely than residential students to transfer to another institution or to stop pursuing a college degree. Distance students typically enroll with transfer credits and engage as part-time students. However, some distance programs (such as RN to BSN program) are designed as intensive, short-term programs. Therefore, typical measures of student success and retention such as four-year and six-year graduation rates are not as relevant for distance students.

Recommendations

- a) Create retention intervention specifically for distance students that focuses on re-enrollment after a leave of absence.
- b) Create retention coaching for students considering a leave of absence. Could the student enroll in one course to continue progress toward their degree? Could they continue engaging with an advisor to minimize the leave of absence?
- c) Develop student success and retention metrics specific for distance students to track, analyze, and gauge progress over time.
- d) Compile, analyze, and disseminate data from 2021-22 Distance Learning Focus Groups.
- e) Evaluate tutoring needs for potential replacement of Brainfuse and additional services for courses with high DFW rates.
- f) Review liberal studies longitudinal data to determine needs of distance students specifically related to enrollment.
- g) Institute early alert systems such as 5th week grade notifications, instructor alerts, and campus partner academic alerts.
- h) Pilot optional distance learning orientation sessions in Summer 2022 and Winter 2022.
- i) Creation of the distance learning student council.
- j) Continue monthly “Whee Chat” opportunities to engage students with their peers.
- k) Re-invigorate Distance Learning honor societies for adult learners and begin advocacy for honorifics as they relate to distance students.

3.3.2 Undeclared Students and Students Switching Majors

Many entering students are unsure of their choices of major because they are not well versed in the full range of academic program options, their requirements, and the relationships associated with career paths. WCU greets students with an ever-increasing major menu selection and combination platter of

concentrations and minors. Therefore, making timely, informed decisions about a program of study has become more complex than ever (NACADA, 2022):

Undecided/exploratory students represent a sizable proportion of the entering student body at most colleges and universities. Many other students (between 60% -75%) who begin university studies as declared in majors, change their majors at least once before they graduate.

Retention becomes an issue if programs are not available, and strategies are not developed to help students understand how to progress from being undecided to declare in a major that fits their abilities, values, and interests.

To add to the complication, federal financial aid and other regulatory entities have added academic progress and performance compliance rules that students and institutions must navigate (e.g., Course Program of Study compliance).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) conducted a study on what it dubbed “The Plight of the Undecided Student” (Buford & Nester, 2019). According to the authors, collaboration on academic pathways, helping students transition from undecided to considering assorted options to narrowing to meta majors (e.g., “something in the health sciences,” “something in business”) to selecting a degree can reduce obstacles to efficient course and program completion. Early identification of students who are struggling with academic and career paths is vital to student success. Interventions at critical junctures (e.g., as students complete liberal studies, application dates for specific majors, progression through class levels, major change meetings with advisors) are key to student persistence and graduation.

Recommendations

- l) Promote the Majors Fair during fall and spring semesters.
- m) Develop and implement best practices for advising a student through a change of major, include notification for previous and future major for a seamless transition.
- n) Assess the reasons students are changing their major to identify common themes.
- o) Develop strategies to get students into their preferred major earlier in their academic career.
- p) Emphasize the liberal studies program as a mechanism for students to explore majors but resist the temptation to have students focus exclusively on liberal studies coursework in the first two years.
- q) Enhance pre-advising day communication to prepare undeclared students for major exploration

3.3.3 *Finish Line Program*

The Finish Line Program is a degree completion program targeting students who have not finished their bachelor's degree. For students to qualify, they must have at least 90 earned hours, have stopped out of school for at least one year, and have at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA. The program is coordinated through the Advising Center, which provides outreach to these students, assists them in the process of applying and registering, and serves as another resource during their studies. Partnerships are crucial to the success of the program and include Admissions (through an application fee waiver), Distance and Online Programs, the Registrar's Office, and faculty across many different programs. The Finish Line Program enrolled its first students in Fall 2015 and to date has assisted 132 students in earning a bachelor's degree. These students represent a promising population for additional outreach and support, which can increase enrollment and graduation rates for the institution.

Recommendations

- a) Analyze and assess the Finish Line Program including the size, scope, effectiveness, impact, and resources needed to improve and grow the program.
- b) Develop an outreach plan to include each program on-campus; this will allow for more targeted outreach by providing each program a list of students who qualify for Finish Line.

3.3.4 *Stop-Out and Resuming Students*

According to Tinto (1993), students who stop out resume their enrollment in the future while students who drop out do not re-enroll. During the pandemic, it has become even more common for students to stop out with the intention of returning to academics in the future. WCU's current policies for stop-out students allow them to resume their studies if their break in enrollment does not exceed three semesters, including the summer semester (*2021-2022 undergraduate catalog*). After three semesters, the student must re-apply as a returning student to continue enrollment (*2021-2022 undergraduate catalog*). A recent EAB analysis found that more than half of stop-outs return within one year (Hubbard, 2020). This creates an opportunity for WCU to intentionally re-recruit students who stop out to assist them in continuing their studies at WCU.

A sub-section of the stop-out students includes students who left the university due to academic suspension and dismissal. These students must reapply regardless of their time away from the university and submit a Statement of Academic Intent as part of their reapplication.

Recommendations

- a) Develop a plan for recruiting students who stop out to resume within the three-semester period.
- b) Review the current timeline in the Resuming vs. Returning students policy against peer institutions.
- c) Develop a plan to support resuming students that includes notification of academic departments.

3.3.5 Transfer Students

Transfer students enter WCU with varying amounts of credit and at different student classification levels. Of the 709 transfer students from the North Carolina Community College System to WCU in Fall 2021, 244 had earned an AA or AS degree, 252 had earned another type of associate degree (e.g., AAS, AE, AFA, AGE), and 213 had not earned a degree (50 of those without a degree had earned less than 30 hours) (UNC System: *Institution(s): All—Where UNC students transfer from*). Likewise, a greater number of first-year students enroll with advanced standing credit through dual enrollment, early college, and achievement test opportunities (AP, IB, CLEP, etc.). Although these students may have college credit, their readiness for WCU classes varies. Additional support including stronger connections with feeder schools and timely submission of college records can better prepare these students for success.

The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) is a statewide agreement that governs the transfer of credits between NC community colleges and NC public universities and is designed to promote the smooth transfer of students. While every transfer student is different, these pathways are important guides to assist NC community college students with taking the needed classes for their desired program of study prior to transferring to our institution (*College transfer/articulation agreements, CAA major pathway baccalaureate plans*). An inaccurate CAA Major Pathway Baccalaureate Plan may create a challenging experience for a new transfer. This can result in not having met the prerequisites, leading to a limited option of courses to take and extend students' projected graduation timeline and cost to finish their degree. As programs make changes to their curriculum, it is critical that CAA Pathways are updated with those changes.

Recommendations

- a) Reinforce the importance of college course performance and timely submittal of college records to early college and dual enrollment students.
- b) Develop or refine instructional resources targeted to high school and community college advisors and students that link academic program options with career possibilities.

- c) Develop efforts to support early college students who apply as transfer students.
- d) Conduct an annual review and update of CAA Major Pathway Baccalaureate Plans at the program level and an immediate review of curriculum changes are being made for that program.
- e) Promote and reinforce pathway messages and career themes for earlier degree declaration and better course alignment for transfer students.

D. STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: Promote High-Quality Activities That Connect Students to the University

“High quality activities” are experiences that allow students to explore their roles in the university and solidify their connection to WCU. Many of these activities fall under The Association of American Colleges and Universities’ definition of High-Impact Practices (HIPs), and other activities serve to support positive student experiences that will lead to retention. To assess the impact of the activities listed below, researchers should consider:

- Student feedback—Collect survey data from students about the impact of the activity.
- Time on task—How long are students engaged in the activity? Can long-term projects extend throughout a student’s academic career?
- Faculty/staff connection and mentorship—Can students connect with faculty and staff and create meaningful connections to their work and their interests?
- Opportunities for connection to students’ sense of belonging—How does the activity help the student find their place in the university community?
- Number of participants—Which activities engage the highest number of students?

As outlined below, many organizations on campus offer what might be considered a HIP. A task moving forward should be to collect an exhaustive list of these activities and apply the criteria above to determine which activities and organizations could use more support. It may be that students are being pulled in too many directions for any one activity to make the depth of impact needed for retention.

According to (Kuh 2008, p. 20),

Ideally, institutions would structure the curriculum and other learning opportunities so that one high-impact activity is available to every student every year. This is a goal worth striving for, but only after a school has scaled up the number of students—especially those from historically underserved groups—who have such experiences in the first year and later in their studies. In the short term, making high-impact activities more widely experienced should have a

demonstrable impact in terms of student persistence and satisfaction as well as desired learning outcomes.

4.1 Utilize existing extra-curricular university initiatives and programs to foster greater student engagement and involvement

4.1.1 Honors, Athletics, Greek Organizations, and SGA/Social Clubs

Organized activities, clubs, and groups (including the Brinson Honors College, Athletics, SGA-recognized organizations, Greek organizations, and social clubs) are key areas that have an impact on a substantial proportion of students. These keep students connected to the university in a deeper way. Currently, programming in the Brinson Honors College and Athletics groups is strong. These tight-knit communities offer selective ways for students to engage. The keys to using student organizations and clubs to improve retention is to promote them well and to build retention checkpoints into these programs.

Recommendations

- a) Conduct an initial assessment to determine the population size that is serviced by student groups to determine how many unique students are involved in these activities.
- b) Train staff and faculty who work with and advise these groups on retention.
- c) Devise retention checkpoints in the Brinson Honors College and Athletics.
- d) Work with the leadership of student organizations to establish a retention coordinator student leadership position for each organization that conducts retention check-ins with their members, advises members of WCU services/resources, and helps integrate retention into the mission of the organization.
- e) Provide retention training to student leaders in the retention coordinator roles.
- f) Work with Campus Activities staff to increase student participation in social clubs and organizations.

4.1.2 Residential Living

Residential living offers students an immersive college experience that facilitates retention through community-building activities and on-campus housing. All first-year students are required to live on campus for their first two years at Western, and all new transfer students are required to live on campus for one academic year. Residential Living encourages learning communities (an AAC&U HIP) centered around themes of leadership and cultural competency that connect students with faculty and staff who will support them throughout their college career. Residential Living sponsors workshops and

recreational activities where students will meet new friends and learn about campus resources integral to their success at WCU. Resident Assistants learn to navigate interpersonal relationships and develop strong leadership skills to ensure their own connection to the university while helping fellow students connect to the campus community. Residential advisors and assistants are often the first line of defense when a student feels out of place or disconnected from the university. Resident Advisors are integral members of the Student of Concern support team, where faculty, staff, and student workers can refer students who are at risk of dropping out of the university, among other things.

Residential Living offers coordinated first-year student activities through the PEAKS program, and the newly created RISE program offers continuing support for second-year students.

Recommendations

- a) Assess the cost of living on campus and how it may be prohibitive for some students who are independent or from low-income households. Explore options to alleviate these financial concerns.
- b) Analyze retention data as it pertains to students living on-campus versus off-campus.
- c) Establish and promote the new RISE program to provide meaningful experiences for sophomores.

4.1.3 Wellness

Goal 2.4 of the Strategic Plan charges the university to “[c]reate avenues to empower students to achieve their best possible well-being and cultivate a campus environment in which students can reach their full potential in all facets of their lives, both in and out of the classroom.” 2.4.1 further seeks to “[c]reate and implement programs that embrace the elements of wellness...” and 2.4.2 calls upon Western to “[u]tiliz[e] the elements of wellness...as a comprehensive framework approach to increase cross-campus awareness of current programs, services, and resources that support and assist students in engaging in a holistic, total college experience.” Western has a dedicated Student Life and Services office. The Health and Wellness unit includes Campus Recreation and Wellness, Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS), Health Services, and Health and Wellness Education. The 2021 Strategic Plan Progress Report provides valuable context on wellness initiatives.

Recommendations

- a) The campus should assess wellness initiatives to determine the extent to which their efforts are coordinated, supported, and updated.

- b) Encourage first-year transition courses to incorporate a video on wellness.
- c) Provide regular updates to the Health and Wellness Education Blog.

4.1.4 First-Year Seminars and Transition Courses

Western Carolina University seeks to integrate students into the campus community through several first-year initiatives coordinated through transition courses aimed at collective experiences to build interest, trust, and community among first-year students first-year seminar and experiences (an AAC&U HIP).

The One Book program utilizes a committee to select a common reading for all incoming students (an AAC&U HIP). This book is assigned to the first-year transition courses and often integrated into other liberal studies courses populated by first-year students. When feasible, the author is invited to speak on campus, and students are encouraged to participate in One Book events throughout the fall semester. The undergraduate research librarian prepares a library guide for students and instructors who want to deepen their interaction with the text.

DegreePlus is designed to give students opportunities to get involved in extracurricular activities that can provide the transferable skills they need to reach their goals for employment, graduate school, professional school, and other post-graduate plans. DegreePlus focuses on skills which can enhance students' self-awareness and interpersonal relationships for a lifetime. DegreePlus is a voluntary three-level experiential program which uses extracurricular experiences to help students build one or more transferable skills. This program is housed under the Center for Career and Professional Development and partners with several campus entities, including first-year transition courses.

Each year, the campus community votes on a campus theme. Depending on the timing, the One Book selection often reflects the campus theme. Various departments on campus host events supporting the campus theme. The theme for 2022-2023 is "mental health." The campus theme supports retention by creating common intellectual experiences (an AAC&U HIP).

Recommendations

- a) Assess and modify the first-year transition course curriculum to provide a structure that covers important topics and resources that are shared with each instructor.
- b) Assess One Book and other first-year experience events and initiatives.
- c) Encourage instructors of first-year transition courses to have students develop an academic career plan.

- d) Collect data on retention for students who engage in DegreePlus activities.

4.2. Promote High-Impact Practices (HIPs) across the university (curricular and co-curricular) to support retention efforts among underrepresented student populations

HIPs have been identified as means to increase retention and persistence with students (Kuh 2008). As such, WCU has the potential to capitalize on certain HIPs that are well structured to support our students. These opportunities include study abroad, service learning, undergraduate research, and internships. Currently, these opportunities are decentralized, and the processes are hard to navigate for students and faculty/staff who support these students. Providing coordination and oversight to these HIPs will allow for the opportunities to streamline processes, unburden students, and create a coordinated approach that will positively affect retention.

Recommendations

- a) Create a central website and marketing to promote WCU HIPs for students.
- b) Work with professional and faculty advisors to incorporate conversations and recommendations to HIPs into their advising sessions with students.
- c) Require incoming students to develop an academic/career plan to provide a clear road map of students' exploration of majors through the liberal studies program and other HIPs/experiential activities. The plan should not force students to declare a major.
- d) Work with Advancement to create monetary support for underrepresented students to participate in HIP experiences.
- e) Utilize JobCat to centralize a database of HIPs for students.
- f) Provide additional fiscal resources and staffing lines to support study abroad, undergraduate research, service learning, and internships.
- g) Work with departments who support underserved students to ensure these student groups are aware of and can participate in HIPs.

4.2.1 Classroom experiences

“Collaborative Assignments and Projects” are among the HIPs identified by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. As defined by the AAC&U, collaborative efforts involve “learning to work and solve problems in the company of others and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with diverse backgrounds and life experiences.” This pedagogical initiative is not formally recognized in WCU’s Strategic Plan. However, Strategic Direction No. 2 (Student Experience) states in Goal 2.5.1: “Provide programs and initiatives, both formally and

informally, for students living off-campus and on campus in residence halls designed to create a sense of belonging among incoming and continuing students. Programs and initiatives include but are not limited to student clubs, student organizations, campus events, Greek Life, and major/disciplinary events.” There is strong resonance between WCU’s Strategic Plan and the goals of Collaborative Assignments and Projects.

Recommendations

- a) Encourage department heads and individual faculty to evaluate the extent to which they use classroom experiences not only as pedagogical tools but also as strategies for student engagement and involvement.

E. STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5: Involve the Whole Campus in Support of Student Retention

Major theories of student retention have typically placed the educational institution upstream in the causal pathway of student attrition (Kinsey, 2021). Specifically, schools can influence academic, social, circumstantial, and personal drivers of success. Institutional efforts to foster support in these domains can be shared among various WCU stakeholders.

5.1 Promote administrative processes in support of student success and retention

5.1.1 Assess the Quality of Student Survey Data

Student surveys are a useful tool for measuring not only satisfaction, but also areas to be improved or changed. However, students receive numerous surveys from many different areas on campus. With too many surveys, students can experience fatigue, which affects the response rate and quality of responses collected. It is important to limit the total number of surveys given to students, which requires a solid foundation of collaboration and communication. Additionally, a way to increase student response rates is to focus on survey length and incentives for completion. Shorter surveys and incentives (such as prizes or vouchers) should produce higher response rates.

Recommendations

- a) Review the number, type, and frequency of surveys deployed to undergraduates.
- b) Review the contents of each survey for relevance to evidence-based retention domains.
- c) Assess congruence of survey practices and content with university retention objectives to identify ways to strengthen datasets.

- d) Review response rates and identify strategies for increasing student survey participation.

5.1.2 Maximize Use of Student Retention Data

Student surveys can provide important retention data, but what is done with that data once collected defines the success of a survey. This data should not exist in a vacuum but be analyzed and distributed across campus and targeted to each area. Setting expectations is important for each area to know what they should do with the data. Then time should be allowed for each area to produce a response and plan moving forward based on the data. Once those plans are in place, regular follow-up is key to measuring the success of those efforts.

Recommendations

- a) Present college/school administration and selected faculty and staff with complete reports consisting of collected data and its interpretation.
- b) Identify named points of contact for ongoing support as colleges and schools develop response plans to data.
- c) Specify expectations to colleges and schools contingent on enrollment fluctuations resulting from program growth, pandemic resurgence, and other enrollment trends.
- d) Establish a meeting schedule to connect with college/school administrators and faculty and staff members to discuss retention trends and response strategies.

5.2 Adopt an evidence-based approach to retention efforts

Some retention efforts on campus have been in place for a length of time and have data to measure their effectiveness. It is important to identify these evidence-based approaches and analyze what can be applied to other efforts on campus. Some of the areas to consider include Health and Wellness, Mentoring and Persistence Success (MAPS), and Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) as they work with students in unique ways regarding retention. These evidence-based approaches can then be a focus for allocation of resources and potential staffing priorities and needs.

Recommendations

- a) Identify whole-campus approaches to student retention that have track records of success.
- b) Gather student survey data using tailored instruments.
- c) Investigate WCU student needs insecurities to clarify the social determinants of student health impacting retention (e.g., food and housing insecurity).

- d) Work with offices such as MAPS to clarify the needs of at-risk students and the resources necessary for addressing them.
- e) Consult with CAPS to learn more about biopsychosocial issues currently affecting student retention.
- f) Use collected data to establish evidence for resource allocation related to retention activities.
- g) Use data to identify hiring priorities for programs/efforts that directly support successful retention initiatives.

5.3 Invest effectively in university-wide retention efforts

5.3.1 Effectively Engage Faculty and Staff

College and university retention best practices typically focus on cultivating stakeholder excellence specific to the specialty of the stakeholder type (University of Maine System, 2022). Looking at the faculty member as a stakeholder leverages the strengths of this group (e.g., appreciation and understanding of evidence-based interventions) and addressing its probable concerns (being asked to do more) is likely to be the most successful (Sabagh et al., 2018). To approach faculty and staff involvement effectively requires an emphasis on the evidence-based element of these suggestions. One way to go about this is to present faculty with guidelines and interventions for student retention and recruitment that are both specific and demonstrated to be effective. Buy-in (and burnout prevention) among faculty would be enhanced significantly by allowing marketing/recruitment/retention activities to count toward or qualify as release from annual service expectations, which is why the development of a task force is recommended, as they are simpler to establish than committees, and participation typically counts toward faculty service requirements. Suggested alternatives include compensation or course release for staff and faculty retention champions.

Recommendations

- a) Clarify and commit to evidence-based faculty and staff actions supportive of student retention and eliminate assignments/goals/objectives that are not evidence-based.
- b) Clarify semester goals and delineate activities supportive of time-bound objectives for faculty and staff utilization of academic progress reporting in EAB Navigate.
- c) Increase the usefulness of data points and reports in EAB Navigate so that faculty can monitor student progress in relation to students' engagement with campus resources (WaLC, MTC, CCPD, etc.).

- d) Provide training for faculty and staff to utilize systems tied to retention that are not used in their day-to-day jobs (EAB Navigate, etc.).
- e) Offer incentives for intensive faculty and staff engagement with student retention efforts.
- f) Provide compensation, course release, or service fulfillment opportunities (such as retention task force participation) for faculty retention champions.
- g) Offer compensation or enhanced promotional pathways for staff retention champions.

5.3.2 Integrate Student Life into Retention Efforts

Student surveys primarily focus on the quantitative side of data collection. However, there is power in student stories that come from qualitative data responses. To get a full scope of how retention efforts impact our students, it is important to ask students directly and hear their stories. Student clubs and organizations are good groups to contact as there are ties to engagement with student retention. Another opportunity is to reach out to our underserved students to see what challenges they are experiencing and the resources they need to be successful. Additionally, it is important to assess and analyze all peer mentoring efforts and groups taking place.

Recommendations

- a) Prioritize resource allocation to efforts targeting underserved students.
- b) Communicate with students about factors impacting retention.
- c) Conduct outreach to student government, student clubs, and sports groups.
- d) Assess the status of peer mentoring efforts.
- e) Inventory peer mentoring groups on campus.

5.4 Collect and Disseminate Progress Data

Although many areas on campus are involved in student retention efforts, not all efforts are widely known in other areas. This can lead to a duplication of efforts or, in some cases, conflict with another area's efforts. It is important to understand and collect a list of the different retention efforts that are being implemented across campus. This will allow the opportunity to analyze results, improve communication, pool resources, and increase collaboration. Knowing these efforts across campus will also allow them to be highlighted and shared with community and external stakeholders to WCU.

Recommendations

- a) Track retention efforts undertaken annually by university administration, staff, and faculty.

- b) Investigate associations between interventions and student retention rates over time.
- c) Communicate developments with key retention stakeholders at intervals throughout the year.
- d) Communicate progress to the broader university community and external stakeholders annually.

III. Inventory of Current Retention Efforts

A. Inventory of Current Practices and Strategies in Retention

A campus-wide survey served as a mechanism to inventory current retention initiatives identified by the sponsoring department, program, or office. A total of 112 retention efforts were submitted. The column on the right indicates whether the initiative is active, in development, or in concept.

Sponsor	Initiative	Status
Academic Affairs	<i>Eight Semester Plan with Milestones:</i> A collaborative effort between our student support services in SHS and our programs to add key milestones to the eight-semester plan to help students see numerous opportunities to strengthen their engagement and resume as they work towards graduation. All plans are now posted on each program's website. Each student receives a copy, and it is updated and posted to Navigate.	<i>Active</i>
Accessibility Resources	<i>Accessible Information Management (AIM):</i> A web-based tool maintained by the OAR to communicate, coordinate, and compile student accommodation information; this tool is used by both students and faculty.	<i>Active</i>
Accessibility Resources	<i>Coordinated Services for Students with Disabilities:</i> The office's charge is to facilitate equitable access and to provide quality services to students with documented disabilities.	<i>Active</i>
Accessibility Resources	<i>OAR Coaching Services:</i> A partnership to work together to set goals, to become empowered to overcome challenges, build new skills to navigate transitions, and apply strategies to successfully achieve student outcomes. Student participants receive academic coaching from graduate students who are trained to guide and engage with students in the post-secondary environment.	<i>Active</i>
Accessibility Resources, Coulter Faculty Commons	<i>Universal Design for Learning (UDL):</i> Advocate for the implementation of UDL practices to ensure access and optimization of all teaching and learning materials.	<i>Active</i>

Advancement	Scholarship Support - General Scholarship Fund Priority for GivingTuesday campaign; 1889 Club (The Fund for WCU - Unrestricted) Freshmen Scholarships: To lessen the financial burden for first-year students and retain continuing students by removing financial stress, the Division of Advancement is prioritizing (at the Chancellor's request) increased funding for a general scholarship pool. For our annual GivingTuesday (national day of giving on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving), the sole focus will be raising a minimum of \$250,000 in general scholarships. This will also address the need for scholarship support for students who do not qualify for high merit scholarships but also do not qualify for high financial need like Pell Grants. We have also committed a third of all unrestricted funds secured each fiscal year to scholarship support, which is provided to the Admissions Office and University Scholarships Office to utilize for whatever the most critical need is.	Active
Advising Center	Advising Day: One day each semester no classes meet providing students a dedicated day to meet with their advisors to schedule classes and discuss their progress toward degree completion.	Active
Advising Center	EAB Navigate: A web-based tool created and maintained by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) to coordinate, target, and report on advising, tutoring, and other Student Success services.	Active
Advising Center	Finish Line Program: The aim of Finish Line, in conjunction with the Part-Way Home initiative through the UNC-system, is to assist students in returning to the university and finishing their first bachelor's degree.	Active
Advising Center	Individual Student Advising Appointments: Professional advisors meet with students for initial meetings, registration for undeclared students and students with recently changed majors, and in response to risk indicators.	Active
Advising Center	Issue Alert: Designed to assist students who are experiencing academic and other difficulties; provides a convenient means for faculty/staff to make referrals.	Active
Advising Center	Majors Fair: An event held on campus that allows students to learn about various majors that they may be interested in targeted for undeclared students.	Active
Advising Center	Military and ICA Presentations: Outreach and attendance at Military Affiliated/Veteran's student lounge and to Intercultural Affairs prior to Advising Day.	Active
Advising Center	Pre-registration Enrollment Model: Allows for student choice and ownership in their onboarding experience; admitted students select critical components of their educational journey such as: major and course options.	Active
Advising Center	Whee Register: Collaboration with Residential Living; Academic Advisors participate one-on-one with students who need assistance in the residence hall environment.	Active

Belcher College of Fine and Performing Arts	<i>Production/Exhibit Program:</i> The performance/exhibit program crosses all units in the Belcher College providing opportunities for students to actively engage in their chosen art form. These events are developed and produced in collaboration with faculty and staff of the college. These events establish a sense of community, belonging, and accomplishment. They serve as a critical retention activity of the college.	<i>Active</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Society for First-Year Students:</i> Brinson Honors College sponsors the WCU chapter of ALD. This honor society recognizes the academic achievement of ALL WCU students who qualify after their first semester. Students do not have to be members of Brinson Honors College to be inducted.	<i>In Development</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>Celebrating Honor Student Success:</i> The BHC has several events to celebrate student success, including Merit Scholarship Competition, Conference on Undergraduate Regional Engagement (CURE), and Honors Scholars Dinner.	<i>Active</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>Creating Leadership Opportunities for Honors Students:</i> This includes Honors Student Board of Directors, student-led social media, and Honors Ambassadors.	<i>Active</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>First-Year Honors Student Programming:</i> This includes a mentoring program for new students, Honors Peer Academic Coaches that participate in the USI Honors sections, and Honors Touchstones Programming.	<i>Active</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>Honors Courses:</i> The BHC works with academic departments to provide specialized Honors courses with lower capacities so that Honors students can experience discussion-based seminar-style instruction where possible. Students also have the option to complete an Honors Contract to earn honors credit for a non-honors course.	<i>Active</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>Interdisciplinary Studies Degree for Honors Students:</i> Honors Advisors work with students who are interested in designing their own majors. This customized major option has a fast-track approval process.	<i>Active</i>
Brinson Honors College	<i>Open Admission to Brinson Honors College for Current Students:</i> Current students may apply to be admitted to Brinson Honors College. They may pursue admission to BHC any time during their undergraduate career. This provides incentive to persevere and maintain high academic standing. Students can complete Honors Path Academy (HPA) to assist in meeting Honors requirements.	<i>Active</i>

Brinson Honors College	Probation Status and Status Check: Students in the BHC who do not meet the requirements for good standing at the end of a semester (did not complete honors credit hours or GPA is below the standard) are automatically given a semester 'on probation' so that they have time to get back on track for graduating with full honors. Status Check is completed by the BHC at the end of each semester and students are notified via a courtesy letter (or email) what their status is. After probation period, students can complete the Petition Process to allow additional time to get back on track.	Active
Brinson Honors College	Undergraduate Research for Honors Students: Close coordination with the Brinson Honors College (BHC) and Undergraduate Research. Research is a touchstone of the BHC, and through information sessions and USI 101 coordination, it is woven into the curricular expectations of the BHC.	Active
Campus Activities	Student Organizations & Clubs: An online community where students can find themselves building their co-curricular transcripts as well as find a list of over 170+ Recognized Student Clubs and Organizations to get involved with. This includes academic clubs, club sports, and intermural sports.	Active
Campus Activities	Week of Welcome: A full week of campus activities and events designed to make students feel welcome; get students involved early and promote peer interaction.	Active
Campus Recreation and Wellness	First Ascent: A wilderness orientation program targeting incoming students that allows students to make early connections to other students, eases the transition to college, and challenges students to learn and experience new things.	Active
Campus Recreation and Wellness	Outdoor Programs (Base Camp Cullowhee): A variety of program offerings, based in the outdoors, that focus on challenge by choice principles and teaching good outdoor ethics.	Active
Campus Recreation and Wellness	Wellness Programs: A variety of program offerings targeting the seven dimensions of wellness that help connect students to campus resources and teach students self-care and awareness.	Active
Career and Professional Development	Career Readiness and Professional Development: CCPD programming to support students' career readiness, job search, and professional development. Includes peer mentors, workshop series, Catamount Career and Networking Day, student employment program, etiquette dinners, Career Studio, and Career Fair Plus events.	Active
Career and Professional Development	Degree Plus: Campus-wide program that promotes involvement in extra-curricular activities that teach students transferable skills in professionalism, leadership, teamwork, and cultural responsiveness.	Active
Career and Professional Development	WheeExplore Program: Program designed for incoming undeclared students. They are selected in the summer prior to their incoming fall semester and placed in a career/major exploration USI course or are placed into a group that receives major/career exploration outreach throughout the fall semester.	Active

College of Engineering and Technology	<i>Vertically Integrated Undergraduate Project Based Learning:</i> A series of sequenced courses includes a year-long senior capstone experience. Courses include ENGR 199, 200, 350, 400, and 450. This creates a community of learners, team-based experience, cohort-based projects, peer-to-peer interactions, and faculty-student mentorship.	<i>Active</i>
Community Engagement and Service Learning	<i>Alternative Break Program:</i> Co-curricular programs are organized to inform students' psychosocial and identity development, increase awareness of community challenges, and encourage critical reflection.	<i>Active</i>
Community Engagement and Service Learning	<i>Service-Learning Programming:</i> Aims to engage students with the WCU and WNC community through service and celebrate their success in service. Includes Day of Service, Lily Community Engagement Award Program, Voter Initiatives, and Conference on Undergraduate Regional Engagement (CURE).	<i>Active</i>
Community Engagement and Service Learning	<i>SLC Designations (100 & 200 Level Courses):</i> Courses seek to engage students in a balance of academic content, community-based experience, and critical reflection done at a duration and intensity commensurate to the course being facilitated.	<i>Active</i>
Counseling and Psychological Services	<i>Counseling Services:</i> A core mission of our department is to assist students in removing barriers to their academic success. We provide counseling services to help students identify and cope with/overcome the stressors impacting them.	<i>Active</i>
Dean of Students	<i>Student Emergency Funds:</i> Emergency funding is available for rent, utilities, car repairs, medical/dental expenses, gas, and other unexpected financial emergencies. The process includes application with detailed documentation through the Dean of Students.	<i>Active</i>
Department of Chemistry and Physics	<i>DEI Task Force:</i> Our department has implemented a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion task force with several goals. The main goal is to provide a more inclusive working and learning environment for our faculty/staff and students. For students, we will be working to provide a welcoming environment for all, with a focus on the success and retention of all our students.	<i>Active</i>
Department of Mathematics and Computer Science	<i>MATH 250 Introduction to Logic and Proof Class Size:</i> MATH 250 Introduction to Logic and Proof is a required course for BS MATH, BSEd MATH, BS CS programs and a prerequisite for several upper-level math courses. Lowering the number of students in this course improves the academic success of students in the follow-up courses.	<i>Active</i>
Department of Mathematics and Computer Science	<i>Math Pathways:</i> Students take an introductory college-level math course that is well-matched with their major or program of study. The goal is to align students' mathematics coursework with their program needs, re-directing non-STEM students from algebraic-intensive course sequences to alternative college-level courses focused on statistics or quantitative reasoning.	<i>Active</i>

Department of Mathematics and Computer Science	Student Assistants for CS 150/151: In each lab section of CS 150/151 (prerequisites for all upper-level CS courses) there are two student assistants (advanced CS majors) helping with the programming assignments.	Active
Department of Psychology	New course PSY 250: Designed to keep students engaged in their major after they have taken PSY 150.	Active
Educational Outreach	Summer Session: Provides students the opportunity to get ahead in their academic pathway or to focus on courses that have proven a challenge.	Active
Faculty Senate	Faculty Senate Student Support Fund: Funding available for students through faculty senate. Process overseen by Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success.	Active
Homebase	Homebase: Partnership between WCU and Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina. Students can receive services based on needs. Services include a food pantry, emergency housing, toiletries, computer lab/printing access, rides, and shower/laundry services.	Active
Institutional Planning and Effectiveness	Retention Data Views: Plans to revise/update main retention dashboard to provide additional views of student sub-populations. Dashboards are currently restricted in how far the data can be disaggregated because the dashboard is public facing. The goal is to move the dashboard to CATalytics where additional data can be displayed.	In Development
Intercultural Affairs	Project CARE: A peer mentoring program targeting underrepresented students; pairs first year and new transfer student participants with student leaders who serve as peer counselors to help new students adjust to college life.	Active
Leadership Programs	Cat Camp Leadership Exploration: Incoming freshmen participate in a 5-day/4-night retreat geared towards college transition; students meet new friends, build leadership skills, participate in exciting and challenging activities, and have fun.	Active
Leadership Programs, Intercultural Affairs	WHEE Lead Conference: This annual one-day conference is an educational opportunity for campus leaders to explore issues that they face every day and investigate workable solutions.	Active
Marketing & Communications	Social Media: Social media accounts for the university engage students/alumni across various platforms as well as connect students with resources at the university.	Active
Mathematics Tutoring Center	MATH 170 Review: Weekly group review sessions for enrolled students in MATH 170 Applied Statistics.	Active
Residential Living	3.0 Club: Enrolls all new first-year residential students with unweighted entry GPA below a 3.0 who receive monthly newsletters with tips and resources; those earning a 3.0 first semester are invited to a dinner to celebrate their achievement.	Active

Residential Living	Case Management: Three professional staff work with students to help connect them to campus resources; will meet one-on-one with students who are having difficulty at the institution to connect them with appropriate campus resources.	Active
Residential Living	Cookies for Catamounts: Campus partners visit the residence halls to distribute cookies, answer questions related to services, and provide academic support.	Active
Residential Living	Human Development Retreat: A weekend trip each semester for 26 nominated students. Students explore their leadership potential and learn ways they can become involved on campus.	Active
Residential Living	Living Learning Communities: Students are organized into cohorts and co-located; connects a college transition course with residential programming.	Active
Residential Living	PEAKS: A residential first year experience program that offers residential programming.	Active
Residential Living	Programming by Resident Assistants: Resident assistants plan and host program events that cover a variety of topic areas (community building, coping skills, alcohol and drug education, engagement on campus, etc.).	Active
Residential Living	Re-Calibrate Your Compass: A mid-term event designed to remind students of available resources that can support the successful completion of the semester.	Active
Residential Living	Student Satisfaction Initiative: One-on-one check-in meetings between residents and their resident advisors that occur three times throughout the year. Students are asked how they are doing overall, with classes, deciding on a major, investigating internships, and other topics.	Active
School of Art and Design	First Year Excursions: Students have the option of doing van trips within 40 min of WCU - all themed and free - four times per semester.	Active
School of Health Sciences	Marketing, Recruitment, and Retention Plans for Each Program: Each program is identifying diverse ways they can market to, recruit, and retain students in the program. Initiatives could include the following: clubs, workshops, peer mentoring, updated websites, weekly and active social media.	In Development
School of Nursing	PEN Scholars: A multi-pronged initiative that will provide culturally responsive, wrap-around support services to promote successful admission, progression, and completion of undergraduate nursing degree programs within the School of Nursing. Potential student participants include but are not limited to students from low-income earning families, first-generation college students, as well as individuals from minoritized backgrounds.	In Development
School of Teaching and Learning	Connections with University Participant (UP) Program: Student-led events, training with other departments and serving as a resource for disability, professional development workshops, mini conferences at WCU and state/national conferences with students, service learning, and community connections.	Active

School of Teaching and Learning, Birth-Kindergarten, and Suite 201	Action Plans: An official action plan is put in place when there is an area of concern that warrants a specific plan that outlines areas of need and identifies strategies for meeting expectations within a prescribed timeline. Action plans exist because Teacher Education candidates may need additional support and structure to be successful.	Active
School of Teaching and Learning, Birth-Kindergarten, and Suite 201	Formative Feedback Plans and Meetings: A process to communicate and document an area of concern and discuss ways to successfully move forward.	Active
School of Teaching and Learning, Suite 201	Intern Professional Development: During the Intern II semester, students engage in additional intentional professional development including Youth Mental Health First Aid certification, DEI, and job search training.	Active
Student Affairs	Student Concern Response Team: Team of professionals across campus to confidentially share information and discuss students who may be going through a tricky situation. Team responds to SCRT Reports and collaborates with Issue Alerts Teams.	Active
Student Retention	Academic Appeals: A formal appeal process for students that find themselves on Academic Suspension or Academic Dismissal.	Active
Student Retention	Academic Learning Communities: A set of linked courses that places students with similar interests together in 2-3 courses and fosters integrated learning environments.	Active
Student Retention	Academic Success Program (ASP): A conditional admission for academically underprepared first-year students. Students take summer credits while receiving intensive academic support and peer mentorship.	Active
Student Retention	Catamount GAP: Opt-in summer program for incoming first-year students to experience college life at WCU. Partnership with Residential Living to provide interventions for students struggling academically or socially.	Active
Student Retention	Change of Academic Plan Survey: The survey allows students to express why they may not be returning, and if they wish to return, their reason for stopping out for a period.	Active
Student Retention	Compass Advising/Mentoring: Targeted advising model specific to the populations served in MAPS. It is a combination of appreciative advising and intrusive advising models as well as academic and social coaching. Students meet with compass advisor several times per semester.	Active
Student Retention	First-Year Transition Courses: Introduce the academic, procedural, and social elements of the university; help new students make a seamless and holistic transition to their new home and to college-level expectations. Includes USI 130, USI 101, and COUN 140.	Active

Student Retention	LC 101 Course: Provides support and guidance to students placed on Academic Warning; designed to connect students with resources and to counsel them through the process of returning to Good Standing.	Active
Student Retention	New Student Convocation: Marks the official welcome of new students to the university.	Active
Student Retention	One Book Common Reading Program: Engage first-year students in a common intellectual experience (HIP) that promotes critical thinking and interdisciplinary conversation across the campus community.	Active
Student Retention	Resilient Independent Student Association (RISA): Community of support for former foster, orphan, emancipated, and homeless students. Programming focused on topics of particular concern to the population.	Active
Student Retention	Statement of Academic Intent: A readmissions process for students not in good academic standing who broke enrollment.	Active
Student Retention	Targeted Outreach: Support targeted at specific populations or specific deadlines.	Active
Student Retention	USI 131-Thriving in College: One-credit course required in fall semester for ASP students who struggled during the summer session for continued academic skill development.	Active
Student Retention	WHEE Call U Campaign: Phone call campaign to new students during the 4 th week of the semester by WCU faculty, staff, administrators; status check and to address concerns or questions early.	Active
Student Retention, Advising Center	5th Week Grade Intervention: Advisors reach out to at-risk students based on 5 th week grades submitted to share resource options and to schedule a visit as warranted.	Active
Student Retention, Advising Center	Nonregistered Student Outreach: Each semester after all current students have had the opportunity to register, we pull a list of all non-registered, active students and contact them to help toward degree completion.	Active
Student Success	High Impact Practices: Ten practices defined by AAC&U that promote higher levels of student engagement and deep learning to encourage student involvement.	Active
Suite 201	Call Me MiSTER - Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models: The purpose is to increase the pool of available teachers from diverse backgrounds in the Western Carolina region and across North Carolina. Includes financial support, mentorship, professional development opportunities, and internships.	Active
Suite 201	Class Visits: EDCI 201 and Internship class visits serve to prepare students for the next steps in their programs including application and licensure.	Active
Suite 201	EdTestPrep.wcu.edu: Webpage listing of resources for preparing for the admissions and licensure test.	Active

Suite 201	Educational Career Fair: In collaboration with the CCPD, we provide an opportunity for public school partners to come to campus to meet our graduating candidates.	Active
Suite 201	Language Enhancement Afterschool Program (LEAP): Afterschool program for K-8 students who are learning English as a second language. Provides education majors with an authentic setting in which to gain experience in working with diverse populations.	Active
Suite 201	Licensure Support: Licensure specialist on staff specifically tasked with assisting students in completing the NC teacher licensure process.	Active
Suite 201	Praxis Core Preparation Workshops: Online module sets for Praxis Core Writing and Math Courses available on-demand for residential and distance students.	Active
Suite 201	Staff Professional Development: Suite 201 personnel engage in at least 32 hours of intentional professional development per academic year to ensure we are meeting students where they are and learning about various populations included on campus (Safezone, Carezone, Greenzone, Trans101, NCBI training, Peacekeepers, Campus Security Authority, etc.).	Active
Undergraduate Research	Learning Environment and Academic Research Network (LEARN) and the Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP): In LEARN (NSF-funded) the focus is serving and retaining underrepresented students in STEM by engaging them in a HIP research apprenticeship for the full academic year. In SURP the focus is serving full-time students from across the colleges in a HIP research apprenticeship during an 8-week summer period. Students and faculty are paid to participate through a stipend system.	Active
Undergraduate Research	Undergraduate Research Employment Program (UREP): Using the current employment program model (JobCats), we would develop a portal for both research faculty and research interested students to connect and engage. Some of these positions would be classified as "for hire"/grant-funded, work-study, or independent study.	In Concept
Undergraduate Research	Undergraduate Research Learning Community (URLC): Expansion of the UG Research Learning Community (e.g., LEARN model) in which students from across all colleges and disciplines can enroll and engage in Introduction to Research (USI 180) and Undergraduate Research in the Discipline (USI 380) alongside securing research experiences with a faculty research team. The expansion of this LC, based on the LEARN model, checks off both the LC and the HIP initiatives for our unit and office. We have data from LEARN that supports the model and would have additional positive outcomes for non-STEM students, too.	In Concept

Undergraduate Research	Undergraduate research: A coordinator on campus offers any student, regardless of background, the opportunity for one-on-one consultation in getting involved in research activities, as well as, working informally with faculty on finding student researchers for various projects across the disciplines. Funding is available for some research-related activities.	Active
Undergraduate Studies	Campus Theme: For the past ten years, WCU has selected an interdisciplinary theme for campus conversations, curricular and co-curricular connections, and enrichment. The primary focus is to educate and to offer a holistic look at something through multiple lenses.	Active
Undergraduate Studies	First-year Seminars (Liberal Studies): New students experience intellectual life at the university level; encourage exploration of innovative ideas, examine a range of academic topics, and challenge students to set ambitious goals.	Active
Various	Community Building Initiatives for Departments/Programs/Colleges: Events that lead to building community or strengthen the commitment of students to their program or college. Examples include Welcome Back Party for FPA, Donut Days and WOW Events in Honors, Specialized Orientation Sessions for Honors, All-College Canvas group in Honors, Rooftop Wednesdays in PAR, and end of year picnics.	Active
Various	High Impact Practice - Capstone courses and/or projects: One example is the NCSELP Collaborate Change Project from College of Education and Allied Professions.	Active
Various	High Impact Practice - Common Intellectual Experiences: This includes students participating in conferences with faculty (CEAP included HPE Speak Out Day in Washington DC) and lecture series such as the Jerry Jackson Lecture in Humanities.	Active
Various	High Impact Practice - Internships & Clinical Experience: This includes field-based courses, internships, and clinical experiences.	Active
Writing and Learning Commons	Academic Skills Consultants: Provide one-on-one sessions and in-class workshops designed to help students with time management, test preparation, note-taking, and reading skills.	Active
Writing and Learning Commons	Course and Writing Tutoring: Collaborative, small-group sessions focused on review of content in a specific course. Writing tutoring offers one-on-one assistance for students during the writing process. In class workshops by request.	Active
Writing and Learning Commons	International Student Consultants: Writing tutors who facilitate one-on-one or small group sessions with International and ESL students, with emphasis on developing conversational skills, understanding the American university system and faculty expectations, and familiarizing students with available resources.	Active
Writing and Learning Commons	Supplemental Instruction (SI): Peer-led group study sessions in which students work collaboratively to compare and clarify lecture notes, review textbook readings, and discuss key course concepts.	Active

Writing and Learning Commons	Writing Fellows: Trained peer tutors who address undergraduate writing needs by providing focused support in genres of writing that are unique to specific fields and disciplines.	Active
Writing and Learning Commons, Math Tutoring Center	Drop-in Tutoring: The MTC is open 56 hours per week and serves students on a drop-in basis for all 100 and 200 level math courses. Various courses offered as drop-in at the WaLC.	Active

B. Graphical Representation of Retention Efforts

The reported retention efforts were adapted into a graphical representation. The horizontal axis represents the reactive versus proactive nature of the retention effort. The vertical axis represents the population included in the retention effort from more targeted to the general population. The symbol of each plotted retention effort is categorized based on those designed as first-year initiatives and for those designed to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. The color of each plotted retention effort shows alignment with WCU's *Honoring Our Promise* strategic plan; however, for the purposes of this graph, retention strategy (green) is shown separately from academic excellence (blue) to emphasize those initiatives where the primary purpose is to retain students.

The Office of Student Retention staff graphed and categorized the 112 retention efforts according to these measures using consensus to determine placement and category (Figure 5). While this methodology is subjective in nature, it provides a visual representation of current retention efforts that can be juxtaposed to the recommendations in this plan.

Reactive retention efforts typically address a retention problem when the student has already encountered the problem. For example, outreach to non-registered students is a retention effort where students who have missed their registration date are called, texted, or emailed to help students register for the next semester. Proactive retention efforts address a retention problem to avoid it completely or to lessen the impact on student retention. For example, CatCamp engages students in leadership development before they begin classes at Western; it is proactive as a retention effort because it seeks to create a sense of belonging and community for student participants to increase the likelihood that they will be retained. Another example of a proactive retention effort is supplemental instruction, a type of tutoring connected to courses with high DFW rates. Supplemental instruction provides tutoring services for higher-need courses to lower the overall DFW rate. On the vertical axis, targeted retention efforts focus on a specific student population such as Project Care targeted at new underrepresented

students. An example of a retention effort for the general population is individual advising appointments which are required for all undergraduate students to create a plan for enrollment.

Figure 5: Graphical representation of all retention efforts reported in the campus-wide survey.

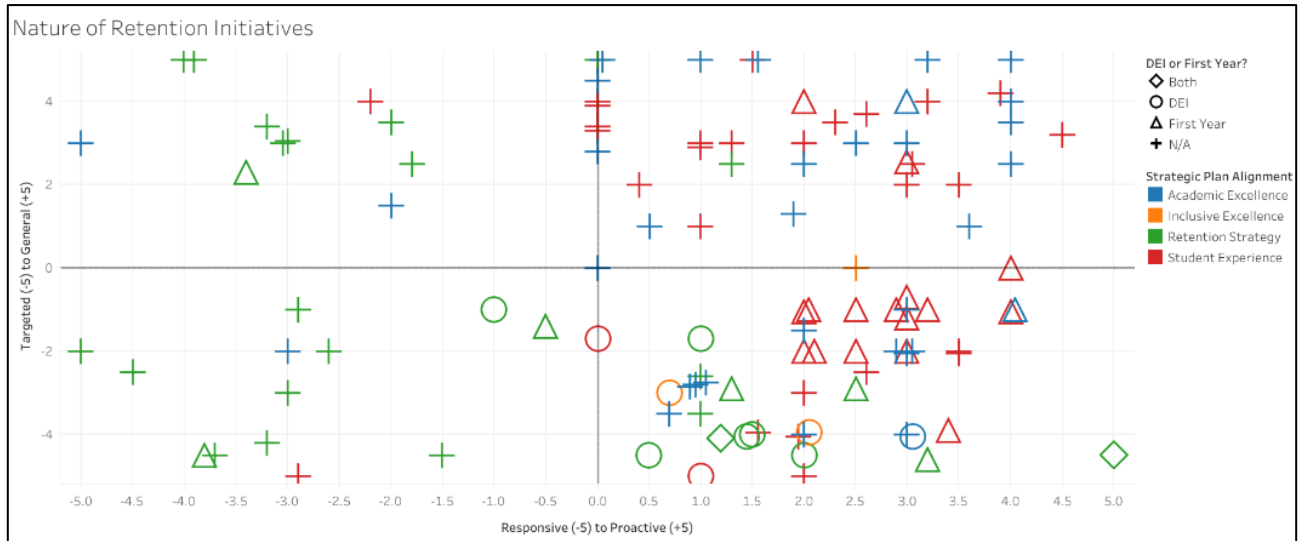


Figure 6: Retention efforts targeted at first-year students.

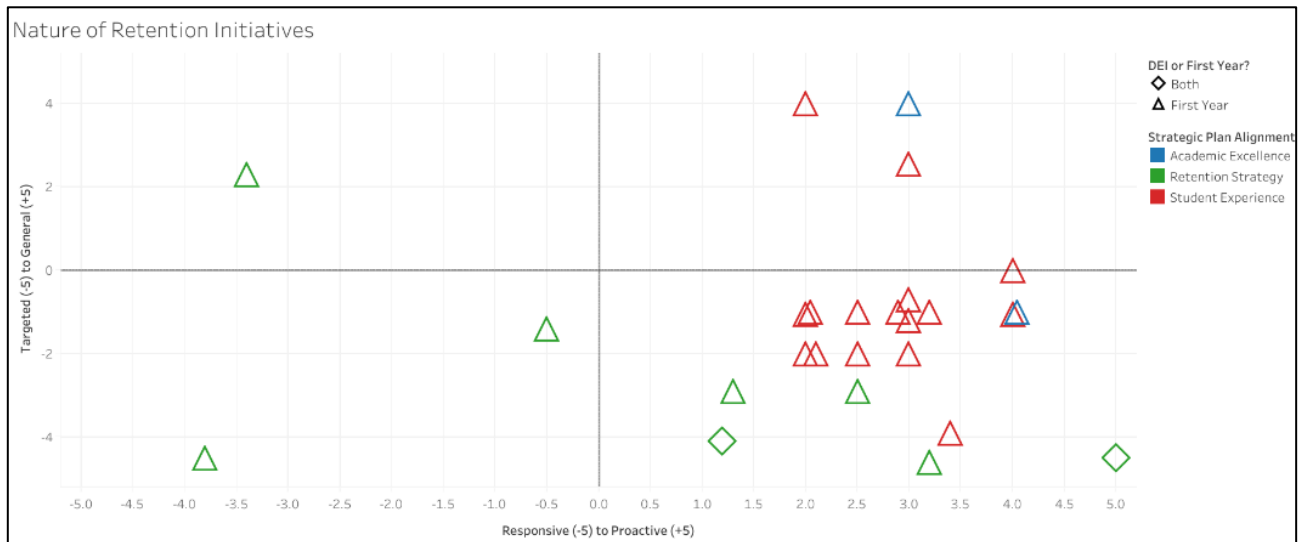
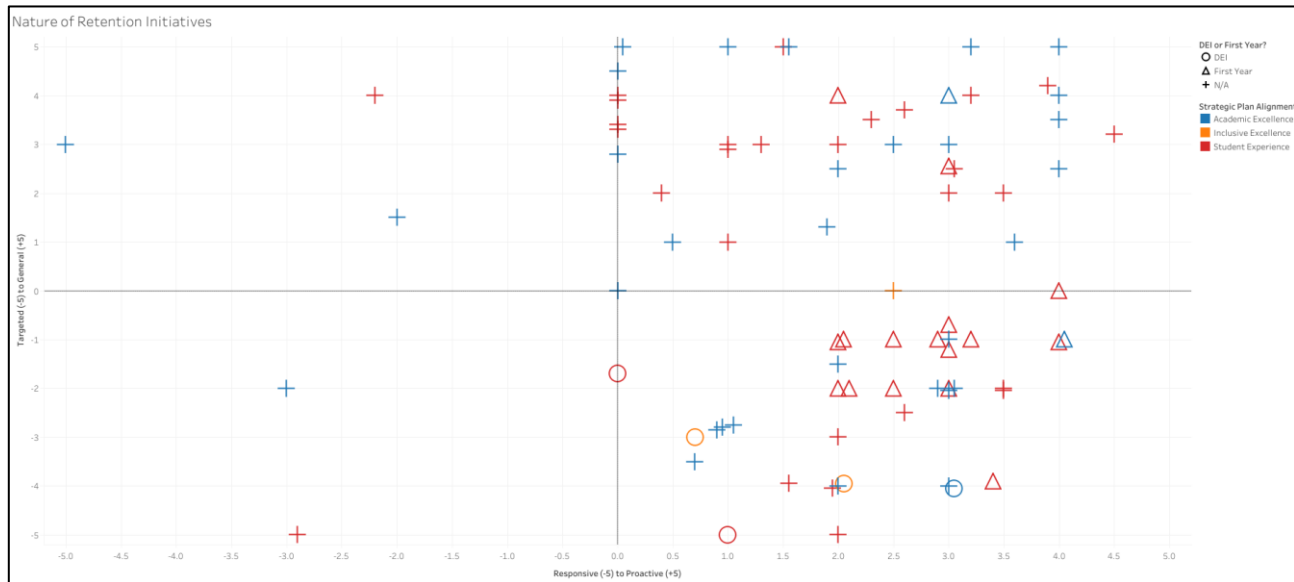


Figure 9: Retention efforts aligned with Academic Excellence, Inclusive Excellence, and Student Experience parts of Honoring Our Promise strategic plan.



The retention efforts categorized as a retention strategy—meaning the primary purpose of the initiative is to improve retention—are heavily responsive or targeted (Figure 8). This aligns with common practices where retention strategies are designed to address a retention concern or are targeted at specific populations to improve overall retention measures. Retention efforts that align with the Academic Excellence, Inclusive Excellence, and Student Experience parts of the strategic plan are very heavily proactive in nature (Figure 9). These differences emphasize the role that all university initiatives have on retention. For example, Living Learning Communities (LLCs) allow for themed housing that fosters peer-to-peer relationship-building and connects students with campus resources. While LLCs are not primarily a retention initiative, the connections that students build with peers, faculty, and staff lead to improved retention for student participants. As current and new programs are reviewed and created, it is important for faculty and staff to examine the connection each program has with retention. The recommendations of this plan seek to guide campus stakeholders in a renewed effort to support student retention.

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