FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Retention Consulting: Visit Four

University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis, Missouri

Analysis prepared by
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Action Plan Workshop Presentation: "Writing Effective Action Plans"

Retention Consulting – Visit Four

University of Missouri-St. Louis • St. Louis, Missouri

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Introduction

Charles Schroeder, senior executive at Noel-Levitz, visited the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) on April 7-8, 2005 for the purpose of following up on the retention planning workshop conducted in March. The goals for this retention consultation visit were:

Conduct workshops on writing action plans;

Discuss the roles, activities, and responsibilities of the retention team, which has been charged with implementing the strategies in the University of Missouri-St. Louis strategic retention master plan;

Meet individually with implementation team (theme) coordinators; and

Meet with the appropriate leaders (Curt, Glen, etc.) to ensure incorporation of relevant data and best practices into specific action plans.

Agenda

Thursday, April 7, 2005

8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Continental breakfast
8:30 – 9:45 a.m.	Review of the overall retention planning process and workshop on various approaches to developing action plans; retention committee presentation: "Writing Effective Action Plans"; assistance in starting individual action plans; and roles, activities, and responsibilities of the retention committee
9:45 – 11:15 a.m.	Small group discussions and review of revised goals/strategies
11:15 – 12:30 p.m.	Group reports and key themes identified
12:30 – 1:15 p.m.	Working lunch
1:15 – 3:30 p.m.	Short presentation on action plan criteria, continuation of working group planning, and development of draft action plans

3:30 – 4:00 p.m.   Group presentations/discussions of preliminary action plans

4:00 p.m.   Conclude day one activities

Friday, April 8, 2005

8:00 – 8:45 a.m.   Minority team – Gwen Deloach-Packnett

8:45 – 9:00 a.m.   Break

9:00 – 9:45 a.m.   Transfer team – Jennifer Taylor

9:45 – 10:00 a.m.   Break

10:00 – 10:45 a.m.   Service team – Greg McCalley and Brenda Jaeger

10:45 – 11:00 a.m.   Break

11:00 – 11:45 a.m.   Freshman team – John Kundel

11:45 – 12:00 p.m.   Break

12:00 – 12:45 p.m.   Data team – John Kundel

12:45 – 1:00 p.m.   Break

1:00 – 1:45   Exit briefing – Cope, George, Coonrod

1:45 – 2:30   Preparation for quality service workshop

2:30 – 4:30   Quality service workshop – key communicators and their colleagues

4:30 – 5:00   Reception

Action Plans

During the visit, Charles Schroeder conducted a workshop on writing effective action plans. One or more action plans are needed for each retention strategy. Every action plan must have an impact on students. For this reason, forming committees and gathering data are not action plans, though they may be steps in an action plan. Involving more people in the development of the action plans ensures a greater likelihood of success because it enhances understanding and builds commitment and investment in the overall process. In particular, it is vitally important to include mid-management and frontline personnel that possess knowledge and expertise in areas central to the action plan goals and objectives. Their efforts, as well as those of others, must be coordinated and monitored to ensure accountability and success. The following structure provides a general framework for management and coordination of the overall process.

Overall coordinators of retention (Glen and Curt):

Shepherd the overall process to ensure compliance with deadlines;

Provide institutional advocacy and championing of the planning process;

Follow up as needed with teams and coordinators;

Develop a communication plan for internal and external constituents;

Offer guidance and support as needed/appropriate; and

Revise the action plan, if necessary.

Retention planning /coordinating team:

Ensures that progress on all action plans is being made;

With guidance from Glen and Curt, evaluates the success of the plan; and

Rewrites the retention plan on a yearly basis.

Action plan coordinators:

Ensure that the action plan is written;

Engage everyone with responsibilities in the process; and

Assist the coordinators.

An action plan consists of the following components:

Comprehensive description of activities;

Step-by-step process of tasks to ensure completion of the strategy;

Responsibility for each step;

Deadlines for each step;

Budget considerations; and

Evaluation process.

The questions that need to be answered are as follows:

What are you going to do? Describe activities in detail in a narrative form that would make the activities clear to any reader.

When are you going to do it? Provide timetables that clearly show key dates and deadlines:

To write this, brainstorm all the activities that will need to be accomplished in order to implement the plan;

Put these in order from beginning to final deadline date; and

Determine (backwards) the dates that will ensure plan completion in time.

Who will be responsible? Assign specific tasks and communicate assignments clearly to those who will be responsible for performing them; and write the name of a point person to monitor progress.

How much will it cost? Include budget information showing the cost of implementation:

Anticipate possible new expense items; and

Research costs.

How will you know when it has been accomplished? Define the methods of evaluation or control that will be used to monitor progress and measure success or failure of the actions undertaken. Examples:

Was the goal attained? Were the deadlines met?

What is the return rate of this year's group compared to previous years? (Can you measure the success of a targeted population? For example, a program to aggressively intervene for probation students would measure last year's retention rate and compare it.)

What was the increase in G.P.A. of targeted students?

What is the change in the measure on the Student Satisfaction Inventory™?

What were some problems, and how will they be overcome in the next year?

SPECIAL NOTE: The consultant has included a number of sample action plans from various colleges and universities in the appendix. Team members should find these to be very useful as they revise and refine their individual plans.

Retention Plan

The next major step in the retention planning process at the University of Missouri-St. Louis is the development of a strategic retention master plan that is combined with the recruitment/marketing plan and integrated into the institution's overall strategic plan. It is important to note that the plan does not need to include every action plan; in fact, it is preferable to simply include a few to illustrate the nature and focus of action plans. If the retention plan is to serve as a *teaching document* for members of the institution, it is recommended that a rationale or warrant be included for each goal and strategy to explain why these are so critical to improving the quality of student life and learning. Since goals and strategies are now relatively complete, someone can start the process of drafting the plan immediately. The retention plan should have the following components:

Table of contents;

Introduction;

Executive summary;

Institutional mission and goals (from the UMSL strategic plan);

Situation analysis;

Organizational structure for retention leadership;

Retention goals;

Key strategies;

Action plans (or sample/representative plans); and

Summary of goals, strategies, and activities.

Workshop and Meetings with Implementation Teams

These were productive meetings that should eventually lead to the development of effective action plans – the heart of University of Missouri-St. Louis' retention plan. It should be noted that there is a high level of enthusiasm, interest, and willingness to commit the time and energy necessary to this project. The level of engagement, dedication, collegiality, and collaboration on the part of team members is truly exemplary, and this bodes well for maintaining momentum and for completing the initial retention plan in a timely manner. The central or primary retention team is comprised of the action plan coordinators and the retention leadership, which includes Glen and Curt as the overall coordinators.

During the first morning session, team members had the opportunity to review the University of Missouri-St. Louis' strategic plan, retention planning principles, best practices, various assessment data, as well as the revised goals and strategies of particular interest to them. All teams made substantive progress, finishing relatively complete draft action plans in the afternoon session. These plans focused on the development of a comprehensive early intervention program to identify characteristics of at-risk students; specific steps to implement a quality service training program; thoughts on ways of substantially improving the advising system; and a variety of opportunities for addressing numerous dysfunctional business practices by improving work processes and customer service throughout the campus.

Meetings the following day with the coordinators of various teams were quite productive as well. The meetings allowed them to become more fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and the strategies and subsequent action plans that will lead toward accomplishing each goal. Discussions during the meetings led to ideas that coordinators were encouraged to address. Furthermore, the consultant suggested a *method for prioritizing* the various strategies under each goal using the following criteria: 1) timeliness and ease of implementing quickly; 2) clear evidence (from various data sources, such as the SSI) that the strategy and subsequent action plans would directly address the desired outcomes; and 3) evidence that these provide for the possibility of quick wins. The consultant also recommended that goal six be framed as "substantially improve the quality of services throughout the campus" rather than focus on reducing gap scores on the SSI, which should instead be a strategy under the goal.

The first Friday morning meeting included the minority team leader, Gwen Deloach-Packnett and Curt Coonrod. As a result of the discussion, the Gwen and Curt decided to explore the following suggestions and recommended action steps:

PRIORITY: Develop new, formal incorporation processes and structures for new freshmen and transfer students of color. For new freshmen, work with Linda Silman and Greg McCaulley to block space in high demand general education courses so that late registering students of color can be co-enrolled in three common courses. Sample courses could include English composition, chemistry, biology, Introductory Psychology or Sociology, American history, economics, etc. Use peer mentors (P.M.) as success counselors for different co-enrolled cohorts by having the P.M.'s meet regularly with the faculty in the three courses, review their syllabi, understand their learning objectives, and use this information to *form study groups* with the students assigned to them. The P.M.'s will serve as faculty and student advocates, and they will focus most of their time on helping students achieve the academic expectations of the faculty. This strategy could be employed immediately with newly admitted freshmen

students of color to encourage their conversion to enrolled students. This would assure them that they already have three of the five courses they need for the fall. This strategy is also congruent with the intent of the *On the Same Page* initiative proposed by the quality service team. Finally, the co-enrollment strategy might be combined with a co-assignment strategy to the same residence hall for students wanting to live on campus. But regardless of the approach, this model should be considered as similar in intent to the highly successful "Posse Program" implemented by numerous universities across the country.

PRIORITY: A similar co-enrollment strategy should be employed for new transfer students of color, particularly in the three largest colleges – A&S, business, and education; however, it is suggested that these students be co-enrolled in two, rather than three common courses.

PRIORITY: To increase participation in orientation for new students of color, consider implementing the following: (a) have the chancellor send a personal letter to all admitted students of color indicating that he expects to have them participate; (b) incorporate faculty of color in the orientation and have them clearly articulate the difference between high school and college as well as what students must do to be successful at UMSL; (c) Encourage current students of color to develop an "UMSL PLEDGE" document outlining critical expectations and standards for academic and social success – encourage new students of color to sign the pledge as a class at the end of the orientation program.

Explore ways of building stronger alliances with groups such as the St. Louis Clergy Coalition that can become partners with UMSL in attracting and retaining students of color.

Provide systematic feedback to high schools and community colleges on the success of their students at UMSL.

PRIORITY: Examine the University of Kansas *Graduate in Four* checklist method (which was given to Curt and Glen) as a primary means for clarifying pathways to involvement and success. Consider adapting the checklist as a primary structure for helping students connect with educationally purposeful activities and experiences throughout their undergraduate years at UMSL.

PRIORITY: Develop specific retention rate targets for this goal. Have Larry determine historical retention rates for first-time, full-time freshmen and transfer students of color and use this as a basis for the targets. For example, consider increasing retention by 3 percent a year for the next three years.

The second meeting involved the Goal Two team co-coordinators, Jennifer and Melissa, and the discussion focused on the early-alert/intervention strategy as well as other exciting opportunities identified by this team. **Please note** that the action plan for this team is included in the appendix. And, be aware that this plan is the *absolute best action plan/strategy* the consultant has ever reviewed among all of the colleges and universities he works with on a continuing basis. Hence, kudos to Jennifer, Melissa, and their colleagues on a truly exceptional job! This group agreed to immediately pursue the following suggestions and action steps:

PRIORITY: Work closely with the freshmen retention team on numerous overlap issues associated with the development of the early-alert intervention program. One example includes jointly creating strategies for incorporating the College Student Inventory (CSI) into

the early-alert system to identify characteristics of at-risk transfers as well as freshmen and to help advisors obtain useful information to enhance the advising process. CSI information can /should be combined with other UMSL data to create an individual profile for students demonstrating various "at-risk" characteristics. Such a profile will help faculty and support personnel respond more effectively to the needs of these students.

The team agreed to immediately implement the recruit-back program (see appendix) and incorporate it as a central component of the early-alert system.

PRIORITY: Accelerate the planning for the new transfer center to be located in the MSC. This is a fantastic opportunity to focus even more attention on University of Missouri-St. Louis' primary students – transfers!

PRIORITY: Continuous efforts should be made to garner buy-in from department chairs and faculty and to reinforce the importance of having all faculties submit mid-term grades in a timely and effective fashion beginning with the fall semester.

Because the development of a comprehensive early-alert system requires collaboration with a variety of institutional agents (i.e., faculty) and agencies (i.e., writing/math labs), the team will enlist the support of the provost and various deans to champion the project.

Greg has agreed to serve as the early-alert coordinator. As such, he needs to convene representatives from the three teams working on separate aspects of the early-alert intervention program.

PRIORITY: Addressing the course scheduling problem will be another priority for this team. Currently, 700 UMSL students are concurrently enrolled in another institution, with 50 percent enrolled in area community colleges. Hence, UMSL is losing much needed revenue, and many of these students are choosing to transfer to the other school. In addition, last fall 900-1,100 students were waitlisted for various classes and 45 students were unable to get even one class for the fall! There are many factors associated with the course scheduling problem, but the main ones include many classes being scheduled between 9:00-12:15 and hardly any classes scheduled on Friday. As stated in the visit three report, the consultant believes that this is the most serious challenge currently facing UMSL and it must be *resolved immediately*.

The third group, the quality service team, spent a considerable amount of time identifying numerous orientation, training, and development issues as well as bottlenecks and barriers that were creating considerable amounts of dissatisfaction, not only for students, but for staff as well.

To address these and other quality service issues, the team agreed to:

Change their goal from reducing SSI gap scores to improving the quality of services throughout the institution. The old goal will now become a strategy under the new one.

The consultant also recommends that the "Overarching Strategy" be changed from "To facilitate a change in the campus culture by making excellence in student service our number one priority" to "To create a culture of quality at the University of Missouri-St. Louis."

PRIORITY: The team agreed to immediately follow-up with the 110 participants in the Friday afternoon workshop, "Creating a Culture of Quality at UMSL" presented by the consultant. Numerous frontline staff and mid-managers attended and many participants enthusiastically embraced the concepts. Hence, it is absolutely critical to "strike while the iron is hot" by engaging participants in follow-up meetings to explore next steps in improving orientation, training, empowerment, etc.

PRIORITY: Immediately review and evaluate the Noel-Levitz Connections customer service Train the Trainer program as well as other programs available in the marketplace. Select a program by May 15 and implement institutionwide training during the summer and before the start of the fall semester (July) and during September and October.

PRIORITY: Consider immediately convening a small institutional working group to draft a UMSL service strategy which can form the basis of strategies developed by each campus department. A possible *sequence for creating a quality of service culture* is as follows:

1. Create an institutionwide, UMSL Quality Service Strategy that makes explicit the institution's commitment to its internal and external customers.

2. Ask each department to create their own service strategy that is intentionally linked and aligned with the institutional one.

3. Through a comprehensive training program, assist each department in the creation of service standards that clearly specify performance objectives (i.e., the phone will be answered on the first ring).

4. Develop systematic assessment procedures to determine if the service standards are being consistently achieved. Consider comment cards, telephone and Web-based surveys, and in particular, mystery shopper programs.

5. Institutionalize customer service training at the division and departmental levels by designing and implementing a train the trainer program. Departmental trainers might become the customer service coordinators for their units as well.

6. Critically evaluate the current UMSL faculty/staff orientation programs. Be sure to include components of institutional history and mission, future aspirations (strategic plan), student characteristics and success rates, and the central role that quality service plays in ensuring institutional vitality and effectiveness.

Form a few cross functional teams (i.e., members from student accounts, financial aid, and the registrar) to identify and correct major problems associated with various dysfunctional business practices.

PRIORITY: Encourage much more participation from staff in the administrative services areas (i.e., human resources, parking and transportation, university police, and auxiliary services such as the bookstore and dining services).

Explore the feasibility utilizing a group of frontline staff from the key communicators group to assist the team in creating and implementing new quality service initiatives.

PRIORITY: Finally, this team should carefully review and prioritize their most important strategies. Some, like the development of an ombudsman program, while interesting and perhaps desirable, will probably have limited impact on improving the quality of student life and learning for a large number of UMSL students.

It is further recommended that the quality service team consider advocating the utilization of the following *key characteristics of a service culture* in staff discussions of quality service:

People take responsibility.

There are few barriers to communication and action.

People are responsive to the needs of internal and external customers.

Frontline staff frequently asks if they can be of service.

People smile and look like they enjoy their work.

People continuously look for ways to improve.

Staff feels empowered to act.

People receive positive feedback from colleagues.

Customers are pleased after their interaction with staff.

Administrators help staff work to improve service.

Everyone works to identify and prevent problems.

People work to develop customer-oriented systems, policies, and procedures.

Staff anticipates the needs of their internal and external customers.

The fourth meeting focused on innovative ways to improve retention rates for first-time, full-time freshmen. This group, chaired by John Kundel, agreed to the following immediate action steps:

PRIORITY: Continue to develop specific, comprehensive action plans for each component of the early-alert/intervention program. Carefully review the early-alert system model in the appendix of this report. Then clearly describe the purpose, role, and scope of the program and identify every agent and agency that can contribute to achieving the program's objectives. Identify what kinds of orientation, training, and coordination will be necessary to realize the full potential of the new system.

Implement a pilot program in the fall in the College of Arts and Sciences for first-time, full-time freshmen. Encourage Mark to be a very vocal and visible champion of the new program with A&S faculty and department chairs.

PRIORITY: Since identifying at-risk factors early on is critical to identifying students in need of additional support, utilize the College Student Inventory (CSI) as a primary tool for this purpose. Immediately develop a comprehensive action plan that specifies every task that must be accomplished between now and the roll out of the program in the fall.

PRIORITY: Develop frequent joint meetings with individuals from other teams that are also working on components of the early-alert system. Be sure to coordinate planning and

implementation, as well as evaluation. In addition, quickly explore model programs that have been launched successfully at community colleges and various four-year institutions. Remember, a key to the success of the program is making the referral a very simple, efficient, and easy process for faculty. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, develop a formal, written strategy for gaining faculty buy-in and support. Consider using Rob, Bob, Mark and other faculty members of the team to be the key influencers with their colleagues.

Consider the possibility of creating a student job description that clearly articulates what students must do to be successful at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The consultant wishes to note that the retention planning team is now well positioned to move forward on almost every front. However, it is important to keep in mind that vigilance must be maintained in terms of "sticking to the knitting," that is, focusing clearly on action plans that are directly related to supporting specific strategies to achieve particular goals. It is equally important to immediately differentiate between strategies and action plans that are extremely complex, time consuming, and politically sensitive – such as creating a comprehensive early-alert system – that requires the involvement of multiple key stakeholders and ones – such as identifying the characteristics of students on probation – that can be implemented fairly quickly. It is highly recommended that Glen, Curt, and the primary team coordinators discuss ways of differentiating strategies and action plans that will address the needs and concerns of all students (i.e., early-alert system and probation plan) and those that respond to unique concerns of specific sub-populations (i.e., first semester freshmen on probation).

Based upon SSI data and information gleaned from multiple focus groups, it is also recommended that the primary coordinating team, with the leadership of Greg, Brenda, and others move forward immediately in initiating efforts to create a quality service ethos and improve customer service throughout the institution. Concerns about the campus runaround and the previously mentioned detrimental effect of certain policies and practices – such as financial holds, billing policies and practices, parking regulations, registration concerns, etc. – continue to be a major source of concern, not only for students, but for staff as well. Perhaps staff in human resources could assist the coordinating group in developing this strategy/action plan and provide guidance on additional ways to create a comprehensive customer training program for all frontline staff. The consultant believes that the workshop, "Creating a Culture of Quality at UMSL," created a solid foundation for a comprehensive quality service program; however, *immediate follow-up* on the problems identified in the team meeting is absolutely essential to maintaining momentum!

The retention planning team has been working diligently and should be commended for their efforts. As UMSL continues to address significant challenges associated with scarce resources, many faculty and staff are being stretched to perform at their highest levels. Their work with the retention planning process continues to confirm their commitment to improving the quality of student life and learning.

Finally, the consultant must underscore again how impressed he is with the quality and substance of interaction among and between team members. The energy, enthusiasm, and investment are truly outstanding, and all members of the team deserve special praise for their contributions and exemplary leadership – JOB WELL DONE!

Important Recommendations for the Retention Leadership

Shepherd the progress of the plan:

Prioritize for the cabinet the plans requiring funding;

Create implementation timetables to ensure progress for strategies being undertaken in subsequent years;

Develop a schedule of meetings with coordinators so each coordinator meets with the retention team for updates on his or her action plan at least once and preferably two to three times; and

Support the coordinators in accomplishing the tasks of the action plans.

Communicate regularly and aggressively with the entire community regarding the retention initiative:

Give brief updates every month to the campus community;

E-mail the final plan and regular updates to the entire campus;

Conduct a staff/faculty workshop on student success and retention;

Encourage discussion of the retention plan at all department and program meetings;

Communicate with the Student Government Association (SGA), Residence Hall Association (RHA), and IFC/Pan Hellenic on selected action plan items;

Use the university and student newspapers, as well as various meetings with SGA, RHA, and other student organizations to get the word out; and

Communicate with alumni regarding the initiatives.

Incorporate the preceding opportunities into a comprehensive, prioritized communications and public relations plan.

PRIORITY: Although the team has developed six retention related goals, two of them – the ones dealing with six-year graduation rates – do not have any strategies or action plans. The team should immediately review these goals and create, as quickly as possible, strategies and action steps for achieving them. In particular, it is recommended that the focus be: improving a) academic advising; b) course scheduling, especially for sophomores and juniors; c) formal departmental orientation and incorporation mechanisms for new majors; and d) the quality of services, especially for transfer students through such initiatives as a transfer student center.

Continue the planned steps as outlined below.

Next Steps: University of Missouri-St. Louis

As previously noted, it is highly recommended that the team members immediately review and rank order the recommendations and suggestions in this report.

Action teams should review the steps highlighted in this report and complete as many as possible before the consultant's visit in the fall.

PRIORITY: All teams are urged to complete additional action plans *no later than May 6, 2005*. The consultant will review these and provide feedback *before May 15*.

PRIORITY: Develop a comprehensive communication strategy to inform members (faculty, staff, students, alumni, etc.) of the UMSL community about your progress to date and your plans for the future. Consider obtaining assistance from a staff member in the university relations office. This should be *completed by May 1* at the latest.

PRIORITY: Create a first draft of the strategic retention master plan no later than May 15 and send it to the consultant for his review at that time.

PRIORITY: Continuously monitor your progress – meet a working group at least once a month; as action teams every two weeks.

PRIORITY: It is critical for team members to remember that in order to be successful, they must adhere to the "80/20 rule," that is, 80 percent of their results will come from 20 percent of their initiatives. Hence, it is essential that team members develop a few, high impact priorities that will quickly yield the desired results. In this regard, the consultant **highly recommends** that the most important priorities be: (1) developing a comprehensive early-alert/probation system that combines a focus on prevention (using the CSI and other pre-enrollment data) with intrusive educational enrichment activities (study groups, academic recovery program, writing center); (2) creating an institutionwide quality service program driven by an UMSL quality service strategy, departmental and unit strategies and standards, comprehensive orientation, training and development, ongoing and systematic assessment of student satisfaction, and the redesign of key work processes; (3) fostering higher levels of student engagement and enhancing the intellectual climate of the campus by designing a pilot learning community program for students of color in the fall; and (4) substantially improving the experience of upperclass students by improving the handoffs between first-year advisors and advisors in the major and through expecting academic departments to take more responsibility for incorporating and integrating new majors with their disciplines and key departmental faculty members.

To achieve the preceding, it is critical for UMSL to improve the "4 C's" – communication, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration – both within and between various divisions, departments, and units. Encourage executive officers to systematically and continuously advocate the importance of the "4 C's."

PRIORITY: Immediately distribute the PowerPoint presentation of the action planning workshop to all workshop participants. Have Greg, Mitch, and Brenda reconvene their team immediately and have the group complete two exercises: identify priority service quality issues and suggest strategies for resolving them. Also, have team members review and

evaluate the suitability of the Noel-Levitz Connections and Train the Trainer programs as core elements of the quality service program the team is developing.

Because the retention plan is a core element of the UMSL strategic plan, as previously emphasized, the first draft of the retention plan should be completed as soon as possible and no later than May 15. Efforts should be made to coordinate the plan's development with individuals responsible for crafting refinements and revisions to the institution's strategic plan.

PRIORITY: Share this report with all team members as well as cabinet level officers, deans, and directors. Discuss the report in various forums over the next few weeks and determine which recommendations will be implemented immediately.

Maintain the momentum that currently exists but in a highly focused and structured fashion. Immediately continue clarifying key roles and responsibilities and communicate them to everyone engaged in the process.

PRIORITY: Because advising, in general, receives a relatively low student rating, the advising system can be substantially improved by: (a) creating an institutional philosophy/purpose statement of the role of advising in the undergraduate experience at UMSL; (b) increasing the amount of training and development for faculty advisors; (c) expecting advisors to devote more personal attention to second semester freshmen, particularly those in academic difficulty; (d) shifting the advising focus from an enrollment course matching emphasis to a comprehensive educational planning model through adapting the University of Kansas *Graduate in Four* checklist; (e) work with a small group of committed faculty to create a feedback mechanism (evaluation) of students' perceptions of the quality of academic advising; and (f) consider making the faculty advisor the primary person for monitoring the overall (academic/social) success of his/her advisees. Additional priorities are included in the set of recommendations provided by David Crockett in his comprehensive audit and report of the status of advising at UMSL.

Create an evaluation/assessment team to directly support the efforts of all action plan coordinators and teams. This group can provide invaluable expertise on appropriate strategies for evaluating each action plan. Also consider utilizing new assessment techniques – such as Your First College Year (YFCY) – to better understand the nature of the first-year experience. Also explore the feasibility of administering the SSI in the spring of 2006 to gauge the degree to which gap scores in high priority areas are being reduced.

PRIORITY: Immediately implement the recruit-back program as part of the early-alert system (model included in appendix).

PRIORITY: Immediately address critical issues of overlap between various goals, strategies, and action plans and the political and managerial impact of this overlap on certain individuals and units. It is essential to reduce territorial behavior and replace it with a firm commitment to collaboration on the part of everyone.

Send additional action plans to the consultant for his review as soon as they are developed. Encourage coordinators to e-mail and/or call the consultant for assistance and support as needed.

Invite key student leaders from SGA, RHA, IFC, and Pan Hellenic to a dinner briefing meeting in early May to bring them up-to-date on the project, process, current action steps, and the role they can play in communicating aspects of the plan to their constituent groups.

PRIORITY: Before May 30, present 20-30 minute updates on the progress of the retention team to faculty in each school/academic program as well as staff in major departments. Use team coordinators as presenters, and have the chancellor and provost, as well as other executive officers, be strong advocates and champions for building support for the plan.

PRIORITY: Continue to convene meetings on a systematic and frequent basis with the implementation teams and various action plan coordinators to review the status of all action plans.

Begin drafting elements of the retention plan now, and select a person to be the primary author.

PRIORITY: If possible, schedule before the end of this semester a thank-you dinner for the retention team members hosted by the chancellor, provost, and vice provost for student affairs.

Determine by May 1 whether or not a fifth visit should be scheduled before July 1 to review and refine various action plans.

Next Steps: Noel-Levitz

If requested, provide additional information regarding best practices, products, and services that will assist action plan coordinators with the completion of their action plans.

React to any request for information or advice.

Review and critique action plans and the draft retention plan when they are available.

Determine in the consultation with Glen and Curt the most appropriate schedule and agenda for the next visit.

Appendix

Sample Action Plans from UMSL and Other Institutions

Recruit-back Program

At-risk Students and Early-alert System

Action Plan Workshop Presentation: "Writing Effective Action Plans"

Sample Action Plans

UMSL Action Plan for Goal Two

Goal Two

Increase the first- to second-year retention rate for transfer students from 69 percent to 80 percent over the next four years.

Strategies

1. Implement a comprehensive and continuous early-alert system. Students should be identified at the community college level, during the admissions process, and during their course work.

2. Create a flexible system to deliver courses in-sequence, year-round, and in a variety of delivery methods.

3. Create a transition center that would be a clearinghouse for transfer and nontraditional students to seek assistance with resources, referrals, and questions.

4. Promote student success by improving classroom experiences to integrate students quickly into the fabric of the campus through personalized contact and connections.

Overarching Strategy

Improve communication among students, faculty, and staff.

Implement a comprehensive and continuous early-alert system. Students should be identified at the community college level, during the admissions process, and during their course work.

Improve communication among students, faculty, and staff.

Establish a contact person for phone calls, e-mails, and office visits – could be a central advisor or departmental advisor – needs to be a consistent person to be familiar with student and needs.

Create a consistent timeline across all units – prerequisite checks, probation notifications, etc.

Enact and enforce a campuswide probation policy.

Have ongoing transcript assessment.

Incoming assessment of transcript – determine where student is in academic program in relation to academic goals.

60-hour checks (transfers and native students).

Early-alert system

Need to include assessment/evaluation component.

Institutional Research to determine how students are performing in courses – what correlations exist related to their transfer institution?

Provide a continuous feedback loop to include departments and their counterparts at the community college level.

Utilize assessment to provide UMSL graduation rates for the various community colleges; transfer institutions can utilize information to highlight the achievement of their graduates and encourage more students to transfer and earn a four-year degree.

Consider what community college the students are transferring from and if there are implications for student success based on that information.

Consider advising strategies and how we will implement the early-alert system based on the outcome of the advising audit.

Before arrival on campus

Establish a continuous early-alert system – before coursework begins and identify students who have the potential to be at-risk based on academic markers.

Students admitted with 30 hours or less.

Undeclared majors.

Trial or probation admits.

If indicated, put students in contact with resources/tools for their success.

Introduce students to the transition center and services available – continue individualized support/attention received at the community college.

Reconsider language of "seamless" transition – need to communicate a very different experience from the community college environment (transfer shock workshops).

Create Web-based virtual testimonials from a variety of students, faculty, and graduates – allows new students to identify with someone within UMSL community.

Promote student merits.

Jobs after graduation.

Testimonials from graduates.

Honors/awards/graduate school acceptance.

During admissions process, orientation, advising

Continue support and personalization of experience for each student – ensure continuous contact and no runaround within the new environment.

Make students aware of the early-alert system – communicate to students during orientation what the academic expectations are at research-based institutions so they will understand their responsibility for their own success.

Assign an advisor to the student – gives point of contact and familiarity with student needs/academic goals.

Promote a relationship between departmental advising and central advising – determine the relationship after the outcome of the advising audit.

Utilize an electronic roster to notify instructors if students are new or continuing and the type of transfer institution – can encourage a different faculty approach if they realize a majority of the class are new students.

After coursework is underway

At the four- to six-week point, identify students who are not performing well.

Ensure that the student's central or departmental advisor is aware.

Include faculty in discussions.

Contact the student (e-mail, phone, etc.) to offer an appointment to discuss progress and determine what can be done to help the student become successful.

Make sure the student is aware performance is not satisfactory.

Include course attendance as a marker for at-risk.

Connect the student with a peer mentor/tutor as indicated.

Continue personalization/early support by faculty.

Create a flexible system to deliver courses in-sequence, year-round, and in a variety of delivery methods.

Improve communication among students, faculty, and staff

Respond to student needs when planning courses.

Consider what methods are desired by enrolled students.

Academic programs

Year-round university.

Ensure student progress never slowed due to courses not being available.

Institutional Research can provide data regarding courses that are being taken concurrently at other institutions, especially community colleges.

Survey/gather data on when students truly want courses – student needs have changed and schedule needs to reflect what courses students want and when they want them.

Create a three-year course schedule for each student.

>Reflect student desire for a year-round schedule or the traditional two semester schedule.

>Utilize these plans when determining course offerings to ensure courses available when needed.

>Look at model of University of Kansas – four-year plan.

Consider what alternative delivery methods could be utilized.

>Online.

>Hours offered.

>Weekend program.

>Accelerated programs.

Learning communities/linked courses.

>Chat rooms.

Create a transition center that would be a clearinghouse for transfer and nontraditional students to seek assistance with resources, referrals, and questions.

Improve communication among students, faculty, and staff

Consider how the transition center will incorporate/coordinate roles of administration, advising, admissions, and departments.

Campus visits.

>Provide a unique campus experience for transfer/nontraditional students.

>>− Tours, orientation, etc. are different for transfer students.

>>− Include departmental tours.

>Create virtual tours of the campus and departments.

Orientations.

>Begin at community college.

>Incorporate student expectations and discuss early-alert system and support mechanisms that exist for student success.

>Emphasize students' central responsibility for their own success.

>Include the family in the orientation (spouse, children, etc.).

>Mandatory orientation to integrate students.

>>− Need orientation to get beyond "transfer shock" – very different environment from community college and need to integrate better.

Services.

Articulation and advising.

Information, resources, referrals – information "brokerage firm."

Ombudsman to answer questions and give directions without runaround.

Dual-admission program – admit to UMSL and community college with first two years at community college and then transfer to University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Social work/counseling services.

- Lead workshops for students.

- Are familiar with unique problems/challenges of transfer/nontraditional students.

- Have the potential of a counseling intern to fill positions.

Roundtables/workshops.

- Can begin as part of the orientation and continue throughout the semester.

- Should be topics of interest to transfer/nontraditional students – balancing work/school/home, etc.

Flexible hours to meet the needs of a nontraditional schedule.

Create system to answer FAQ's – keep track of "hot-button" issues that drive students away.

Their "home" on campus – for all transfer students – address needs of prospective, new, and current transfer students.

Assessment exam.

Implement to promote successful transition to UMSL curriculum and academic rigor.

Ensure students are prepared for courses they're enrolling in – can incorporate with assessment of performance of students from different community colleges.

Consider differences in transfer populations.

Community college transfers.

Four-year university transfers.

Childcare.

Drop-in – liability concerns.

Evening care – current survey being conducted in evening with the College of Education.

Sick care?

Consider if open to faculty/staff.

Build on existing child developmental center success.

Seek corporate support.

- Look to family-friendly corporations.

- Consider corporations that hire UMSL graduates – sell with how childcare would improve retention, increase graduations, and create more potential employees.

- Give publicity for supporting childcare center.

- Talk with advancement (development) office as a starting point.

Promote student success by improving classroom experiences to integrate students quickly, and continue to engage them in the fabric of the campus through personalized contact and connections.

Improve communication among students, faculty, and staff

Identify and share an executive summary of the best practices currently in use across the campus that help students succeed.

Gather data to support whether practices are effective at retention.

Feedback

Personalizing student experience with names.

Smile and look up as walking across campus.

Friendly demeanor – social interaction with students.

Encourage students who demonstrate potential in major.

Attendance and participation required/rewarded/noticed – especially at mid-semester feedback.

Require office hour visits.

Increase utilization of My Gateway – encourage instructors to utilize as much as possible.

Faculty should introduce self in syllabus.

Faculty to explain what do, what are interested in, research – transfer students may not have concept of what are the variety of activities occurring at a research institution.

Post photo on office door.

Personalization

To begin fall 2005!

IT to incorporate digital photos of students into class roster at beginning of semester – use ID photo already stored in database.

Students receive digital photo of instructor with class schedule.

Integration into major

Department meeting at beginning of year – could hold picnic with faculty and student introductions/interest discussions.

Orient major students to department.

Create pride in learning experience – emphasize experience gained, not just degree earned.

Undergraduate research – introduce the concepts and incorporate students.

Academic clubs.

Student to student interaction

Create ways for students to meet each other/connect.

Identify peer mentors in each department to work with lower level students.

Engineering example.

Utilize scholarship dollars or work-study monies to pay mentors/tutors.

Can begin before they get to campus – give personal contact before coursework begins.

Recruitment/retention staff members within college

Engineering and Nursing.

Consider ratio of recruitment/retention staff to student.

Capstone courses.

Student meetings with chairs.

Standardized forms of assessment.

Maintain quality of academics – carefully consider course compression (summer course examples).

Integrate students into major.

Undergraduate research.

Academic clubs.

Improve communication between students, faculty, and staff.

Involve chairs, deans, associate deans, etc. into communication discussion and emphasize their role in student retention

Create data sets to identify retention rates for the individual colleges/departments.

Challenge them to improve retention within their own units/create their own retention goals.

Look at NSSE data as a guide for improvements.

Assign students e-mail addresses immediately upon admission.

> Can receive e-mails from UMSL – ready means of communication.

> Immediately begins integration into campus environment with more personal contact.

> Good retention tool – communicate information about campus orientation, registration information, etc.

Better utilize student e-mail.

> E-mail deadlines for registration, drop dates, etc.

Allow students to forward e-mail to their personal account if they choose (**BEING DONE**)

> Create a method for verification so this can be done online by students – use SSO ID and password as verification.

> Advertise in MSC, on MSC bridge, Current, and My Gateway.

Create more a user-friendly e-mail address from the beginning.

> Encourage more use of the UMSL e-mail account.

Orientation to campus for staff (especially key communicators).

> Support with manpower and resources – not just human resources' responsibility.

> Could schedule on a quarterly basis – new hires would be required to attend the next available campus orientation.

> Create motivational encounters with potential mentors.

> Gives peer reference group for newcomers.

> Campus tour for all new hires (like the new faculty orientation tour).

> Communicate the student and faculty perspective on campus – promotes understanding and communication among staff, faculty, and students.

Expand department hours to reflect student hours.

Identify existing channels of communication.

> Need to ensure information is getting to the appropriate populations.

> Utilize the best channel of communication for the intended audience.

Action Plans from Other Colleges and Universities

ACTION PLAN (University "X")

GOAL: Increase the retention rate for undecided students 10 percent by 2007.

KEY STRATEGY: Develop a comprehensive approach to undecided/exploratory students.

Description/Explanation:

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Create a cross-functional team between Career Services and Academic Advising.	Alewel/Pint/Melvin	July 20, 2004
Develop a structured procedure for working with open option students.	CFT	
Develop positive connotation for undecided label – OPEN OPTION.	CFT	July 26, 2004
Host a welcome reception for all Open Option AE1400 students.	CS	August 24, 2004
Designate a specific academic advisor for open option students.	AA	
Expand sections of AE1400 to meet student enrollment demands.	AE/AA/CS	
Develop a handbook for open option students.	EM/CS/AA	In process
Increase touch/contact points with open option students prior to orientation.	EM/CS	
Follow-up on open option students who have not enrolled for spring semester, transcript sent to other university, and/or no housing contract.	Registrar/Housing/ Retention coordinator	
Develop a 45-hour credit plan as a guideline for open option majors.	AA/CS	
Professional development for those working with the open option students.	CFT	

Coordinator: Teresa Alewel

Budget/Reallocation Plan:

Staff to teach/counsel/advise open option students - $150,000

Evaluation/Control:

ACTION PLAN (University "X")

GOAL: All goals

KEY STRATEGY: Increase frequency and quality of out-of-class contact between faculty, staff, and students.

Description/Explanation: This initiative is directed toward retaining junior and senior students by putting in place a program that provides opportunities for undergraduates to engage in research projects directed by faculty. This program also could be a strong recruiting tool for students with higher ACT and high school G.P.A.s.

Title of Initiative: Instituting an Undergraduate Research Program at Central Missouri.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Identify departments interested in offering faculty-directed research programs for undergraduates	Deans Deparment chairs	Fall 2004
Identify faculty to participate in the research for undergraduates program.	Department chairs	Fall 2004
Introduce students to faculty research in the departments.	Faculty Discipline student organizations	Fall 2004
Expand research opportunities for honors students.	Dean, Honors college	Fall 2004
Connect research opportunities to current courses (as appropriate).	Faculty	Spring 2005
Create special projects courses offering research opportunities or connect the project with ICAP courses (as appropriate).	Faculty	Spring 2005
Provide rewards for faculty who participate in this initiative.	Provost	Spring 2005
Provide opportunities to feature student research on campus.	Department chairs	Spring 2005
Provide travel money for students to present their research at conferences.	Provost Deans Department chairs	Spring 2005
Evaluate the program and make changes as appropriate.	Faculty	Ongoing
Coordinator: To be determined.		

ACTION PLAN #2 Advising

GOAL: Increase students' responsibility for their academic progress.

KEY STRATEGY: Improve academic advising.

Description/Explanation: By adapting the University of Kansas' "Graduate in Four" materials to CNU, we expect to improve student understanding of expectations and help them take charge of their academic careers. In addition, we expect our version of "Graduate in Four" to increase faculty advisors' knowledge of resources relevant to student success.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Assemble models of pathway documents.	Jay/Virginia/Maury	ASAP
Circulate selected models (with cover letter from the provost) to campus offices and academic departments for their contributions to CNU version. [return deadline: April 15]	RPT subcommittee	March 29, 2005
Compile and edit draft document.	Jay and academic advising staff	May 16, 2005
Plan format/design of document.	Jay, Carol, Stevalynn Adams	May 16, 2005
Arrange for Setting Sail session introducing document.	Jay, Carol, Katey Morlino-Howerton	May 16, 2005
Publish first edition of CNU version.	Jay, Carol, Stevalynn	June 3, 2005
Distribute copies to faculty advisors during training sessions.	Academic advising staff	June 10, 2005
Deliver copies to the Office of Student Life for distribution during Setting Sail.	Academic advising staff	June 10, 2005

ACTION PLAN 2-1

Goal 2: Enhance student satisfaction with university services.

Key Strategy: Integrate billing processes to include financial aid expectations, scholarships, and other awards such as departmental honors so that students' bills for tuition and fees more accurately reflect what they owe.

Description/Explanation: Bills sent to students do not include the scholarship or student aid monies which have been or will be awarded. This leads to confusion for students and/or parents as to the actual amount owed. Subsequently, it is difficult for students or parents to know their total bill. The Billing Office does have information relating to student aid.

Issue Group: Teresa Gallagher (IT Student Services), Diane Rice (Accounts Receivable), Clara Thurman (Financial Aid), Bethany Collings (Financial Aid), someone to be determined from the Foundation (the source of departmental honors monies), Laura Wiesen (Financial Systems), and Maribeth Trun (Comptroller).

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Form issue group of key personnel.	RPT Goal 2 team	March 18, 2005
Issue group meets to discuss feasible solutions for integrating billing processes.	Gallagher/team	NLT April 1, 2005
Solutions and recommendations reported to RPT.	Team	May 2, 2005
Obtain permission for implementation.	Team/VP	May 15, 2005
Implementation.	Team	July 2005 for fall 2005 billing

Coordinator: Teresa Gallagher

Budget:

Evaluation/Control:

ACTION PLAN 2-3

Goal 2: Enhance student satisfaction with university services.

Key Strategy: Streamline processes for student organizations to access SGA-approved and other funding.

Description/Explanation: The procedures for student organizations to access SGA-approved and other funding may be cumbersome or inefficient. For example, prior approval for student travel (e.g., to attend conferences) and to simply access their funds is difficult. We need to review operational policies with an eye toward streamlining this process, while maintaining awareness of any state-imposed requirements relating to student access to funds. This may depend, in part, on the source of the funds.

Issue Group: Michelle Reed (Fiscal Technician, Student Life), Donna Mottilla (School of Business), Donna Eddleman (Dean of Students), Maribeth Trun (Comptroller), Bill Brauer (Vice President), Denise Crittenden (Purchasing), Eric Creasman (Student, SGA Budget Committee) and or/Kerri Rothell (Equestrian Club)

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion date
Form issue group of key personnel.	RPT Goal 2 team	March 18, 2005
Issue group meets to discuss feasible solutions.	Reed/team	NLT April 1, 2005
Define flexibility in local/state fiscal regulations.	Reed/team	NLT July 15, 2005
Gather data to compare CNU's processes to that of other Virginia schools.	Reed/team	NLT July 15, 2005
Solutions and recommendations reported to RPT.	Team	July 29, 2005
Obtain permission for implementation.	Team/VP	August 1, 2005
Implementation.	Reed/team	August 8, 2005 for fall 2005

Coordinator: Michelle Reed
Budget:
Evaluation/Control:

ACTION PLAN for Early Alert System (College "Y")

GOAL: 1, 2, 3, 4

KEY STRATEGY: Develop an institutional advising plan that includes the components that are associated with successful delivery and organization of advising services.

Description/Explanation: Refine, expand, and implement an early-alert system that provides proactive intervention for students with indicators of adjustment and/or academic difficulties.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Form committee.	Undergraduate dean	January 7, 2005
Committee meets, examines current practices, and determines additional needs.	Undergraduate dean	January 13, 2005
Committee designs what the full early-alert system(s) should include, prioritizing the various items.	Undergraduate dean	January 22, 2005
Undergraduate dean meets with provost to discuss feasibility of system components (structural and budgetary).	Provost or provost's designee	January 28-31, 2005
Committee meets to build a system for full operation and implementation for fall 2005, with interim processes during the spring 2005 term.	Undergraduate dean	Spring term 2005

Coordinator: Sandy Powers

Tentative Committee: Penny McKeever (or Rhonda Mack); Lynn Ford; Brian McGee; one of the CSL professionals; Myra Whittemore (or David Goss); Ashley Bloodworth (or Don Griggs); Willette Burnham (or a designated professional from Intercultural Programs); Suzette Stille; Tom Hallberg; Bill Lindstrom (or a designee by Norine Noonan); Valerie Morris; a residence life professional chosen by Victor Wilson; students (follow up by Susan Gourdin)

Outcome: Reduce number of students on probation and increase the number of students who maintain their scholarships

Budget/Reallocation Plan: TBA

Evaluation/Control: Examine percentages of students on probation and who maintain their scholarships.

ACTION PLAN for Learning Communities (College "Y")

GOAL: 1, 2, 3, 4

KEY STRATEGY: Create Learning communities to increase student engagement.

Description/Explanation: Use the theme of globalization to create an exemplary model of learning communities for College of Charleston.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE/TIMETABLE

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Find best practices.	Victor Wilson Andrew Sobiesuo	January – March 2005
Recruit interested faculty and staff.	Kay Smith	March 2005
Define structure and develop theme.	Faculty and staff steering committee	March – August 2005
Schedule faculty and staff.	Kay Smith	Fall 2005
Recruit students.	Admissions and LC steering committee	Fall 2005 – Spring 2006
Implement.	Faculty, staff, and LC steering committee	Fall 2006
Assessment.	Kay Smith	Start in Fall 2006

Recruit-back Program

There is considerable potential in intervening in the decision to dropout or transfer. Consider the following components in the development of a system to prevent some attrition.

1. Flags
    The following indicators target the population:

    − Not pre-registered;

    − No housing deposit;

    − Transcript request;

    − Notification from faculty;

    − Notification from residential life; and

    − Poor academic performance.

2. Process
    The director of retention or advising coordinates receiving feedback from advisors, residential life, financial aid, bursar, registrar, and faculty.

    The director of retention/advising uses the university database to create a list of at-risk students determined from the information above. Further data for each – such as SAT/ACT scores, semester GPA, cumulative GPA, EFC, financial aid, balance, payment plan, and social violations will be helpful in determining the level and type of intervention. The university may decide that it is inappropriate to attempt proactively to retain some of these students (due to social violations, poor academic performance, inability to pay, etc.).

3. Intervention
    The director coordinates personal intervention from the appropriate person: advisor, residential director, financial aid director, or comptroller/bursar.

    The process should occur three times a year while students are on campus. The process of flagging the at-risk students should take place approximately one week after pre-registration.

    The procedure should also be used after July 1 via telephone calls.

4. Outreach for readmits
    Send a letter (with a reapplication form) and/or conduct a telephone campaign during the summer to attract students back to the university who were enrolled in academic years 2001-02 and 2002-03 and who left in good standing.

At-risk Students and Early-alert Systems

Successful student retention initiatives include identification, monitoring/tracking, and intervention system designed to identify, in advance of enrollment, high-risk or dropout-prone students who could benefit from institutional intervention, and to identify enrolled students experiencing academic and/or personal problems that might be ameliorated by institutional intervention. Such systems are commonly referred to as early-alert systems.

Early-alert systems are based on the following assumptions:

Most decisions to drop out occur early in a student's interaction with an institution.

Many dropout-prone students do not voluntarily seek out institutional support services to assist them with problems that may ultimately lead to attrition behavior.

It is easier to anticipate a problem than to solve it.

Faculty and staff are the best referral agents.

Many student problems are treatable if identified early.

Time and resources should be focused on the most dropout-prone students.

Most students respond positively to direct contact in which potential or actual problems are identified and a resource of help is offered.

There is evidence that such programs are successful in reducing dropout rates.

The goals for a comprehensive early-alert system are:

To enhance institutional effectiveness and student success by proactively matching student needs with institutional resources.

To reduce unnecessary student attrition by identifying as early as possible those students who are most dropout-prone.

To implement a systematic student monitoring/tracking system and an ongoing retention/attrition research database.

We recommend that the university review and modify as necessary their ensuing early-alert system. The following generic description of an early-alert system is intended to assist institutions in designing a system appropriate to their special needs and situation.

Identification of At-risk Students

Definition of a High-risk Student

A student who possesses one or more attributes or characteristics that traditionally have been associated institutionally with higher rates of attrition is a high-risk student.

Using assessment or other sources of information, high-risk students should be identified prior to enrollment and appropriate prescriptive actions recommended on an individual basis. One or more of the following risk factors may qualify a student for special intervention:

Low standardized test scores;

Poor high school/other college record;

Weak study skills;

Low socioeconomic status;

Low level of educational aspiration;

Uncertainty about program of study/reasons for attending college;

Physical or learning disability;

First-generation college student;

Late applicant;

English as a second language;

Lack of support system;

Self-reported need of help;

Rural residence;

Out of formal education for several years;

College not his/her first choice;

Low predicted college grade point average (PGPA); and

Student athlete.

Enrolled Students Experiencing Academic or Personal Difficulties

Early-alert systems evaluate a student's academic progress, attendance, and behavior and provide information about problem areas to a central office where students can seek help and the office can proactively reach out to flagged students. Following are some common triggers for faculty or staff referral:

Excessive number of absences or habitual tardiness;

Failure on two or more tests;

Grade point average below a "C";

Statements about dropping out or transferring to another institution;

Lack of socialization on campus;

Non-involvement in student activities;

Manifestation of adjustment problems;

Expression of concern about grades;

Problems with an instructor;

Behavior that appears to be depressed or apathetic, or lacks interest/motivation in becoming involved academically or socially;

Evidence of need of assistance with study skills; and

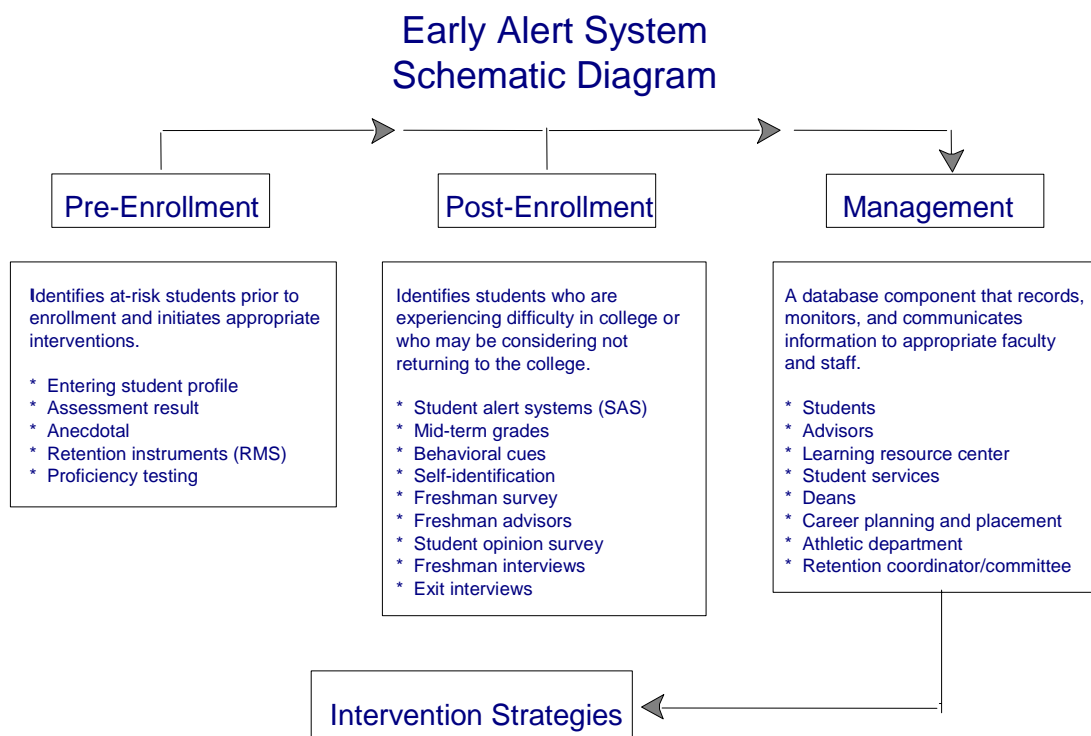Expression of personal or family problems.

The success of a monitoring and intervention system is based on accurately identifying dropout-prone students and being able to provide immediate attention and assistance that focuses on teaching needed skills or leads to changes in student behaviors. Effective implementation requires a coordinated and cooperative effort by both instructional and student services staff into a single system that promotes student success and retention.

Components of the Early-alert System

Early-alert systems should include the following three components:

1. Pre-enrollment subsystem;

2. Post-enrollment subsystem; and

3. Management subsystem.

Following is a brief description of each major component of the proposed system:

Early Alert System
Schematic Diagram

Pre-Enrollment	Post-Enrollment	Management
Identifies at-risk students prior to enrollment and initiates appropriate interventions.	Identifies students who are experiencing difficulty in college or who may be considering not returning to the college.	A database component that records, monitors, and communicates information to appropriate faculty and staff.
* Entering student profile * Assessment result * Anecdotal * Retention instruments (RMS) * Proficiency testing	* Student alert systems (SAS) * Mid-term grades * Behavioral cues * Self-identification * Freshman survey * Freshman advisors * Student opinion survey * Freshman interviews * Exit interviews	* Students * Advisors * Learning resource center * Student services * Deans * Career planning and placement * Athletic department * Retention coordinator/committee

Intervention Strategies

Characteristics of an Effective Retention Management System

User-friendliness;

Ease of data entry;

Development of a flexible individual student record in which data are updated, corrected, or deleted instantly;

Ability to create information in a variety of formats (e.g., list reports or individual reports) for ease of dissemination to individuals and offices;

Provision for tracking the number of contacts a student has with the early-alert system;

Ability to track the enrollment behaviors of individuals and groups of students; and

Source of information that will assist in the ongoing planning and management of the retention program. Some examples are:

Profiles characterizing selected student populations (e.g., persisters versus dropouts);

Analysis of at-risk profiles;

Documentation of contacts with referral resources; and

Evaluation of the effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

Intervention Strategies

The ultimate success of an early-alert system resides less in its ability to identify dropout-prone students correctly than in the effectiveness of specific interventions with specific students. It is not within the scope of this generic design to identify the specific character of the most appropriate interventions. These will be determined following finalization of the design, further discussion of the various strategies available, review of current strategies, and input from campus personnel and resources. However, a preliminary shopping list might include:

Conditional admissions;

Freshman advising/mentoring program;

Freshman seminar/extended orientation;

Learning resource center;

Peer tutoring/advising;

Supplemental instruction;

Career/life planning workshop/course;

Financial aid counseling;

Faculty friend program;

Personal counseling;

Special topic workshops/seminars (e.g., test-taking, financial aid, and helping undecided or exploratory students);

Student skills workshop/course;

Developmental/remedial courses;

Enriched/honors courses;

Assessment (abilities, values, and interests);

Computerized career exploration programs;

Drug/alcohol counseling;

Student success center;

Writing, reading, and mathematics labs;

Special programs for adult learners;

Freshman interviews;

Summer bridge programs;

Proactive/intrusive advising program; and

Programs targeted for high-risk students.

Designing and Evaluating an Early-alert System

The proposed early-alert system ensures that the institution is doing everything possible to identify high-risk or dropout-prone students and to intervene in a timely and effective manner. In determining the final system design, it will be necessary to keep in mind the five criteria for system success proposed by George Baker in his work, *Toward Mastery Leadership: Strategies for Student Success*:

Simplicity;

Flexibility;

Reliability;

Economy; and

Acceptability.

It is also important to acknowledge the potential problems or obstacles to implementing a successful early-alert system. The following issues may need to be considered in the final design decisions:

Unwillingness of faculty and staff to cooperate;

Failure to identify correctly high-risk students and to ensure their participation in the appropriate intervention strategies;

Failure to respect the confidentiality and privacy of students in a system highly dependent on communication and proactive intervention;

Lack of an adequate automated system for monitoring/tracking individual students;

Ineffectiveness of the intervention strategies; and

Awareness of the tendency for any system to encourage unintentional stereotyping or self-fulfilling prophecies.

Ultimately, the success of the system is based on being able to accurately identify dropout-prone students and to provide immediate attention and assistance that matches student needs with institutional resources.