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University of Kentucky "War on Attrition" 2007-2010: A Report from the Provost's Retention Workgroup to the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, June 2010

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Repository Citation

Hollingsworth, Randolph, "University of Kentucky "War on Attrition" 2007-2010: A Report from the Provost's Retention Workgroup to the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, June 2010" (2010). *Undergraduate Education White Papers*. 4.
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University of Kentucky “War on Attrition” 2007-2010

A Report from the Provost’s Retention Workgroup to the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, June 2010

Goal: *UK’s Top 20 Business Plan has a 72%, six-year graduation rate as a goal by 2020; to reach this, the retention rate of UK’s first year students must rise to 90%. For the 2007 graduating cohort (which had a record return rate of 81%, the Provost challenged the University community to ensure at 90% graduate before 2013. Statewide budget cuts critically undermined efforts to bolster student support infrastructure, however the Provost continued to maintain levels of support for critical resources for the War on Attrition.*

Closing the Achievement Gap by Reinforcing Student/Faculty/Advisor Relationships

- Professional academic advisors in nearly all undergraduate colleges newly hired to support at-risk students.
- Some colleges centralized professional academic advising duties under administrative leadership in the dean's office and emphasized the supporting role of faculty as subject area mentors.
- Academic Alert System began Fall 2007 with faculty submitting centrally alerts of at-risk student behavior (e.g., pattern of poor attendance, low grades on assignments, disruptive behavior in class) and academic advisors as well as special support units meet with students to craft action plans to address specific issues.
- Office of Retention and Student Success created in January 2008 to coordinate Academic Alerts and to implement Hobsons EMT Retain communications and tracking software (e.g., identifying students who did not pre-register for classes and working with advisors and support programs to contact them).
- Starting in Fall 2007 all faculty report midterm grades for all undergraduate students; Faculty Senate extended withdraw window to allow for more effective use of academic advising sessions based on grades.
- The Provost's Faculty Forums on First-Year Student Experience gave faculty who typically teach large numbers of first-year students opportunities for discussions on increasing engagement and success – these discussions continued in the Mind Matters Series by the Chellgren Center for Undergraduate Excellence.
- Some colleges placed underperforming first-year, first semester students on probation status (and some require they sign a contract that specifies expectations) instead of suspending them immediately.
- Five colleges and three student support units now using an online advisor appointment scheduler and tracking system (ASK) for student to access easily from within the MyUK portal.
- A two-year study of UK's adult learner experiences led to a restructuring of policies and procedures for distance learning as well as a workshop on credit-for-prior-learning for Directors of Undergraduate Studies.
- Project Graduate, a statewide initiative focusing on re-recruiting adult students with 90 or more earned credit hours but who have not earned a bachelor’s degree, at UK focuses on over 350 eligible students; 32 have graduated so far and more than 50 are currently enrolled.
- Center for Academic Resources & Enrichment Services (CARES) offers enrichment by partnering with faculty in such activities as the Science Living Learning Community and Project C.S.I., a point-based incentive program that focuses on providing opportunities for students of color to gain first-hand experience in their career interest areas.

- A campus-wide workgroup redefined professional academic advisor responsibilities including an emphasis on programming to increase students' academic success and evidence-based assessments for improvement.
- New student leadership groups were created in the colleges to address issues of University climate and to improve communications, e.g., Gatton Cares Club in the College of Business & Economics, and University Studies Ambassadors.
- The Provost leads an Undergraduate Student Success Summit annually with academic leaders from undergraduate colleges (deans, associate deans and academic advising administrators) to examine results from the War on Attrition and generate ideas for new initiatives.

Setting Higher Academic Expectations

- Faculty leadership in the General Education Reform has produced course templates to guide deployment of dozens of new courses, and several pilots seek assessment strategies appropriate for their disciplines.
- Faculty hosted and participated in newly designed workshops focusing on assessment tools for learning outcomes, active learning and inquiry-based approaches to teaching.
- Starting in Fall 2009 incoming first year students with low ACT/SAT subscores in reading, writing or math were required to take a University Placement Test to determine the level of supplemental or remedial support required to prepare them for the rigors of UK college credit bearing courses. Academic advisors and special programs in student support units provided personalized alternative resources for student success.
- Creating college-specific UK101 sections to generate peer support groups and to allow co-registering students together in several of the same course sections to create cohort-based learning communities.
- An International Workgroup found ways to internationalize the curriculum and campus activities including promotion of education abroad so to offer high impact experiences early in students' academic careers.
- UK's federal TRiO program, Student Support Services (SSS), is designed to retain and graduate first generation, low income and/or students with a documented disability - serving approximately 160 students each academic year. UK's SSS has a six year graduation rate of 53% with the national average being 49% for SSS programs. This year a record high number of thirteen SSS students participated in Study Abroad.
- New technologies for student engagement and outreach utilized, e.g., KY Space, Big Blue on Internet2, and UK Blue2.0, including the Big Blue Network for undergraduate mentoring and a UK island in Second Life.
- CARES services and programs for students from underserved populations include study groups, individual tutoring, peer academic coaching, academic progress sessions and a parent listserv to involve students' families in their academic success.
- Center for Community Outreach launched in 2007 to become an integral component of academic programs that require community service and outreach, including "Alternative Break" program for service learning opportunities over spring break.
- UE, Enrollment Management, Student Affairs and Institutional Diversity partnered to create the First Scholars Center, a national model in supporting students from families whose parents did not attend college; this collaborative effort in providing scholarships and personalized programming is supported by a grant from The Suder Foundation.
- Studies on college readiness at UK provided new understandings of gaps by gender, socio-economic status and race in critical reading skills and in the sciences -- leading to new initiatives in peer mentoring, gaming and the use of mobile technologies to be launched next year.

Enhanced Recruiting, Admissions and Orientations

- Since 2007 the Offices of Public Relations and Enrollment Management have managed the new See Blue campaign to create a sense of community and pride at UK.
- UK 101 (Academic Orientation) continues to be a critical source of support for most of UK's entering first year students, with some sections designated for higher-risk students such as first-generation college-going students. Those who complete UK 101 have higher retention rates than those not enrolled.
- High academic expectations are emphasized in recruiting events, summer advising conferences and the Student Induction Ceremony, as well as in new units in UK 101 and the UK Common Reading Experience.
- A BCTC-UK Dual Enrollment memorandum of agreement signed in Fall 2008 supports the BCTCblue+ Program, focusing on personalized advising for transfer students more a more seamless transition to and timely graduation from a specific baccalaureate degree program at UK.
- UE and Enrollment Management are working with Fayette County School District to develop a dual-credit program with local schools; and Student Affairs hosted a campus panel discussion with local principals on how to prepare high school seniors for college and addressing high-risk alcohol use.
- Focusing on mathematics and writing skills, SSS collaborated with CARES to offer a 6-week summer bridge program which supports college readiness for students participating in their scholarship programs.