

PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION ACADEMY

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

Prepared by Angela Mathers, Team Lead

OVERVIEW:

The Persistence and Completion Academy is a four-year, structured program organized by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that focuses on cultivating data-driven strategies that lead to institutional improvements. There is a strong focus on defining, tracking, and analyzing data with the goal of implementing strategies to improve student success metrics.

There are goals in the College Strategic Plan that are tied to persistence, including increasing the fall-to-spring student persistence rate by 3 percentage points, the fall-to-fall student retention rate by 2 percentage points, and the first-term completion in good academic standing of First Time in College students by 3 percentage points.

The team's efforts will focus on the at-risk student population. We recognize that this is a broad category and requires that we delve deeper into the data to fully understand this student demographic. The participation in the Persistence and Completion Academy demonstrates a deep and ongoing commitment to identifying practical solutions to meeting the needs of students.

TEAM MEMBERS:

Faculty: Heidi Anderson, Shana Petermann

Staff: Marisa Gonzalez, Teresa Stolfus

Administrators: Angela Mathers, Shawn Anderson, Steve Erickson

1ST YEAR PRIORITIES:

At the kick-off roundtable during the summer of 2017, the team discussed an initial plan that included a number of tactical actions. The first was related to working with our Cabinet and senior administration to discuss the adjustment of focus for the team. We initially believed that focusing on students of color was what would be of most benefit to the institution. While that is still a priority, based on the data book that was put together, we hope to expand that to include at-risk students as well.

Secondarily, we need to identify and collect missing data. Discussions around our initiative and a more thorough review of our data book helped us realize we had more questions we need data to inform. We are in the process of incorporating additional data into the framework for continuing to move this work forward.

In addition, we will address the culture associated with persistence and completion initiatives. Concerns related to these areas are often attributed to outside factors. The team recognizes that for sizable shifts to occur, buy-in from staff, faculty, and administration is critical.

As an institution, we recognize that we often move to solutions quickly once a problem is identified. Slowing that process down to fully examine the problem, the data, and possible solutions will be a challenge for the team, and the institution. We will identify a communication strategy, as well as a plan to get others involved in the process of reviewing, and examining, trends related to student persistence.

TYING OUR FOCUS TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Alignment with our strategic plan goals tied to student success and learning is paramount. Our data indicates that while our students of color are persisting at higher rates compared to years previous, our white students' persistence rates have dropped significantly. After deep discussions at the round table, our team believes that focusing on the at-risk student and working to prioritize their needs is the path that our team needs to pursue.

Programming and policies are a necessary part of improving the success of our students. At this time, a system-wide multiple measures review process is underway to further examine how best to serve students in regard to suitable course placement that will benefit all students. In addition, a system-wide expectation to institutionalize an Academic Bridge experience is in place. Considering how to weave these M State and system-wide goals into the recommended improvements for students is key.

Overall, M State's strategic plan aligns well with our goal of increasing student persistence and success. The participation in the Academy demonstrates a deep and ongoing commitment to identifying practical solutions to meeting the needs of students.

CHANGE PROCESS

Continuous improvement based on the team findings are a critical component of the Persistence and Completion Academy experience. The team leads, Angela Mathers and Shawn Anderson, report necessary updates to the Vice Presidents for Student Development Services and Academics, Dr. Peter Wielinski and Dr. Carrie Brimhall, respectively. Based on findings from the team reviewing data and determining next-steps, recommendations are made. The group's work is underway and the team will continue to identify, collect, analyze and distribute institutional data sets to the college/campus community, research and network on best practices, recommend improvements on structures, systems, and policies, and evaluate and promote programming and policies to support student success.