Pathways for Student Academic Success

Beginning in fall 2012, the Pathways strategy called for a gradual shift of students who are not yet prepared for college coursework to first enroll at a partner community college or at our Wayne College. The strategy also focuses efforts on attracting more academically prepared students and sustaining and increasing the success of our current students.

While it is early to measure this initial year of the Pathways strategy, we are seeing very positive results in the academic quality of freshman:

- As of fall 2013 census date, our enrolled fall 2013 first-time full-time (FTFT) bachelor's degree seeking students have an average ACT of 23.2, up from last year’s 22.4 ACT
- FTFT bachelor’s degree seeking high school grade point averages continue to increase, from 3.2 in fall 2012 to 3.3 in fall 2013

Even though an enrollment decline was predicted, it is important to understand student attrition to inform persistence and completion strategies. In general, we found the reasons for our student attrition are varied. Forty-six percent of the decline is related to the pathways strategy and to consistency in policy oversight. Forty-four percent of the decline is attributed to diminished yield and retention.

With the Board of Trustee’s endorsement in May 2013, faculty will be reporting early-term progress reports starting this fall, primarily for the 100 and 200 level courses, where earlier intervention strategies are key. Students who receive unsatisfactory progress will be automatically emailed and directed to speak with their advisor and faculty.

Grades First, an advising system currently used in Athletics, will be installed in the advising offices targeting pre-major students, giving advisors additional tools for student meetings and follow up.

Decreasing the time to degree completion is a top priority and several initiatives are currently in place. For example, students can earn alternative forms of credit, such as advanced placement, credit by exam, and military credit. In 2012-2013, more than 3,300 University of Akron students were awarded 30,000 student credit hours in the form of alternative credit. Last year alone, over 5,000 credit hours were awarded to our Early College students who are well on their way to attaining a college degree.

These retention and completion strategies along with several other initiatives show promising results, yet there is much work yet to be done. Discussions and planning have begun, to develop a comprehensive retention and completion plan, bringing together current successful strategies with other best practice initiatives. We will begin to engage the campus in developing our retention and completion plan. All university employees are accountable for student success. As we become more accountable as an institution, we become more accomplished in serving all our students.