Strategic Enrollment Retention Sub-Committee

2012 Summary Report

Summary

The Strategic Enrollment Retention Sub-Committee has had a very successful set of conversations and has developed an action plan for the fall of 2012. The committee researched successful retention strategies from a host of other institutions in the United States. Various educational reports were reviewed that illustrated proven techniques to improve retention and graduation rates. The Committee identified 83 endeavors that could be implemented at Fairmont State University. These items were categorized around the broad areas of First-Year Transition Strategies, Financial Aid, Academic Advising, Assessment, Faculty Development, Career Planning and Placement, Academic Support, Mentoring, and Student Involvement.

It is hoped that this committee will be continued during the next several years, and in subsequent years additional retention strategies would be adopted and implemented by the faculty and staff at Fairmont State University. Realizing that time and budget considerations are important to this process, the Committee is recommending a limited number of retention strategies to be implemented for the fall of 2012. The overall goal of this endeavor should be to improve retention at Fairmont State University by two percent each academic year. Below are the specific recommendations for the fall semester:

Implementation Activities for 2012

First-year Seminar/University 101 Course

Fairmont State University should implement a first-year seminar/university 101 course. This course could be for credit or for non-credit, and this credit option could rest with the academic units, schools, or colleges. The first-year seminar/university 101 course should have consistency in the topics and activities presented, and it needs to be taught by discipline specific faculty within the academic units, schools, or colleges at Fairmont State University. This seminar or course should help students make a successful transition to the University, both academically and personally. The course should foster a sense of belonging, promote engagement in curricular and co-curricular activities, articulate to students the expectations of the University and its faculty, and help students develop and apply skills to clarify their purpose, meaning, and direction with regard to a post-secondary education. At the conclusion of this course students should be able to:

I. Foster Academic Success
   - Adapt and apply appropriate academic strategies to their courses and learning experiences.
   - Demonstrate how to effectively evaluate information sources and utilize University libraries and information systems for academic inquiry.
• Recognize the purpose and value of academic integrity and describe the key themes related to the student code of conduct at Fairmont State University.

• Identify and apply strategies to effectively manage time and priorities.

• Identify relevant academic policies, processes, and procedures related to advising, course planning, and major exploration.

II. Help Students Discover and Connect with Fairmont State University
• Identify campus resources and opportunities that contribute to their educational experience, goals, and campus and community engagement.

• Develop and apply skills that contribute to building positive relationships with peers, staff, and faculty.

III. Prepare Students for Responsible Lives in a Diverse, Interconnected, and Changing World
• Examine how their background and experiences impact their values and assumptions.

• Describe concepts of diversity and recognize diverse perspectives.

• Describe and demonstrate principles of responsible citizenship within and beyond the campus community.

• Describe processes, strategies, and resources, and explain the implications of their decisions, related to their overall wellness.

Academic Advising
Fairmont State University should provide additional training and support for faculty advisors. Faculty need professional development to assist students in their career preparation and in interventions with academically challenged students. The institution needs to improve academic advising via an assessment of student needs and the quality of academic advising at Fairmont State University. Academic advising encompasses much more than the scheduling of classes. The advisor is the link between students and the institution. Advisors can take a student who might leave the institution and guide that student so that he or she stays and feels good about their academic decisions. A good advisor can help to reduce initial student confusion and strengthen the affiliation with the institution during their early years of study. Additionally, all students should be required to meet with their advisor and instructor prior to being allowed to drop a course or withdraw from the University. This process should require a signature from the instructor, advisor, and Dean of the College or School. Students often drop a class when they are having academic difficulties, and some could be successful with the proper assistance.

Assessment
Fairmont State University needs to utilize diagnostic academic skills assessment and implement interest and career aptitude assessments for undeclared majors. While these assessments are optional for
students at Fairmont State University, these should be a required of all undeclared students. This information needs to be shared with academic advisors, and the University should consider having a ‘career fair’ each year for students to learn more about potential majors at Fairmont State University. During the career fair, each academic unit would be represented by faculty or staff to help students acquire more information about potential academic programs of study and career opportunities within disciplines of study.

**Faculty Development**
Beyond fostering faculty development in academic advising, faculty need to understand the importance of providing regular assessments to students. There are a variety of techniques and methods for assessing student performance, and retention is clearly connected to students being informed of their grades and the need to acquire additional help at the institution. Faculty need additional assistance in fostering the use of undergraduate research, internships, cooperative education, community engagement, and experiential learning within programs of study. Each of these endeavors can positively influence student retention and graduation rates at Fairmont State University.

**Academic Support**
Fairmont State University should mandate remedial or development coursework within the first 32 credit hours completed. Far too many students are not completing their required English and math requirements needed for success at the institution. This delays student progress toward meeting their academic programs of study and impedes their success at the institution. Lastly, the institution should implement an early warning system to help identify students that are having difficulty at the institution. The system should be less cumbersome that MapWorks, but provide relevant and timely information to faculty and staff at Fairmont State University.