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Student Retention & Success Newsletter

Faculty Role in Student Retention

Marquerite Dennis, Vice President of Enrollment and International Programs



During the Spring semester, Suffolk University had the pleasure of a visit from Dr. John Gardner, the founder and senior fellow of

the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. He is the distinguished professor emeritus of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina and serves as the executive director of the Policy Center on the First Year Experience. At the conclusion of his visit, John informed us that the Suffolk University **faculty** is, in his opinion, our school's greatest asset in keeping students enrolled.

Over the past several years, Suffolk has experienced growth in both applications

and enrolled students. Applications for our undergraduate and graduate programs are 11.6 % over the previous year. We have received more than 10,000 applications for all programs.

Despite increased growth on the "front end", our persistence and graduation rates are below the national average. Suffolk's six-year undergraduate graduation rate is 50%.

There are many reasons why students leave Suffolk. Lack of adequate financial resources is the most frequently stated reason. A student in the residence hall has a budget of nearly \$40,000. University officials are working on improving the University's financial aid budget and easing the financial burden of students and their parents.

Throughout the year, several administrators have been meeting to discuss the ways to increase student persistence. The Student Retention and Success Committee meets monthly. It is the primary goal of this committee to both identify and solve the obstacles related to student attrition. This month's newsletter is our attempt to involve you in the process and to keep you informed of our progress.

The retention of students is a national problem and because there are so many factors involved in student persistence, there is no quick fix. I hope you will agree with me that the retention and success of Suffolk students is a shared goal. We are all responsible for retention. Students' success is the University's success. As the months go by, I will share our success with you.

Chalk Talk

(excerpts printed from Chalk Talk with permission of author Donna Qualters, Director of Suffolk University Center for Teaching Excellence.

Helping Freshmen get up to Speed.

First year students come from different backgrounds, levels of preparation, and varying degrees of maturity and self-discipline. Here are some tips for you to help your students "get up to speed." Encourage students to

come to your office hours. You can make an early assignment that requires them to come to your office hours so they realize it is not scary!

Take time in your class teaching students how to study your discipline, how to study for quizzes and exams, and how to approach the test. Pro-

viding this information to freshmen is time well spent. Remember first year students are essentially still in high school mode. By understanding this, and knowing how to help first year students when they struggle, you can be proactive in their success.

Quick Tip: Prepare a short form of the basic knowledge that students should have coming into your class. Ask students to anonymously check off: a) I think I know it, b) I think I heard of it or c) you've got to be kidding. The student will then have some idea of what background work they need and you have a view of areas that may be problematic.

First Year Experience Student Issues

September Happenings

Classes begin.

Formation of first impressions of college life will occur.

Quick judgments and friendships based upon exterior similarities.

Acting out as a way to deal with stress, uncertainty of role in new place.

Initial group formation—cliques form, typically around rooms that are close together

Staff members receive many questions regarding location of classes, resources, and services.

Possible Issues/Concerns

Homesickness—especially for freshmen.

Roommate conflicts.

Initial adjustments to academic environment.

Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority develop due to discrepancy between high school status and grades and initial college performance.

Values exploration—students are confronted with questions of conscience over conflict areas of race and alcohol experimentation, morality, religion and social expectations.

New social life adjustments - including new freedoms.

Initial social rejections.

In-loco parentis problems –students feel depressed because of real or perceived restrictive policies

Long distance relationships.

Financial adjustment.

International student adjustment including confusion, vulnerability, cultural and academic transition.

Adjusting to “Administrative Red Tape.”

Navigating the Hill

submitted by Olena Savvytska

In each issue of this newsletter, Olena Savvytska, a new freshman, will write this column sharing her experiences throughout the academic year as a new college student. We hope this column will provide you insight into the college transition issues from the student perspective.

College lies ahead of me, an unexplored horizon, exciting yet dangerously unfamiliar. What is it really all about? What is the ultimate goal of my journey toward an adult life?

Academics are the key aspect of college, it seems. A wider selection of topics as well as in-depth, highly specific material provide the opportunity to expand one's knowledge of the world as well as to become a well qualified worker in a particular field. There are required courses in math, science, and the humanities, much like in high school, but there is much more room for choice. Books aside, college is a place to develop one's character, and, once again, there are many paths for personal growth. Volunteer-

ing, joining the step team, trying out for the dance company – the opportunities abound, and yet making decisions is difficult, at best.

College, above anything else, will be practice for the rest of my life. I hope that I will master a number of skills: managing my time, being responsible for my choices, taking advantage of opportunities. I also hope to encounter new topics and new ideas that will spark my interest and broaden my outlook on the world.

The BLC – An Academic Fitness Center

By Mike Dickinson, Director of the Ballotti Learning Center

When I speak to new students about the Ballotti Learning Center, I encourage them to utilize our services like they would a fitness center ... rather than an emergency room. Several of them do. Many of the students who utilize the BLC have very good GPAs and take advantage of tutoring and study group resources to practice their skills and hone their understanding of material.

Our shared challenge is reaching those students who don't recognize that they are not in as good academic shape as they may think. As you begin to identify these students, please don't underestimate the value of your referral. When asked why they came to the BLC, many will say that a professor encouraged them.

When students first come to the Ballotti Learning Center, they meet with an Educational Consultant, the

BLC version of an athletic trainer. The EC meets with a student to clarify his or her goals and needs, identify the most appropriate resources, and develop a plan for success.

Educational Consultants are available Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM. Tutoring services for the fall begin on Wednesday, September 19. If you have any questions, please contact the Center at 617-573-8235.

Save a Student



Save a Student is a new program beginning this term which provides you with the opportunity to recognize faculty and staff who go **above and beyond** to help a student succeed at Suffolk University. Nominations can be made for

an individual faculty member, academic department, staff member, or administrative office. All employees and students of the University can nominate a person or group within the Suffolk University Community.

Nominations can be made to Judy Benson in the Office of Retention

Services at jbenson@suffolk.edu. Recipients will receive a certificate of appreciation, will be invited to attend a luncheon at the end of the academic year, and be eligible for inclusion in a drawing for a prize.

All recipients of this certificate will be recognized in this newsletter and the University SUN.

Entering the Maze

First-Year Student Transition and Our Collective Role in the Process
 Mike Siegel, Director of the Higher Education Program, Suffolk University

Those who study, or work with, retention on college campuses ultimately confront an alarming paradox about the enterprise, namely that retention is everyone's concern in general but no one's in particular. To be sure, questions of "whose problem is this" abound. Many colleges appoint individuals (often faculty, but mostly not) to spearhead campus retention efforts. Vesting ownership in one person, however, can often lead to inaction by other members of the campus community who should be part of the discourse. Typically, committees (and sometimes bloated ones at that) are

formed, their effectiveness inextricably linked to the commitment and follow through of the members (both volunteer and conscripted alike).

The reasons for student departure have been thoroughly examined in the higher education retention literature. The well-documented list – the usual suspects of student attrition – provides a context for understanding the array of concerns students have during the transition process. More importantly, knowledge of the concerns helps us to be more proactive and better informed in designing and delivering appropriate

intervention strategies on campus. Many new college students, whether they are first-year undergraduates, transfer students, or graduate students, experience the typical stressors and anxieties that are a part of any newcomer socialization process. I have taken some commonly cited retention issues and categorized them into four primary domains. The list, of course, is not exhaustive, and the categories are not discrete. The fact is that retention is complicated, and often a perfect storm of problems inextricably links the categories.

Look for Part 2 in the October issue.

Domain	Transition Issues Related To...
The Personal	Emotional and/or family problems Homesickness Difficulty in developing friendships and experiencing a sense of community Time constraints and the pinch of multiple commitments (family, jobs, leisure, community work) – education is only one of among many competing priorities and interests Health-related issues Distance from friends, a significant other, or both
The Academic	Lack of commitment to the academic process Difficulty in coping with the academic requirements Unrealistic expectations about study time Feelings of being academically unprepared
The Financial	Tuition / room and board Job related concerns Opportunity costs Transportation and travel concerns Child care issues
The Institutional	Unmet expectations, both academically and socially (the perceived gap between what students expect from college and what they actually get; institutions are often complicit in the problem because of the mixed messages that are sent to students) The "run-around" from staff as they move through the maze of bureaucracy on campus Advising-related concerns Concerns about the quality of the academic experience

What if I am Asked?

What should I do if a student requests accommodations due to a learning disability?

Students must provide the University with documentation to request accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disability Act. You can contact Elizabeth Irwin in the Dean of Students office at 617-573-8239 for additional assistance.

A student tells you that s/he cannot keep up with the class work because the bookstore has run out of the book and it will be two weeks before the additional copies of the book arrive.

Inform the student that the Sawyer Library, located at 73 Tremont Street, has a copy of the book on

reserve for student use in the library. The library hours are Mon-Thurs, 8 am-9pm, Fri. 8am-6 pm and Sat 10 am-6 pm. Be sure to immediately inform your department chairperson of the problem as the department may also be able to provide assistance.

Faculty Involvement in Campus Life

by John Silveria, Assistant Dean of Students

As we begin the school year, we often hear from faculty about their eagerness to get involved with students outside the classroom.

The first opportunity to consider is serving as a faculty advisor to a student organization. With over 75 student organizations, we are always looking for full time faculty to serve in these roles.

Additionally, faculty can consider how they might work with students on programs or research. We are happy to connect students and faculty for these projects via student organizations that may share a passion related to research areas. One more thing to consider is just attend a student run event or participate alongside students in one of our various service programs, or even show off your own talent at our annual Fallfest program.

If any of these are of interest, please contact me directly at jsilveri@suffolk.edu.

Early Alert

Faculty in all undergraduate classes are asked to submit to the Ballotti Learning Center the names of students not completing assignments, in serious difficulty mastering course content, deficiencies with basic communication skills, difficulties with English as a second language, and excessive absences from class. These student names must be submitted by October 12. Further information and instructions will be sent out later this month.

Student Retention and Success Initiatives

The following is a list of new University retention initiatives:

Excessive Absences: Faculty in the Seminar for Freshmen and MGT 101 courses will be required to take attendance, perform outreach to students with 2 or more absences, and report to the BLC at the 3-week mark of the term the student name and outcomes of the student discussion. This allows outreach to students by drawing students back into the class before it may be too late to be academically successful in the course.

Monthly Student Retention and Success Newsletter

Student Transition Support Services

There are many academic support resources available at Suffolk to support students transition to college and their pursuit of excellence. The Ballotti Learning Center, the Math Support Center, Second Language Services, the Writing Center, are all centers dedicated to supporting students' academic transition to college and their pursuit of excellence.

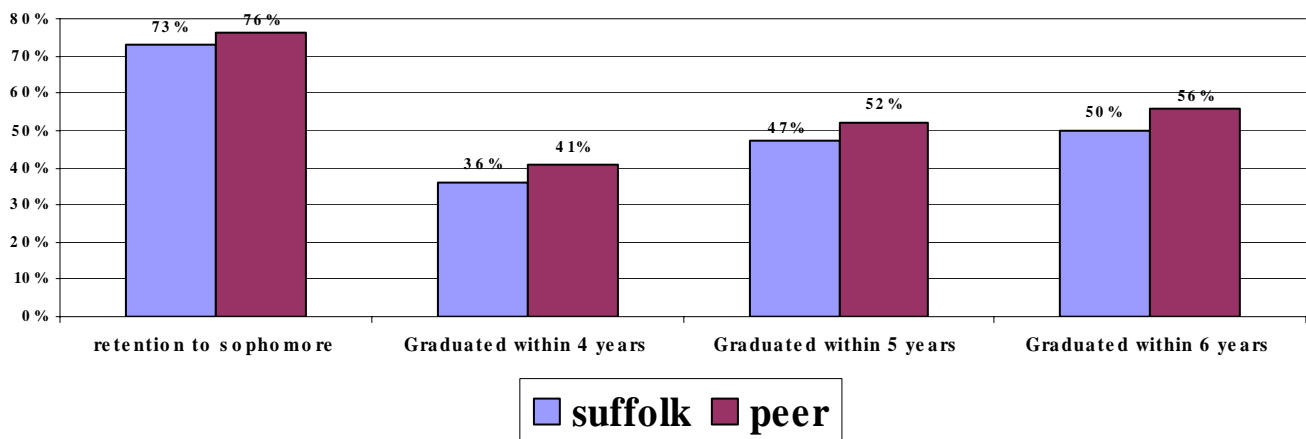
Student Retention and Success Committee Members

- Marguerite Dennis, Vice-President, Enrollment and International Programs
- Walter Caffey, Dean of Enrollment and Retention Management
- Morris McInnes, Associate Dean, Sawyer Business School
- Sebastian Royo, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- Lauri Umansky, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- Christopher Giordano, Associate Dean of Students
- John Silveria, Assistant Dean of Students
- Michael Dickinson, Director, Ballotti Learning Center
- Michael Duggan, Director of Enrollment Research and Planning
- Judy Benson, Director of Retention Services
- Mary Lally, Assistant Dean Enrollment & Retention Management/Registrar
- Christine Perry, Assistant Dean Enrollment/Director of Financial Aid

Retention and Graduation Rates

submitted by Michael Duggan, Director of Enrollment Research and Planning

Comparison of First-Year retention and Graduation Rates: Suffolk versus Masters Institutions - Larger Programs



The chart compares first-year retention and graduation rates of Suffolk with institutions with the same basic Carnegie Classification (Masters Institutions – Larger Programs) for the three most recent cohorts of new full-time fall first-year students available through the IPEDS Peer Analysis System. Suffolk is compared to 150 other private, non-profit Masters Institutions. The chart shows the average percentage of new first-year students who were retained to their sophomore year. The chart also shows the average 4, 5, and 6 year graduation rates. The retention cohorts were fall 2003, 2004, and 2005. The graduation rate cohorts were fall 1997, 1998, and 1999. If you have questions about this data, please email Michael Duggan at mduggan@suffolk.edu