

Student Success and Goal Attainment at Lane Community College

2003-04

By Mary Parthemer and Dan Timberlake

I. Introduction/History

The Success and Goal Attainment committee (SAGA) evolved from the February, 2001 Success and Retention charter (see Appendix I) authorized in the 2000-01 Enrollment Management Plan. The purpose as stated in the charter was to:

- ❑ coordinate success and retention efforts that are guided by informed vision
- ❑ summarize retention efforts that have been made to date
- ❑ determine how these efforts compliment or overlap each other
- ❑ understand barriers to success and retention from both a student point of view and a faculty/staff point of view
- ❑ bring data into the developmental and decision-making processes related to success and retention
- ❑ determine criteria and target areas for success and retention efforts through an inclusive process and consistent with the College's mission and goals
- ❑ establish the extent of college-wide and community involvement in success and retention efforts
- ❑ identify resources that are critical in moving success and retention efforts forward
- ❑ benchmark with other institutions
- ❑ glean best practices from the literature on student success, retention, and related areas

This report will outline the progress made in these areas during 2003-04 and will provide an evaluation of the current status of student success and retention efforts at Lane Community College (Lane).

II. SAGA: 2003-04 In Review

Four goals were established for 2003-04 by a Lane team who attended a seminar in March, 2003 sponsored by the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE): *Assessment of SSS Model Retention Components for Institutional Teams*. Vincent Tinto, well-known for his retention research and practices, was the lead faculty for the seminar. The Lane team was composed of Nancy Hart, Donna Koechig, Mary Parthemer, Cheryl Roberts, Adrian Rodriguez, and Dan Timberlake.

The four 2003-04 goals are listed below and progress in each area is described in detail.

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| Goal 1 | Establish a committee with broad representation. |
| Goal 2 | Complete a literature review of retention models and establish a list of retention best practices supported by data. |
| Goal 3 | Identify baseline data in order to evaluate how successful Lane students are at progressing towards and accomplishing their academic goals. |
| Goal 4 | Create a report with recommendations to guide the next steps for facilitating student success at Lane. |

GOAL 1: Establish a committee with broad representation.

Progress Made:

The SAGA membership grew significantly in 2003-04 with active representatives from many college departments and workgroups, and regular meeting attendance by most members. SAGA met two times per month during the academic year, with additional meetings for subcommittees.

2003-04 SAGA membership included the following:

Jill Bradley	Women's Program and Learning Communities Leadership Team
Marv Clemons	Cooperative Education
Liz Coleman	Tutoring/Academic Learning Services
David Doctor	Library
Jerry DeLeon	Counseling Department
Melinda Dunnick	Student Financial Services
Nancy Hart	Disability Services
Dana Haltunen	Student
Alise Lamoreaux	Adult Basic and Secondary Education
Patrick Lanning	Health and PE, Music, Dance and Theater Arts
Adrienne Mews	Academic Learning Services
Mary Parthemer, co-chair	TRiO Learning Center
Cathy Russell	Adult Basic and Secondary Education
Chris Seifert	English Language Learner Program
Marva Solomon	Counseling Department
Craig Taylor	Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning
Dan Timberlake, co-chair	Counseling Department

Needs/Gaps:

Representation from several additional critical Lane departments including Enrollment Services, Disability Services, Math, and Writing is needed for 2004-05. SAGA has determined one goal for the next academic year is to increase awareness of SAGA issues across campus. It is anticipated this may result in additional members who are passionate about student retention and success.

GOAL 2: Complete a literature review of retention models and establish a list of retention best practices supported by data.

Progress Made:

SAGA members conducted an extensive literature search and compiled articles and other resources related to retention during 2003-04. David Doctor, Lane librarian and SAGA member, has begun to develop a SAGA bibliography of books, articles, and websites. The SAGA bibliography will be located on David's library web page at www.lanecc.edu/library/david.htm. The link is still under construction and will be ready early fall term. In the interim any requests for retention resources may go directly to David at ext. 5378 or doctord@lanecc.edu. Links to the retention resources will also be available at the SAGA website which is under development. The library has expanded its collection of books and articles related to retention. The Associate Vice President for Instruction and Student Services funded the purchase of national publications related to retention during 2003-04 and a subscription to the monthly "Enrollment Management Report" which shares innovative retention strategies being utilized by colleges and universities around the country. Staying up-to-date with retention best practices will be an on-going goal for SAGA.

Two notable pieces of retention literature that SAGA examined were the second edition (1993) of Vincent Tinto's book Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition

and a 2002 article from the Community College Journal of Research and Practice authored by Wild and Ebbers entitled *Rethinking Student Retention in Community Colleges*.

Tinto's 1993 book reported that attrition during the first year of college for full-time, first time students was holding steady at about 26.8% for 4-year schools and 47.9% for 2-year public schools. More recent data seems to support those rates of retention (ACT, 2003). Tinto went on to report that students who leave during the first year account for about 53.3% of all attrition for 4-year schools and 67.7% of all attrition for 2-year schools. Tinto reviewed the research literature on student attrition and concluded that there seem to be two types of student departure: 1) involuntary withdrawal (i.e., academic dismissal), which accounts for 15% - 25% of all institutional departures and 2) voluntary withdrawal, which accounts for the remaining 75% to 85% of student departure.

He went on to report that the research conducted on departure has identified several major causes that can be sorted into three groups 1) forces within the individual such as lacking a strong commitment to an educational or occupational goal; 2) negative experiences after arriving on campus which result in feeling isolated and not connected to any community on campus; or 3) the result of external forces in the student's life (i.e., families, work, finances).

Tinto's book lays out a model of student persistence (Appendix II). Tinto's model considers unique student attributes (intentions and commitments) in combination with on-campus experiences (academic and social integration) and external forces to explain why some students persist in college and some do not. SAGA adapted this model to conceptualize student retention and success at Lane Community College (Appendix III), and to help guide actions that are designed to improve student success and goal attainment.

The Wild and Ebbers article mentioned above outlined retention issues unique to community colleges. Among other things, it emphasized the importance of ensuring a common and accepted definition of student success and retention. SAGA spent considerable time discussing the appropriate definition of retention for Lane and finally concluded that this setting demands more than one definition because of the varied goals of students. In addition to earning a degree or certificate, examples of legitimate goals of Lane students are: achieving a GED, developing basic educational skills, transferring before degree completion, learning a second language, improving work skills, and participating in life-long education. Most of the research literature is focused on the goal of degree attainment as it has traditionally been viewed as the critical outcome for institutions of higher education and it is easily measured. Wild and Ebbers provided specific recommendations for developing institutional philosophy, processes, and procedures to improve student retention. The article was especially valuable because it provided concrete guidance for how a college could systematically improve its rate of student success by following a stepwise plan.

SAGA's literature review resulted in the emergence of six areas of best practice for supporting student success and retention. Those six best practice areas were:

1. First Year Experiences
2. Academic Advising
3. Learning Communities
4. Supplemental Instruction
5. Early Warning and Intervention Systems
6. Campus Climate/Supportive Learner Environment

Section III of this report will examine each of these best practices in depth by describing the best practice, recognizing efforts at Lane in the specific area, and identifying issues/needs/gaps in each area.

GOAL 3: Identify Lane baseline data evaluating how successful Lane students are at progressing towards and accomplishing their academic goals.

Description of goal:

Baseline data is required to understand how well Lane students are persisting, graduating, and meeting their educational goals and to provide a frame of reference for evaluating new services. Additionally, it is helpful to identify which practices we know are working.

Progress Made:

Upon returning from the COE conference in spring 2003, it was discovered that Lane's office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (IRAP) was planning two projects that could provide data to help satisfy this goal. First, in order to complete a TRiO grant proposal to the U.S. Department of Education, IRAP was planning to provide data by August 2004 that would focus on student success and retention. TRiO data would include comparisons of GPA, credits completed, persistence rates, and graduation rates between various groups of Lane degree and transfer-seeking students. The second project in which IRAP intended to participate was a League of Innovation data-pooling project that included several metrics related to student success and retention. IRAP planned to have Lane data prepared for that project by August 2003 and expected to have data from all participating schools by October 2004.

The section below highlights some baseline student success data from the TRiO grant proposal. We are not providing the Lane data IRAP contributed to the League data-pooling project because there is no comparison data available yet to help interpret it. In the data below, the "SSS-eligible" group can be conceptualized as a very good approximation of Lane Community College students in general since over half of Lane students are SSS-eligible.

Data from the TRiO Grant Proposal:

In order for the Department of Education (ED) to provide funding for a Student Support Services (SSS) program (like the TRiO program at Lane), a college must show significant need for the project. Need is determined by showing a high number and percentage of SSS-eligible students on campus, and by comparing the academic success of identified SSS-eligible students to another population of students. To be SSS-eligible a student must be seeking a degree or preparing to transfer, attending half-time or more, and must:

- ☐ Be a first generation college student
- ☐ Be low-income
- ☐ Have a disability

The recent TRiO grant document compared Lane's SSS-eligible students in general to the students actively participating in Lane's TRiO program (SSS-active). The results indicated that TRiO students performed better on all outcome measures related to retention and persistence, strongly suggesting the retention services provided in TRiO are effective.

Numbers of SSS-eligible at Lane: Between 1999-00 and 2002-03, Lane's total enrollment decreased 22% while the total transfer/degree-seeking student population increased by 33%. During the same period, the SSS-eligible population increased by 52%. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of Lane transfer/degree-seeking students, and SSS-eligible transfer/degree-seeking students enrolled each year and the rate of increase over 1999-2000

levels. In 2003-04, the numbers of transfer/degree-seeking and SSS-eligible students decreased to 6,335 (10%) and 4,206 (33%), respectively.

Table 1: Increase of SSS-eligible Compared to Transfer/Degree-seeking							
Transfer/Degree Seeking Students				SSS-eligible students			
99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
5,767	6,566	7,758	7,659	3,162	3,873	4,873	4,805
--	+14%	+35%	+33%	--	+22%	+54%	+52%
Percent Total SSS-eligible students:				55%	59%	63%	63%
Source: IRAP Trend data for transfer/degree-seeking students from 1999 to 2003							

GPA and Credits Completed: Grade point average (GPA) and percentage of credits completed are the Lane criteria for determining satisfactory academic progress, and are indicators of how students are advancing in their academic programs. Table 2 shows that TRiO students perform better than SSS-eligible students. Over the 4 years shown, a decreasing percentage of TRiO students have a low GPA and an increasing percentage have a high GPA, whereas the SSS-eligible population's GPA is fairly level across time. This trend suggests that the more experienced the TRiO staff becomes in assisting students, the better the outcome. The trend suggests that similar services made available to Lane students in general would have an increasing positive effect over time as well.

Table 2: GPA of SSS-eligible Compared to SSS-Active								
SSS-Active					SSS-eligible students			
	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
2.0 or less GPA	3.7%	1%	1.5%	0%	9%	7%	7.2%	6.5%
2.8 or greater GPA	77%	80%	83%	89%	67%	70%	69%	71%
Source: IRAP Cum GPA data at end of last term attended each year for transfer/degree-seeking students from 1999 to 2003								

In examining percentage of attempted credits completed, there are not major differences between the SSS-active and SSS-eligible groups, although the TRiO students performed slightly better. The credit completion data in Table 3 reflects an average over six-years of year-end data, rather than examining student performance at the end of each term (which is how student performance is evaluated for financial aid qualification at Lane). The data below indicates that over 11% of SSS-eligible and 8% of SSS-active students would be on probation or disqualified from Financial Aid. However, those percentages would likely be greater if end of term data were considered. Another important consideration is that the data reported in Table 3 reports a much higher credit completion rate than is reported in the 2002-03 Profile of Lane Community College (IRAP, 2004). That data indicated that in an average term, 30.7% of Lane credit students complete less than 50% of the credits they attempt and 13.3 complete none of their credits. The difference between IRAP's Profile of Lane Community College data and the data in Table 3 needs to be investigated but if the Profile data is accurate it suggests a strong need for intervention aimed at helping students successfully complete courses.

Table 3: Credits Completed of SSS-eligible Compared to SSS-Active		
	SSS-Active (6-yr average, 99-04)	SSS-eligible students (6-yr average, 99-04)
Completed less than 50% of credits	2.14%	3.88%

Completed 50% - 75% of credits	5.82%	7.35%
Completed greater than 75% of credits	92.05%	88.76%
Source: IRAP Credits completed data for transfer/degree-seeking students from 1999 to 2004		

Retention and graduation rates: Retention rates were examined in two different ways. First, by comparing year-to-year persistence of Lane's degree or transfer-seeking, credit students, enrolled more than half-time (a.k.a., the Base population) with SSS-eligible and the SSS-active groups. This comparison looked at which students were enrolled at the end of any given year, and did not consider how many terms or credits the students enrolled at Lane. The second way of examining retention rates compared cohorts of SSS-eligible and SSS-active students. The SSS-eligible cohort was new students in a given year and the SSS-active cohort were the new TRiO students in a given year. This examination method gives better information about persistence and drop-out rates because it only compares new students who have similar goals and who are enrolled half-time or more.

Neither the Base population nor the SSS-eligible students persist at the same rate as the SSS-active group. Table 4 shows the SSS-active group persisted at higher rates every year compared to the other two groups. Table 5 shows that of the fall 1999 cohort, 82% of the SSS active group persisted between the first and second year (were registered in at least one term during 2000-01), while only 67% of the SSS-eligible group persisted, and retention for the SSS active cohort continues to surpass the SSS-eligible. This data strongly suggests that academic support services like the ones offered by the TRiO program work at Lane Community College.

Table 4: Retention Rates Compared SSS Active to SSS-Eligible to Base Population Enrolled					
	1 st Yr 99-00	2 nd Yr 00-01	3 rd Yr 01-02	4 th Yr 02-03	5 th Yr 03-04
1999 SSS Active Enrolled	171	126	85	48	27
% Retained	100%	74%	50%	28%	16%
1999 SSS- Eligible Enrolled	3,058	1,884	1,067	650	415
% Retained	100%	62%	35%	21%	14%
1999 Base Population Enrolled	2,222	1,186	621	338	203
% Retained	100%	53%	28%	15%	9%
Source: IRAP: Persistence rates 1999-2004					

Table 5: Retention Rates Compared SSS Active to SSS-Eligible Cohort					
	1 st Yr 99-00	2 nd Yr 00-01	3 rd Yr 01-02	4 th Yr 02-03	5 th Yr 03-04
Fall 99 SSS Active Cohort	83	68	44	25	12
% Retained	100%	82%	53%	30%	14%
Fall 99 SSS- Eligible Cohort	1,468	989	684	408	230
% Retained	100%	67%	47%	28%	16%
Source: IRAP: Cohort retention rates 1999-2004					

Finally, the data in Table 6 clearly indicates that SSS participants graduate at much higher rates than the SSS-eligible group. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the SSS active cohort graduated in three years and 45% graduated in the five years between 1999 and 2004, whereas only 13% of the SSS-eligible group graduated within three years, and 21% within 5 years.

Table 6: Graduation Rates Compared SSS Active to SSS-Eligible Cohort					
	1 st Yr 99-00	2 nd Yr 00-01	3 rd Yr 01-02	4 th Yr 02-03	5 th Yr 03-04
Fall 99 SSS Active Cohort	7	8	6	8	8
% Graduated	8%	18%	25%	35%	45%
Fall 99 SSS- Eligible Cohort	14	75	105	70	43
% Graduated	1%	6%	13%	18%	21%
Source: IRAP: Cohort graduation rates 1999-2004.					
Note: Number of awards are not cumulative by year. The percentages are cumulative.					

The data above seems to overwhelmingly support the contention that academic support services like the ones provided in Lane's TRiO program are effective and result in considerable improvements on critical indicators of student success. However, due to the demands of the TRiO granting institution, the data is internally focused. While it clearly documents the potential of academic support services to help students, it does not help us develop a sense of Lane's overall performance at helping students compared to other institutions of higher education.

SAGA is hopeful that the League Benchmarking project will provide that information. The League data should allow us to compare Lane's indicators of performance to other specific League Colleges and/or to the averages of all other League Colleges. The Lane data IRAP

compiled for this project should also serve as a frame of reference for gauging Lane's future performance at supporting student success.

Student Satisfaction Data: IRAP conducts two different surveys to gather students' perceptions and levels of satisfaction: the ACT Survey of Student Opinion (conducted every two years), and the Student Follow-Up Survey (annual). The retention literature supports the importance of gathering student feedback. The level of satisfaction indicated by that data is very positive which is good. However, SAGA has some concern that the current satisfaction survey may under sample the non-persisting student. While we certainly empathize with how difficult it is to reach these students, we fear that satisfaction data that mainly samples students who have successfully completed many credits at Lane will not be representative of the level of satisfaction of the average student at Lane.

Unmet components of this goal:

Transfer to four-year universities is a major goal of many of the credit students enrolled at Lane. The 2002-03 Lane Profile indicates 52% of credit students report that transfer is the initial reason they enrolled (IRAP, 2004). Lane lacks accurate data about successful transfer of its students to four-year universities and schools mostly because transfer data is not readily available from the Oregon University System (OUS). This is a systemic problem where the resolution will come through increased collaboration of OUS, the Oregon Community College Unified Reporting System (OCCURS), and the National Student Clearinghouse (Clearinghouse).

The Clearinghouse provides degree and enrollment verification for student loan providers, employers and providers of student-based services, at no charge, however Enrollment Search, which allows schools to obtain up-to-date enrollment and degree records to assess student acquisition and retention performance, is a subscription service. The annual fee is based on fall enrollment (12¢ x headcount). In February 2004, OUS signed a multi-service agreement with the Clearinghouse. As a result of this agreement, Lane is currently unable to access university enrollment and degree records. OCCURS is negotiating a contract with the seventeen Oregon community colleges and Lane hopes to have accurate transfer data in the near future.

GOAL 4: Create a report with recommendations to guide the next steps for facilitating student success at Lane.
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Progress Made:

This report serves to meet this goal by summarizing the recent history of retention efforts at Lane, providing an evaluation of the state of student retention and success at Lane, and providing an in-depth update on the work of the SAGA committee during 2003-04. Rather than making recommendations for 2004-05 at this time, the SAGA committee decided to wait until this report was completed so that the committee could review it at its first meeting of 2004-05 (September 22nd, 2004) in order to have the benefit of the information in the report when setting recommendations and goals for 2004-05.

III. Exploration of Best Practices

Best Practice 1: First Year Experience (FYE)

Description:

College students are at greatest risk of dropping out and not completing college during their first year. Over half of college freshman in the U.S. will not move from freshman to sophomore status (Muraskin, 1997). At Lane, only about 60 percent of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students who were enrolled in fall 1998 were enrolled in fall 1999. Tinto (1993) explains that first year attrition can be explained in part as a function of whether students successfully adjust to college, socially and academically. There is clear indication throughout the retention literature that structured first year experiences and “front door” services are extremely important interventions to increase retention and success.

Structured first year experiences include such strategies as the following:

- Pre-admission and structured orientation programs
- Early learning assessment and mandated academic assistance (including mandatory course placement)
- Mandatory first year advising and counseling
- Intrusive monitoring and assessment of first-year academic progress
- Building community through group services
- Freshman seminars and courses that provide new students with the knowledge and skills needed for successful college performance
- Freshman year academic programs tailored to specific educational needs of new students
- Summer bridge programs
- Faculty and peer mentor programs
- Assigning the best teachers to first year courses

Examples of how best practice has been implemented at other institutions/programs:

There are many excellent examples of structured first year experiences across the U.S. in both two- and four- year schools. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement has highlighted some exemplary FYE practices in its 2003-04 newsletters. Some of those featured include the following.

- Skagit Valley College in Mount Vernon, Washington provides a number of retention strategies including a first year course called “Student’s Fast Track to College Success”, in which new students, especially those with low placement test scores, are strongly encouraged to participate. Another strategy is the “Peer Calling Campaign” with the purpose of connecting new students with peers. Four times each term, returning students make contact with new students to ask how they are doing and what they need.
- Muskingum Area Technical College in Zanesville, Ohio developed a strong Developmental Education Program and a required Orientation Course in response to retention rates that were lower than national averages. Since implementing the Orientation Course, retention rates from fall to fall have increased by 10 percent.

Services currently in place at Lane that reflect the FYE best practice:

- Early Orientation And Registration (EOAR)
- Library Orientation
- Transitions to Success
- Fast Lane to Success learning community
- Women Starting College Workshop

- Puertas Abiertas
- Puentes al Futuro
- College Success classes
- Effective Learning classes
- A GED transitions class coordinated by ABSE, ALS, and Tutoring that will begin Spring 2005

Needs/Gaps between the best practice and what is currently in place at Lane:

- Only minimal funding for EOAR
- EOAR is designed to only orient students to their academic programs and get them registered for their first term. It is not designed to orient them to the rest of the college experience.
- EOAR is not required.
- No minimum placement test score requirement to enroll in any courses except Math courses, some Writing courses, and some Professional Technical courses.
- Advising is not required for new students.
- Although Lane has College Success and Effective Learning courses, there are no systematic referral avenues to the courses.
- Few group services which can help facilitate social integration.
- Some of the procedures for placing students in developmental courses are confusing.
- Lack of required prerequisites for most Lane college-level courses.

Ideas for addressing the gaps:

- Implement the Noel-Levitz Retention Management System (RMS).
- Use the assessment data from the RMS to target at risk students and intervene with them to develop tailored success plans.
- Set minimum placement test scores or a prerequisite for more Lane courses.
- Require new students to participate in a First Year Seminar that could orient students to services, procedures, and policies at Lane, foster a social connection to other students, and would provide a personal connection to at least one instructor.
- Offering an orientation to Lane Community College class or workshop in the High Schools during Spring term for seniors considering enrolling at Lane fall term

Best Practice 2: Academic Advising

Description of Best Practice:

Academic advising is a developmental process that assists students to clarify their life/career goals and to develop educational plans for realizing those goals. It open conversation and information exchange with an advisor; it is ongoing, multi-faceted, and the responsibility of both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and program progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus services as necessary. Best practice academic advising programs are intrusive. In other words, they don't allow students to "opt out" of academic advising to choose their courses and develop their overall education plan on their own. The fundamental elements of intrusive advising include frequent feedback, accountability, and a caring relationship with the advisor (Thayer, 2000).

Examples of how best practice has been implemented at other institutions/programs:

The *Integrated Student Development Retention Model* at Columbus State Community College (Ohio) is a comprehensive retention program which was implemented in the spring of 1996. It emphasizes personalized advising for all students, many of whom are adults. The model makes good use of technology and coordinates efforts in a practical, yet theory-based approach. Faculty,

professional academic advisors, student leaders, and placement testing personnel are the key players involved.

Pre-enrollment services

Services prior to the start of classes include, but are not limited to:

- A welcome packet sent to all applicants with the name and phone number of their personal academic advisor. (Contact information is given again at registration.)
- A computerized placement test to assist with effective course selection is administered to all incoming students prior to registration.
- During registration, an explanation of, and encouragement to participate in, the advising system.
- Orientation including a college success skills workshop; overview of the college's academic programs; introduction to the personalized advising system; opportunity for students to meet their personal advisors at a pizza party.

Post-enrollment services

Services after enrollment include, but are not limited to:

- Initial meetings with advisors in which advisors introduce themselves as the student's personal advisor while attending Columbus State. Advisors encourage students to set up appointments as needed or at least once per quarter.
- Personal phone calls during the fourth week of class from a student leader serving in the Student Ambassador Tele-retention program. Student callers ask how things are going and if help is needed. Advisor contact information is given if students request help, and advisors are notified with a communication form.
- A Freshmen Seminar course for freshmen interested in transferring to a four-year school and a College Success Skills class that has traditionally targeted students in developmental English and Math classes.
- Restricted registration for the next quarter for students who drop below a 2.0 GPA until they meet with their academic advisors.
- Counseling Center-related programs including and open house; SOAR (Student Organization for Adult Re-entry) for adult students; Sister Friend for African-American women, Project Brotherhood for African-American men, As We Are for women; and workshops covering topics ranging from text anxiety to self-esteem.
- Programs for students planning to transfer to a four-year college, including a college fair for transfer students and advisor liaisons to clarify transfer policies and procedures to area institutions.
- A longitudinal database maintained in conjunction with the Office of Research and Planning to track enrollment patterns and use of services.

Favorable outcomes

The college's new student fall-to-winter retention rate climbed 15 percentage points to 78 percent. In addition, a post-implementation study revealed a significant difference in retention rates for students seen or not seen by an advisor. The college also saw the success rate improve for students placed on academic probation.

Services currently in place at Lane that reflect this best practice:

- New Student Information Sessions
- Some advising available in Spanish
- College CORE Connections
- Transitions Advisor in Women's program
- Student Orientation web page
- TRiO intrusive advising model
- Disability Services Advising

- Innovative advising team model in place in Counseling & Advising (O'Bannion model)
- Weekly Advising Seminar to keep Lane advisors up-to-date

Needs/Gaps between the best practice and what is currently in place at Lane:

- Attending orientations to academic programs is not required before declaring a program/major
- No required academic advising except for students in the TRiO program and student athletes
- Instructors report that the current "Writing" test is not an effective assessment of student's writing skills

Ideas for addressing the gap:

- Require all new Lane students meet with an advisor prior to registering for classes.
- Require orientation sessions
- Assess the predictive validity of Lane's placement tests and replace those with validity coefficients that are not high enough.
- Require academic advising before students on probation can register.

Best Practice 3: Learning Communities (LC)

Description:

Vincent Tinto (2003) asserts that the success of institutional retention efforts is based on the institution's capacity to collaboratively construct educational settings that actively engage all students in learning. Learning Communities (LC) are an effort to actively involve students in learning. LC are designed to change the manner in which students experience curriculum and the way they are taught. LC's promote shared, collaborative learning experiences among students across linked classes. It requires students to work together in groups and become responsible for their own and others' learning.

Examples of how this best practice has been implemented at other institutions/programs:

Skagit Valley College in Washington requires collaborative, integrative coursework to achieve a transfer or professional/technical degree (CCSSE, 2004). Interdisciplinary, thematic learning communities are an additional requirement for the transfer degree. Degree-seeking students must take college-level English composition linked with another discipline. Students are encouraged to complete collaborative courses during their first year at the college.

Services currently in place at Lane that reflect this best practice:

- Many Lane Learning Communities
- Lane LC Leadership Team
- 5+ yr history of offering learning communities
- SAGA initiated First Year Experience LC, *Fast Lane to Success* which links a college success and effective learning class

Needs/Gaps between the best practice and what is currently in place at Lane:

- Although Lane offers a number of excellent LCs, sometimes they are cancelled, or the courses are unlinked because of insufficient enrollment. This may indicate a need to better inform students and staff about the benefits of LCs.

Ideas for addressing the gap:

- Inform/educate Lane staff about the value of LCs for student learning.
- Advise students to enroll in LCs to deepen learning.
- Explore possibility of requiring an LC for students prior to graduation.

- Create an incentive for instructors to teach a LC

Best Practice 4: Supplemental Instruction (SI)

Description:

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic assistance program that utilizes regularly scheduled peer- or tutor-led study sessions specifically linked to targeted, high-risk courses. The purpose of SI is to improve grades and reduce attrition in these historically difficult classes. The SI leaders attend the targeted courses, and then work with students outside class in small groups to integrate the course content and to develop learning strategies.

Examples of how best practice has been implemented at other institutions/programs:

SI was created at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) in 1973. It is a proven practice that has been named an Exemplary Educational Program by the U.S. Department of Education. UMKC continues to use supplemental instruction in many of its “gatekeeper” courses. Faculty and staff from hundreds of institutions across the nation have received training from UMKC to implement their own SI programs.

Services currently in place at Lane that reflect this best practice:

- EL 113 Content Specific Study Skills
- Campus-wide tutoring resources including study groups in Math and Science
- Women in Transition required discussion groups
- Library and Information Research class
- Women's Studies Discussion groups

Needs/Gaps between the best practice and what is currently in place at Lane

- There are no pure SI services currently at Lane. There is tutoring but it lacks the formal “link” to the targeted “gatekeeper” class.
- There are many historically difficult classes that might clearly be appropriate for SI.

Ideas for addressing the gaps:

- Identify 2 or 3 “gatekeeper” courses at Lane and pilot SI.

Best Practice 5: Early Alert and Intervention System

Description:

An effective early alert system detects students who are having academic or personal problems before they begin to fail and responds with interventions customized to address each student’s unique needs. David Crockett, senior vice president of Noel-Levitz, says there are two important goals of an effective Early Alert/Warning System. 1) To identify in advance of enrollment, “high-risk” or drop-out prone students who could benefit from institutional intervention; and 2) to identify enrolled students as they begin to experience academic or personal problems that may be reduced through institutional intervention.

Dr. Crockett (2003) identified some critical components to an effective Early Alert/Warning system. These included:

- Placement test scores
- Assessment of academic risk factors
- Assessment of social and psychological risk factors
- Tracking GPA

- Tracking course completion rates
- Tracking attendance
- Tracking mid-term grades

Best practice Early Alert and Intervention Systems in place at other institutions/programs:

Muskingum Area Technical College (MATC) in Zanesville, OH utilized a \$450,000 Title III grant to initiate (among other things) an assessment and placement testing program via a “Tech Learning Center (TLC)”. The college used the Noel Levitz Retention Management Program to enable them to identify high-risk students before they began classes at the College. Counselors and advisors from Muskingum then initiated meetings with high-risk students to help them develop tailored plans for success. The plans often included developmental courses or tutoring to increase their chances of academic success.

Instructors at MATC sent written intervention referrals to counselors and advisors when they were concerned about a student’s attendance or academic progress. The instructors received written updates after the counselor or advisor met with the student.

Services currently in place at Lane that reflect this best practice:

For the past three years, Lane’s TRiO program has had an early alert program in place. A TRiO advisor has a one-on-one interview with all new TRiO students before their first term. In the interview the advisor and the student work collaboratively to begin identifying any areas where the student would likely benefit from help. Additionally, during 2002-03 about half-way through each term, TRiO contacted instructors with TRiO students in their classes to inquire about how the student was doing. If the student was doing poorly, TRiO, the instructor, and the student worked together to design interventions to help the student improve academic performance.

The TRiO program’s individual interviews and mid-term grade checks do qualify as examples of the best practice because they are designed to detect academic problems before students have received poor grades and they include an intervention component.

The Athletic Department does grade checks at the 3rd, 6th, and 9th weeks for its athletes as well but we do not have more details about the logistics of their early warning system.

Student Financial Services (SFS) and Enrollment Services (ES) each have “Academic Warning Systems” that assign a “status” to students based on academic performance (i.e., GPA and course completion rate, see Appendices V and VI). The systems are independent of each other. In other words, a given student at any one time has two statuses, one with each system. The criteria used to determine their statuses are different in each system and the SFS criteria demand better academic performance for “good” standing than the ES criteria. Students report that having two independent statuses with the College is confusing.

At the beginning of 2003-04, SFS revised the criteria it uses to calculate student status. The new method utilizes only academic performance data for the most recent two terms to determine student status. A student may move from the “good” status to a “probation” status in one term with a warning to improve and a suggestion to see an advisor or counselor. A second consecutive term of probationary status results in disqualification from financial aid. If academic performance is poor enough, a student can move from the “good” status to the “ineligible” status for financial aid in just one term, with no interim probationary status or opportunity for intervention plan. While it may have been effective in decreasing the default rate, it appears to have resulted in a higher financial aid disqualification rate in 2003-04. The SFS system is not directly coordinated with any assistance to students who perform poorly and does not provide an “early alert” to students before the consequences of the system are imposed.

Using ES’s current system for calculating student status, the fastest a student can become

ineligible to take courses at Lane is 4 terms. (see Appendix VI). However, the ES system is based on cumulative GPA and cumulative credits earned, so it is possible that students can have several terms of poor academic performance with no notification. By the time the notification occurs, it may be too late to get the student back to solid academic progress.

Neither the SFS status system nor the ES status system qualify as an example of a best practice early alert system because they are not early (i.e., the poor academic performance has already occurred).

Assuming we continue with two independent systems of calculating student status, SAGA believes the ES standard should be higher in order to get students' attention and provide assistance well before they are at risk of losing their financial aid.

Needs/Gaps between the best practice and what is currently in place at lane:

- Lack of adequate assessment of new students before registration. We do not assess new students beyond using placement test scores to determine very basic academic preparedness
- Except for a few specific groups of students (TRiO, student athletes), there is a lack of regular and intrusive monitoring of academic performance.
- SFS and ES Academic Warning systems are not closely coordinated with any intervention plans designed to help students improve their future academic performance (to their credit, both systems do provide a suggestion in a letter that students meet with a counselor or advisor but there really is not coordination between the warning and the intervention).

Ideas for addressing the gap:

- In 2004-05, TRiO will administer the Noel-Levitz Retention Management Program (RMS) to new TRiO students to help identify those who are especially at risk of attrition and to identify the areas where the students are most likely to benefit from support services.
- Explore the feasibility of utilizing the Noel-Levitz (RMS) to assess students on a wider basis (i.e., all new students, targeted groups of students beyond TRiO students).
- Develop a better and more broadly implemented system of utilizing placement test scores as predictors of academic difficulty and design a plan to provide more systematic early intervention and course placement.
- Align the Enrollment Services and Financial Aid warning systems to be consistent, early, and have interventions attached.
- Develop a systematic and prescribed continuum of interventions for students to help them return to successful academic progress as soon as possible.

Best Practice 6: Campus Climate/Supportive Learner Environment

Description of Best Practice: The institutional climate and quality of service are critical and integral elements in retention practices (Crockett, 2003). A key retention fundamental is providing a student-friendly, customer-oriented learning environment. Institutional policies and procedures that affect students should be created with the primary consideration being what is best for students. Because there is a strong correlation between student satisfaction and persistence, improving student success should begin with evaluating and improving the institution's service systems, policies, and processes in order to develop a supportive, learner-centered environment.

Some of the common higher education systems that often need focused assessment and attention include:

- Admissions and registration
- Financial aid
- Quality of teaching
- Advising and counseling
- Academic support services
- Library
- Food service
- Building and grounds
- Safety/security
- Bookstore
- Health services
- Information technology
- Student life programs

Examples of how best practice has been implemented at other institutions/programs:

Loyola University in New Orleans implemented a successful, broad-based retention initiative that involved a 120-member task force. The Task Force on Student Success and Retention consisted of faculty, staff, managers, students, and alumni. The overarching goal was to plan and lead a cultural transformation of the campus making student success the top priority. The Task Force was divided into ten workgroups:

- Instructional effectiveness
- Academic advising
- Academic support and career development
- Campus diversity
- Freshman experience
- Post Baccalaureate programs
- Student life and campus traditions
- Campus services
- Alumni affairs and public relations
- Recruitment and financial aid

The role of each workgroup was to examine institutional data related to its area, and develop action plans to enhance student life and learning. Numerous enhancements were made which resulted in significant increases in persistence and graduation rates.

Services currently in place at Lane that reflect this best practice:

- Lane's IRAP periodically administers the ACT Student Opinion Survey which has generated useful data.
- Strategic Learning Initiative (SLI)
- Center for Innovation, Connection and Learning (CICL)
- Diversity Plan and Coordinator
- Diversity Training
- Learning-Centered College principles
- Strategic Directions, especially the directions to enhance the college climate and to build an infrastructure that mainstreams innovation
- SAGA

Needs/Gaps between the best practice and what is currently in place at lane:

Although Lane has some effective services and practices in place that serve students well, it is important to regularly assess the current Lane systems, policies and procedures to ensure they are learner-centered and customer-oriented.

Many colleges and universities across the country have begun routinely engaging in formal assessment by an external group to gauge how they are doing at serving students and promoting academic success. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is an instrument that is getting national attention for the valuable student success data it generates and the availability of national benchmarks.

The CCSSE generates a “Retention Index” for each institution to gauge its overall performance. The retention index is an additive value that combines a college’s scores in three key areas of student engagement: 1) *active and collaborative learning*, 2) *student-faculty interaction*, and 3) *support for learners*. All three of these categories comprise items from CCSSE’s survey instrument, The Community College Student Report.

The following are the type of CCSSE items that make up first key area: *active and collaborative learning*:

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Worked with student on projects during class
- Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)
- Participated in a community-based project as a part of a regular course

The following are the type of CCSSE items that make up first key area: *student-faculty interaction*:

- Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors
- Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework

The following are the type of CCSSE items that make up first key area: *support for learners*:

- Providing the support you need to help you succeed at this college
- Helping you cope with your nonacademic responsibilities
- Providing the support you need to thrive socially
- Providing the financial support you need to afford your education
- Academic advising (students are asked to indicate frequency of use).

The policy of systematically engaging in objective formal assessment allows an institution to quickly identify problem areas and make changes to address the problems. It is based on student feedback and is administered by an external organization to maximize the integrity of the data. SAGA believes that the CCSSE is superior to the ACT because its focus is student retention and the CCSSE provides a numerical Retention Index that provides an overall institution rating. The Retention Index would facilitate an evaluation of how well Lane as a whole does at promoting student success over time and would provide a means by which we could directly compare the rating of Lane’s retention services to national benchmarks.

Ideas for addressing the gap:

- Begin administering the CCSSE on a regular cycle and make it a College goal to improve our Retention Index score on each future administration.
- Establish a higher expectation for customer service from Student Services and Instructional units alike and effectively intervene where improved unit performance has the most potential to enhance student success.
- Earmark money in the budget for initiatives based on proven best practices like the examples above

IV. Summary

Colleges that effectively assist students in achieving their goals have the following components in place (Crockett, 2003):

- have retention plans
- have someone responsible and accountable for implementing retention strategies
- have a recurring budget for retention efforts
- regularly analyze retention-related strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- collect retention data by student category
- have faculty involvement in retention strategies
- regularly assess how they are doing at retaining students
- are learner-centered
- conduct student evaluations and student satisfaction surveys

It is important that SAGA consider these components as it moves forward in planning its goals for the short- and longer-term.

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