

STAY@FAU

OFFICE OF STUDENT RETENTION NEWSLETTER

WHAT IS STUDENT RETENTION?

Retention is a University-wide initiative to ensure that all students have ample opportunity to complete a degree at Florida Atlantic University. The Office of Student Retention was created to coordinate activities between academic and student affairs divisions; support and monitor students' academic progress; coordinate with academic advisement units; provide referrals to campus resources and support services; and coordinate programs that foster the academic success of students. These efforts have been established in order to retain a greater percentage of students through the completion of the baccalaureate degree.

ABOUT THE OFFICE

The Office of Student Retention is located in the University Center, Room 156-A, on the Boca Raton campus. Jennifer Bebergal, acting director of retention, has been with the University for over five years, helping to recruit students and acclimate them to FAU. Now she is continuing her dedication to these students as she helps to ensure their success at the University. Linda Schmall (executive secretary) and Ashley Melvin (program assistant) are working with Jennifer to enhance some of the exciting

new initiatives that the office is implementing.

The retention director also administers the newly reorganized undergraduate orientation programs at FAU, which are coordinated by David Hampton. David oversees two student orientation and retention counselors, Carole Pfeffer and Lenny Marine, and a staff of student orientation leaders.

RETENTION COMMITTEE

The University Retention Committee, chaired by Jennifer Bebergal, is composed of students, faculty and staff from throughout the University. The committee, originally chaired by Sharron Ronco, has made several recommendations for student retention, and was the driving force behind the creation of an office and a full-time position dedicated to the University's retention efforts. Currently, the committee is finalizing an action plan that will be presented to the President and his Executive Committee for approval and adoption as a University-wide Retention Plan in early spring.

SLS COURSE UPDATE

One of the key initiatives of the Retention Committee has been to mandate that all new freshmen take the one-credit introduction to academic life course, "Learning Strategies and Human Development,"

SLS 1501. Currently, students in the Honors College, students in the SOAR program and student athletes are required to take the course. The Retention Committee has recommended that the course be made mandatory, in order to ensure that all freshmen are given the tools they need to persist at FAU. The University is hoping to make the course mandatory within the next several years, as issues of classroom space and need for additional instructors are worked out. The new residence hall currently under construction will have a classroom dedicated to the SLS course to help in those efforts.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS & SURVEYS

The Office of Retention is coordinating student focus groups in order to get valuable student input on a variety of campus issues. These focus groups give FAU students the opportunity to share their University experiences with key administrators, as the University evaluates and makes plans to enhance the student experience. Student groups will be contacted so that a variety of target populations will have their voices heard. Groups that have already met include students with disabilities and student athletes. Upcoming focus groups will include residential students, commuter students,

and non-traditional and transfer students, Broward campus students, Northern campus students, Honors College students, and students within specific majors/academic colleges.

Data from these focus groups are transcribed and information will be extracted to assist areas indicated as possible barriers to student success. This data will be complemented by information being collected through surveys of other student populations. The Retention Office is currently conducting phone surveys of students who have withdrawn from all of their courses for the fall semester, and will be contacting students who left the University prior to earning their baccalaureate degree. This information will form a more complete picture as to what FAU can do to enhance student persistence.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: FAU ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

In each issue of STAY@FAU, a particular office or service that works to improve student retention rates will be highlighted. A few of the highlights you can find in future editions include a focus on mentoring and tutoring programs, career and personal counseling, financial aid, residential life, and student development and activities.

One of the keys for a successful retention program is providing students with a comprehensive orientation to the University. Orientation at FAU is mandatory for all new degree-seeking, first baccalaureate students. The Office of Student Orientation works to coordinate consistent orientation programs that meet the needs of our students across all campuses. Transfer Orientations provide students with information specific to FAU and to their new campus, with the understanding that they have already been successful at another institution. Due to the time constraints of so many of our transfer students, we try to provide as many services as possible in a short period of time. This one-stop shopping atmosphere has been greatly appreciated by these students.

While transfer students attend a half-day program on the

Boca Raton campus, freshmen are invited to participate in two-day orientation programs during the summer. These programs are student-led and organized into small group sessions to help students develop a connection to FAU. In addition to three meetings with a student orientation leader, freshmen choose sessions that meet their specific interests and needs: from library workshops to "money matters," "getting involved" and "planning for the future." As with the transfer program, the orientation culminates with the opportunity for students to meet with an advisor and register for classes.

Orientation at FAU is taking on a more personal feel these days. Students receive a confirmation letter for their session, which welcomes them by name and tells them of any registration holds they may have. This allows them to clear up holds prior to orientation. Small group sessions at the freshman orientations make students feel at home at FAU. A few days after the program, each freshman receives a personal, hand-written letter from his or her student orientation leader, to reinforce the community aspect of FAU and to provide a connection to that community.

Another exciting enhancement to the orientation program this year was the creation of a comprehensive parent program. Involving parents in their students' education is essential. Research shows that students who have greater parental involvement have a greater rate of success and persistence in college. Parents attend sessions with their sons and daughters to learn about available resources, and are separated at times to learn about issues such as "Letting Go" and "Parents as Partners" in their child's success.

We haven't stopped here. Next, we are working to develop a "virtual orientation" for our transfer students who find it difficult to attend a traditional orientation program. Students will be able to "attend" orientation from the comfort and convenience of their own homes, while learning about important policies and resources that are available. Once they complete the on-line program, they will get contact information for their academic advisor and registration information. We expect to have the virtual orientation online for Fall 2001, with the advent of web-registration.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Another regular feature of STAY@FAU is the "how can I help" section. A question we often hear in the Office of Retention is "What can I do as a member of the FAU community to enhance student satisfaction and retention?" Each newsletter will give tips for faculty and staff – little things that you can do to help to retain students. Issues will include friendly student service throughout the University, making student referrals and awareness of services, time and availability of student services, and increasing FAU spirit.

The "how can I help" tip for our first issue is for each of you to read everything that you can about FAU. The more you know, the better prepared you are to refer students and help them to succeed. Nothing frustrates students more than being given "the run-around." Having accurate information and sharing it with a student can truly help that student reach his or her educational goals.

STAY@FAU, the University's Retention newsletter, will be published semi-annually.

Future issues will go in-depth with some of the key services that enhance student persistence, analyze findings from student focus groups and surveys, and explain how YOU can help increase the retention rates of our students.

