

Strategies to Improve Graduation and Retention Rates

Florida Atlantic University Admission & Retention Committee  
April 2014

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY ADMISSION AND RETENTION COMMITTEE**

The Admission and Retention Committee of Florida Atlantic University is empowered to consider undergraduate admissions appeals for hardship and special talent exceptions, and recommend action to the Director of Admissions. It shall also consider and recommend to the UFS policies and procedures relating to undergraduate admission, retention and recruitment.

The Admission and Retention Committee consists of one faculty member from each FAU college and a large number of ex-officio, non-voting member including the Associate Provost for e-Learning, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, the Director of Undergraduate Admissions, and the Assistant Dean of Retention and Academic Support, to name just a few.

The current voting members of the Admission and Retention Committee are

Pat Darlington	Dorothy Schmidt College of Arts and Letters
Sharon Dormire	College of Nursing
Veljko Dragojlovic	Honors College
Evangelos Kaisar	College of Engineering and Computer Science
Barry Linger	Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine
Richard Mangan	College for Design and Social Inquiry
Philomena Marincaccio	College of Education
Evonne Rezler	College of Science
Rupert Rhodd	College of Business (Chair)

## CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Table 1 shows the retention rates for FTIC students that entered in the fall of 2007. Six year later in 2013, 39.4% graduated from FAU, while 6.6% transferred to and graduated from another university in the State System. Table 1 also indicates that 10.8% of these students were still at FAU (Persist) trying to complete their degree and 40.6% left FAU during this 6 year period.

Table 2 shows that FAU's graduation rate during this period was next to the bottom in the State University System (list of 10 state universities), just one percentage point higher than FAMU.

**Table 1: Florida Atlantic University Six Year Retention Rates  
First Time in College Students (FTIC)**

<b>Outcomes Through 6 Years</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>	<b>2007-13</b>
<b>Graduate @ FAU</b>	37.5	35.2	40.5	41.0	39.8	39.4
<b>Graduate @ other SUS Institution</b>	6.9	6.7	7.0	6.9	7.3	6.6
<b>Persist</b>	10.3	10.1	9.4	10.1	11.1	10.8
<b>Transfer to other SUS</b>	2.7	3.0	2.1	2.5	2.2	2.6
<b>Leave</b>	43.5	45.1	42.5	40.5	39.6	40.6

Table 2: FAU's Graduation Rate compared to other Universities in the SUS

<b>FTIC Graduation Rates - 6 Year</b>					
<b>Comparison Group</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>
<b>SUS</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>61%</b>
FAMU	41%	40%	41%	40%	39%
<b>FAU</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>40%</b>
FGCU	40%	45%	45%	44%	43%
FIU	47%	45%	44%	41%	47%
FSU	69%	71%	73%	74%	75%
NCF	63%	60%	68%	68%	69%
UCF	63%	63%	63%	62%	65%
UF	81%	82%	84%	83%	85%
UNF	45%	49%	46%	49%	47%
USF	47%	47%	52%	52%	56%
UWF	42%	43%	46%	46%	44%

The retention rates for individual colleges at Florida Atlantic University are shown in Tables 3 to 7 below. Even before 2013, colleges and departments at Florida Atlantic University had initiated strategies to improve retention and graduation rates. Some of these policies are summarized by college on pages 6 to 10.

The objective of this report is to recommend broad university-wide policies based on faculty input, to improve retention and graduation rates. As expected, the recommendations will be “faculty-centered”.

**Table 3: College Comparison of Gradation Rates at FAU after 6 Years**

<b>Graduate @ FAU After 6 Year</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>	<b>2007-13</b>
<b>Arts &amp; Letters</b>	44.8	34.9	43.2	40.0	49.2	41.7
<b>College of Business</b>	42.1	34.0	44.5	44.5	34.1	37.9
<b>College of Education</b>	43.1	44.6	48.0	44.0	51.0	47.1
<b>College of Engineering &amp; Computer Science</b>	27.6	33.3	37.9	36.7	35.3	38.0
<b>College of Nursing</b>	34.9	27.8	28.5	27.8	30.8	26.1
<b>College of Science</b>	41.4	36.7	38.9	46.2	43.9	43.0
<b>Honors College</b>	46.3	55.2	61.1	56.5	62.2	69.9
<b>College For Design &amp; Social Inquiry</b>	41.3	35.7	45.7	46.7	42.0	41.2

**Table 4: College Comparison of Graduate @ other SUS Institution after 6 Years**

<b>Graduate @ other SUS Institution at 6 Years</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>	<b>2007-13</b>
<b>Arts &amp; Letters</b>	6.0	6.2	6.4	6.6	9.0	6.2
<b>College of Business</b>	7.0	7.4	6.8	5.2	9.6	7.6
<b>College of Education</b>	6.0	5.4	6.6	8.2	4.8	8.8
<b>College of Engineering &amp; Computer Science</b>	5.3	4.9	6.3	4.8	4.2	4.4
<b>College of Nursing</b>	4.0	6.5	9.3	6.3	4.3	3.5
<b>College of Science</b>	5.8	5.5	6.0	7.2	3.8	5.3
<b>Honors College</b>	11.3	13.6	8.8	15.2	16.2	4.3
<b>College For Design &amp; Social Inquiry</b>	6.3	5.5	2.9	6.0	5.3	6.0

**Table 5: College Comparison of Students Persisting at FAU after 6 Years**

<b>Persist at 6 years</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>	<b>2007-13</b>
Arts & Letters	12.0	8.5	7.9	13.8	12.0	10.2
College of Business	8.7	7.8	10.0	10.0	10.3	12.1
College of Education	11.7	12.4	9.3	11.0	13.3	7.8
College of Engineering & Computer Science	17.3	14.2	14.0	14.8	12.7	16.9
College of Nursing	6.0	9.5	9.3	8.7	10.3	7.7
College of Science	11.4	14.6	12.3	9.4	13.4	13.2
Honors College	10.0	3.2	6.2	6.5	-	3.2
College For Design & Social Inquiry	10.6	9.3	8.2	8.0	15.5	9.4

**Table 6: College Comparison of FAU Students who transferred to other SUS at 6 Years**

<b>Transfer to other SUS at 6 Years</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>	<b>2007-13</b>
Arts & Letters	1.8	3.7	2.1	2.1	1.1	1.9
College of Business	3.1	2.5	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.8
College of Education	0.8	3.0	0.9	2.2	1.4	2.5
College of Engineering & Computer Science	3.2	2.4	2.2	3.1	4.7	2.0
College of Nursing	4.0	3.0	1.2	2.4	1.7	6.3
College of Science	3.3	3.6	2.1	2.5	2.1	2.4
Honors College	2.5	2.4	-	1.1	0.9	-
College For Design & Social Inquiry	1.6	2.2	3.8	3.0	3.5	3.0

**Table 7: College Comparison of FAU Students Leave during the 6 year period**

<b>Leave at 6 years</b>	<b>2002-08</b>	<b>2003-09</b>	<b>2004-10</b>	<b>2005-11</b>	<b>2006-12</b>	<b>2007-13</b>
Arts & Letters	35.4	46.7	40.4	37.4	28.7	40.0
College of Business	39.0	48.4	37.6	38.9	44.7	38.8
College of Education	38.3	34.7	35.2	35.0	29.9	33.8
College of Engineering & Computer Science	46.8	45.1	39.9	40.6	42.8	38.6
College of Nursing	51.0	53.3	51.7	54.8	53.0	56.3
College of Science	38.1	39.6	41.0	34.7	36.7	36.1
Honors College	28.8	25.6	20.4	21.7	21.6	19.4
College For Design & Social Inquiry	40.2	47.3	39.4	36.5	34.1	40.3

## **SUMMARY OF RETENTION INITIATIVES**

### **COLLEGE OF BUSINESS**

1. Competency exam to determine student readiness (School of Accounting)
2. Peer Advising Program (School of Accounting in partnership with College of Business Student Academic Services)
3. Tutoring for at-risk students (Economics Department - tutoring sessions given by the teaching assistants for students experiencing difficulties in their courses)
4. Increased use of web-assisted courses (Management - Online tools such as Blackboard provide functionality that enhances the capacity of the faculty to support students)
5. Increased Mentoring of Students (Hospitality Management and Health Administration)
  - More focus on the internship placement process and experience, and career development
  - Ongoing sponsorship of competitive events that showcase student excellence.
  - Matching students with field experience opportunities.
6. Chairs' review of student performance in critical pre-requisite courses and the Implementation of CONNECT to monitor student performance (Ex. Finance Department) CONNECT provides an "at risk student report" that the instructor uses to track the level of students
7. More training for advisors. All advisors in the College of Business are given the opportunity to attend the national conference for advisors (NACADA) once every two years.

### **COLLEGE FOR DESIGN AND SOCIAL INQUIRY**

A discussion of the goals that the Faculty Senate Committee on Admissions and Retention were trying to achieve were discussed at the College Chairs meeting conducted by Dean Carter as well as at a college-wide faculty meeting and at faculty meetings conducted by the representative schools within CDSI.

"At Risk" students were viewed to be in two categories:

- a) At risk due to poor academic performance
- b) At risk due to problems relating to finances, issues at home etc. keeping them from continuing registration.

Initiatives undertaken include:

1. Hiring more advising staff whose focus will be on student success
2. Placing advising/registration hold on CDSI students with GPA below 2.2. After meeting with an advisor and faculty a "game plan" for improved academic success is mapped out.
3. More focus on retention through increased communication with the Registrar. The CDSI Dean will request from the Registrar approximately a month after the start of each semester, a list by major of all CDSI students who failed to register for classes for that term. Those names will then be sent to the program coordinators who will reach out to those students to determine why they failed to register for classes.
4. Increased involvement of CDSI faculty with advising and retention.
5. Addition of the paragraph below to the syllabus of all faculty and adjuncts in CDSI

**Dear students:**

***If you attend this class regularly, take good notes, and read the assignments, you should succeed. If you are having problems understanding lectures, reading assignments, or having difficulty with exams or quizzes, please see your instructor during office hours or contact your instructor via e-mail. It is imperative that you contact your professor early in the term if you are having problems with this course. Do not wait until the end of the term to seek assistance. If you need individualized help or tutoring in reading, writing, taking notes, or other academic issues, please see one of the help centers listed below:***

**UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN WRITING**

<http://www.fau.edu/UCEW/WC/>

**LEARNING COMMUNITY**

<http://www.fau.edu/class/LearningCommunity/>

**TUTORING, STUDY HELP, & ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

<http://www.fau.edu/ctl/TutoringStudyHelpAndAcademicSupportStudentResources.php>

**CENTER FOR LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

<http://www.fau.edu/CLASS/>

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

<http://www.fau.edu/cdc/>

**STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

<http://www.fau.edu/sil/>

**If you are having personal problems and need guidance or help, please contact one of the centers listed below:**

**OFFICE OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

<http://www.fau.edu/wellness/index.php>

<http://www.fau.edu/wellness/staff.php>

**CHARLES E SCHMIDT COLLEGE OF SCIENCE (CESCoS)**

1. ***“Project Graduation”***, a college-level intervention, initiated at the end of the summer 2013 semester, requires CESCoS advisors to meet with students on academic probation on a one-on-one advising, at least once every semester. Advisors explain the student’s academic status, chart and plan their progress toward their degree, address issues about course sequence and selection, and outline all other resources available to them.

2. ***“Back on Track”***, another college-level intervention that targets suspended students, was piloted in Summer 2013 semester and is now a formalized advising-based intervention program in the CESCOs. Suspended students are required to attend mandatory **weekly** advising, until they are academically readmitted. The advising session focuses on developing appropriate level of study skills, and finding appropriate alternatives to their current major
3. ***Advising intervention for all students (in all majors) in the CESCOs.***
4. ***Revision of course schedule*** to remove scheduling road blocks within any given major or program. This entails scheduling more sessions of high-demand courses, and increasing the variety of course electives within many
5. ***Catering to High-achievers through honors compacts and DIS research:*** For high-achieving science majors CESCOs currently offer honors compacts in a variety of courses, as well as undergraduate research opportunities through the DIS program.
6. ***Ideas under discussion at the Department and College-Level*** include encouraging students to declare their major as early as their freshmen year. CESCOs is formulating the creation of a variety of second semester freshman courses called: *Current Issues in X Discipline*, where **X** is Biology or Chemistry or Geology or Mathematics or Physics etc. Each course would be taught by a team of faculty from that discipline and would cover the “hot and current topics” in that discipline. It is anticipated that students would benefit by taking these a courses early in their academic careers to help them identify their scientific interests and potential strengths sooner. Ultimately, student success and timely progress within a science major would likely be enhanced.

## **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (COE)**

The College of Education recommends using seminal and current education theory for creating instructor/professor training that embraces culturally and linguistically diverse learners. The retention issue and growing diversity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century student population are closely aligned and reciprocal. Educators need to recognize the cumulative wealth of experience and abundant expertise that professors in the COE can bring to studying this important issue. It should be further recognized that myriad linguistically and culturally diverse students are not succeeding because of being marginalized by many current teaching practices and assessments (i.e., deficit and difference interventions). Globalization and the internet are creating a growing need for recognition of multiliteracies and communicating meaning through multimodalities in the classroom. FAU could also dramatically increase our admission rates if we embrace the diversity reflected by the student population of our surrounding communities (i.e., the student body of the 6th largest school district is in Broward County). We need to recognize cultural pluralism in the classroom and integrate rather than assimilate students into our institution.

1. Increased faculty involvement in student learning outside the classroom
  - a. The first FAU faculty-in-residence is a COE faculty member.



- b. Five COE professors are participants in a Faculty Learning Community to investigate *Best Practices in Interdisciplinary Co-Teaching*. This group is currently creating a web site for interdisciplinary studies at FAU
  - c. Two COE professors are leading leadership reading circles (Boca and Davie).
  - d. Phone calls by faculty to students who are close to graduation
- 2. Added note to syllabus about Student Success similar to that of the School of Criminology & Criminal Justice.
- 3. Utilizing developmental advising (transitioning students).
- 4. Efforts to secure funds to assist students with the cost of the FTCE exams especially the Math GK
  - a. COE no longer has a math tutor on the Davie campus
  - b. The GK Math Review that FAU offers is expensive and only offered in Boca
  - c. The timing of the free Broward GK workshops does not coincide with the COE deadlines.
- 5. Strengthening of FAU's and COE's relationship with State Colleges (Middle School STEM grant).
- 6. Strengthening of the relationships with public schools and district administrators (i.e., Black Male Success Initiative)
- 7. Revising of course schedule to achieve greater efficiency and to accommodate students who teach (EX: more summer and Saturday courses).

### **DOROTHY F. SCHMIDT COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS**

The initiative focuses on mentoring whose mission is to expose students to a broader world of opportunity through mentoring relationships, educational and cultural enrichment programs, and academic and social support.

The goals of the program are outlined below:

- a. Provide greater connection among students, between students and faculty, between students and their academic home, and between students and the university.
- b. Provide opportunity for students to establish an academic "home"
- c. Provide an avenue for academic support
- d. Provide an avenue for students to give feedback on teaching and programs
- e. Provide exposure to information about college/university issues beyond the classroom
- f. Provide an avenue for motivation for further learning about the issues mentioned above
- g. Provide information about real life opportunities and applications beyond the classroom
- h. Create long-term support for school/department/college/university Alumni Association

The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters has initiated (or is in the process of initiating) the establishment of a Blackboard Community site for each student-faculty mentoring group to support mentoring. This requires

- a. Assigning faculty lists of students in their program. The number of students should be equalized among faculty
- b. Having students and faculty create personal web profile on Blackboard site
- c. Face-to-Face meeting at least once a semester (individual or group) for group discussion about current topics (both university and non-university related), and feedback discussions about program, teaching, and other academic issues.
- d. Faculty mentoring activities documented in annual review and for faculty mentoring to be tied to promotion/tenure/contract renewal
- e. Administrative staff to develop and maintain list of students in Blackboard site
- f. Administrative support to create a "handbook" for mentees

- g. Financial support for social activities related to mentoring groups and for faculty development of mentoring skills

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The University Admission and Retention Committee acknowledges the various student retention and graduation initiatives currently being pursued at the college level and the involvement and support by the faculty. The committee is aware that student retention and graduation success depends not only on faculty-student interaction inside the classroom, but also on substantive interaction between students and faculty outside the classroom. This interaction if purposeful, and of a high quality will help to reinforce the academic goals and objectives of the programs at Florida Atlantic University, and ultimately will improve retention and graduation rates. To this end the Admission and Retention Committee makes the university-wide recommendations below. These recommendations are not intended to replace the various retention initiatives in the colleges but to supplement them.

1. The Inclusion of a paragraph in the syllabus similar to that shown below.

**Dear students:**

**If you attend this class regularly, take good notes, and read the assignments, you should succeed. If you are having problems understanding lectures, reading assignments, or having difficulty with exams or quizzes, please see your instructor during office hours or contact your instructor via e-mail. It is imperative that you contact your professor early in the term if you are having problems with this course. Do not wait until the end of the term to seek assistance. If you need individualized help or tutoring in reading, writing, taking notes, or other academic issues, please see one of the help centers listed below:**

**UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN WRITING**

<http://www.fau.edu/UCEW/WC/>

**LEARNING COMMUNITY**

<http://www.fau.edu/class/LearningCommunity/>

**TUTORING, STUDY HELP, & ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

<http://www.fau.edu/ctl/TutoringStudyHelpAndAcademicSupportStudentResources.php>

**CENTER FOR LEARNING AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

<http://www.fau.edu/CLASS/>

**CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

<http://www.fau.edu/cdc/>

**STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

<http://www.fau.edu/sil/>

**If you are having personal problems and need guidance or help, please contact one of the centers listed below:**

**OFFICE OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

<http://www.fau.edu/wellness/index.php>

<http://www.fau.edu/wellness/staff.php>

2. All professors be encouraged to use Blackboard Portal as this will make it easier to identify students that are at risk to fail through mid-semester report/grade or other early warning indicators.
3. A greater focus on mentoring of students by faculty, and that this be included as a part of the faculty service assignment.
4. There should also be greater emphasis on the internship placement process and experience, and career development. Each college should employ a Professional Development Coordinator responsible for providing quality career related services to current students, faculty, and employers. The Professional Development should serve as the primary contact person for employers, students, faculty, and staff for all experiential education and employment related services; one who builds and maintain working relationships with faculty to support experiential education; and one who build and maintain relationships with employers.
5. More involvement of faculty across the university in “faculty learning communities”
6. Instructor or professor training that embraces culturally and linguistically diverse learners. This will bring the retention issue and the growing diversity of the student population together. Educators need to wake up and recognize that linguistically and culturally diverse students are not succeeding because of being marginalized by many current teaching practices (deficit and difference interventions). Globalization and the internet are creating a growing need for recognition of multiliteracies and communicating meaning through multimodalities in the classroom. Without this there will be lower retention and graduation rates. We could also dramatically increase our admissions if we could embrace the diversity reflected by the student population of our surrounding communities (the student body of the 6th largest school district in Broward). We need to recognize cultural pluralism in the classroom and integrate rather than assimilate students into our institutions.