

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of the meetings, interviews, reports, surveys, (campus visit September 19-20, 2016) and recognized strategies to improve the quality of student life and learning that have the potential of increasing student success at NMHU. They are presented in separate categories but are not in any prioritized order.

Retention Planning

1. NMHU retention leaders should initiate a highly participative and data-informed planning process to strengthen the recently developed retention plan so it targets the “vital few” student success priorities aimed at specific lagging subpopulations of NMHU students.
2. Several data sets have become or will soon become available that should be used to support this planning improvement effort. They include the disaggregated sub-population data from the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Retention Predictor (SRP) model variable diagnostics and the student satisfaction data that is currently being gathered using the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey (SSI) and Adult Student Priority Survey (ASPS).
3. While the recently developed plan is well written and contains important retention improvement priorities, it is understood that it is a “living” document subject to continual updates as information and context change. Among the improvements to be considered are specific sub-population quantified goal statements that, in the aggregate, will total the current plan outcomes, specific strategy steps that will align directly with the targeted sub-populations, additional participation and ownership of the improvement priorities, and detailed action and measurement plans to ensure full deployment.

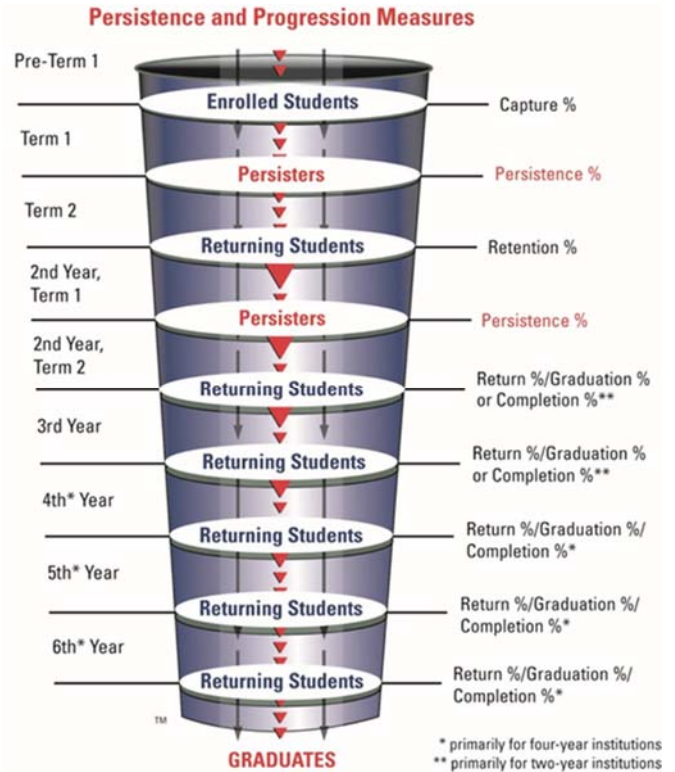
Increasing the participation in retention planning and increasing the data used to inform the process will prioritize, guide, and build support for NMHU retention-related efforts. It will also help institutionalize the most successful of good practices currently in place so the maximum number of students can benefit.

A thoughtful retention planning process helps set meaningful goals, identifies the most important strategies and activities necessary to achieve these goals, and broadens the discussion of student success. There are many benefits that can accrue from the retention planning process. A retention plan:

- Provides systematic assessment of present strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and current retention strategies;
- Results in the establishment of consensual institutional goals and priorities;
- Encourages innovative thinking and problem-solving;
- Creates awareness of obstacles that may need to be overcome;
- Coordinates and unifies staff effort;
- Ensures more effective use of existing resources and identifies the possible need for additional resources;
- Assigns responsibility and accountability and schedules work;
- Facilitates control and evaluation of activities;
- Communicates and documents efforts and the retention game plan; and
- Provides a basis for future planning.

Data and Information

- NMHU should use the RNL variable diagnostic data to identify relatively large but lagging subpopulations and set specific quantified improvement goals for these populations. These subpopulation goals, when aggregated, will allow for the overall retention goals to be attained.
- NMHU personnel were able to provide, in a timely manner, all the data necessary to build the student retention predictor model. This data has been formatted by RNL into variable diagnostic tables that will be used to strengthen the retention plan.
- NMHU should use the results of the most recent student satisfaction and engagement surveys to identify actionable improvements that respond to the voices of NMHU students.
- RNL student satisfaction data includes importance as well as satisfaction ratings, allowing NMHU to focus improvement efforts on those areas of concern that are most important to students. Comparing student perceptions to an aspirant group, in addition to more generic national norms, will provide the most useful information.
- It will be important for NMHU to *communicate real-time retention data to build retention funnel data and track the critical populations selected for their potential as improvement targets and all subpopulations for which intake enrollment funnels will be built.*
- All other retention rates for populations that are identified in the retention planning process as lagging should be tracked at a minimum, from:
 - Persistence rate day one to census date;
 - Persistence rate census date to midterm;
 - Persistence rate midterm to end-of-term; and
 - Persistence rate end-of-term one to beginning of term two (and so on, until graduation).
- Additional leading indicators including process and input measures should be identified and tracked once the overall outcome goals and goals for each selected sub-population have been quantified.
- Leading indicators are useful as they often are predictive of the desired outcomes and allow for earlier strategy adjustment if necessary. These indicators can be thought of formative where outcomes are summative. They may also be input or process indicators and are “upstream” from the outcomes.
- The student suggestion collection and feedback system should be redesigned and promoted to increase suggestions and the promise of immediate direct feedback for those who are willing to contribute without anonymity.
- The current system is reportedly underused but still valued by some constituents. An effort to increase utilization and feedback will help identify potential student satisfaction concerns in real time and will allow NMHU personnel to respond more quickly to potential improvement opportunities.



Teaching and Learning

1. Provide freshmen students with NMHU's best full-time teaching faculty whenever possible and support all new (especially new part-time faculty) with a well-designed "on-boarding" professional development program.

NMHU employs a substantial number of part-time faculty reported in the public record by the National Center for Educational Statistics as a greater number of part-time than full-time faculty. While many of these part-time faculty at NMHU are continuing faculty and many part-time faculty who teach freshmen are excellent teachers, they are often less knowledgeable and less effective in their efforts to connect students with needed learning support and campus life services.

Both full-time and adjunct faculty would benefit from an improved on-boarding process. Efforts to recognize and improve full-time and adjunct teaching for freshmen can also be emphasized by linking professional development directly to the performance review process (especially for faculty who teach freshmen).

2. Develop additional supplemental instruction (SI) programming to address success rates in high-fail and gateway courses (i.e., Math 140).

The use of SI is a best practice that has been producing excellent results at NMHU, especially in STEM-related courses for several years, but there remains opportunity to systematically develop these supportive tutoring strategies for additional high-fail courses. The ARMAS center was cited repeatedly by students, staff, and faculty as a high-impact practice at NMHU.

3. Continue to develop and pilot approaches that can increase successful completion of the developmental courses, and include quantitative measurement of student success, not only in the development classes but also in the related subsequent college-level offerings.

Additional learning options should be developed and offered to students based on their learning styles and learning readiness. Measurement of the effectiveness of all approaches should include the success rates for students in the subsequent-related, college-level course.

4. Identify opportunities for additional learning communities and implement these for targeted populations of at-risk students.

The "power of the cohort" was understood by NNHU personnel as evidenced by the exemplary required learning community program currently in place for freshmen; however, it still represents an important opportunity to increase engagement and success for populations in addition to the new first-time freshmen.

5. Develop an honors program to challenge and support the highest-achieving and most creative undergraduate students at NMHU.

Honors programming is a national best retention practices that is not currently available to NMHU students. This at-risk population is typically very mobile and would be well served by a program structured for students in all majors so the eligible students would complete their honors requirements over the course of their time as an undergraduate. This program could appeal to high-ability incoming freshmen and transfer students and may include a housing option as well.

Orientation, Extended Orientation, and Sophomore Programming

1. Increase the enrollment of transfer students in the freshmen-year experience (I-Seminar) course during their first enrollment term and develop and design a seminar for sophomore students.

The current I-Seminar course appears to be well designed and its integration into the learning communities, along with the integration of advisors and peer mentors, represents a high-impact practice. It also represents a practice that mitigates some of the unevenness of the current advising

model and can be expected to benefit transfer and sophomore students, provided the curriculum is specifically designed with their needs in mind.

2. Provide additional orientation programming for sophomores to address retention issues specific to these returning cohorts.

Initiatives that will allow NMHU to decrease sophomore attrition could be as simple as structuring a required sophomore reorientation program. Sophomores often feel neglected when they return and find a new freshmen class receiving the special attention and programming they experienced last year.

3. Accelerate efforts to ensure students “fit” their program choice and perceive NMHU as a first-choice institution where they can continue to graduation.

NMHU has an exceptionally high number of students who enroll with intentions to transfer prior to graduation. Efforts to design transfer (out) programming that would help students make knowledgeable choices fully aware of their options is likely to increase the number of students who stay at NMHU. Another activity that could contribute to this end would be to include select faculty in an admissions interview process. This can be designed so it does not restrict open access, but instead encourages student reflection, self-selection, and understanding of the requirements for success in their program choice and the options of continuing to graduation. Increasing information relevant for “intending to transfer” students at orientation can be an effective retention strategy. This could include transfer student testimonials from students who left and returned or others who are willing to share their transfer experience. Often, transfer challenges are underestimated and allowing “intending to transfer” students to learn from other student’s experiences can help them more realistically evaluate their options.

Communications

1. Develop an approach to communication with students that responds to the way students want to receive their communications from the university.

Currently, emails often go unread by students who reported feeling overwhelmed by irrelevant messages and who more frequently read text messages or prefer other communication modalities such as Twitter or Facebook. Because NMHU already has a cell phone application (Ellucian Go) that is promoted and downloaded by most freshmen during orientation, it represents one option that could contribute to improved communications if it is complete and continuously updated. At the time of this visit, it appeared that only athletic schedules were included. Text messaging is currently used for alerts but represents the single best way to reach students and has proven to be, on many campuses, the “go-to” method for reaching students with timely information about services and engagement opportunities.

2. A complete review of current publications and promotional messages should be completed to ensure the accuracy and integrity of communication to prospective and current students. Especially relevant would be a review of messages, written and oral, about program requirements and learning rigor required for successful completion.

Any lack of accurate information about program rigor or expectations is likely to detract from the image NMHU wants to convey to prospective students and can contribute to unnecessary student attrition and a lack of continuation to graduation.

Early Alert

1. The current post-enrollment early-alert system appears to be well designed but requires greater faculty participation and assurance that freshmen courses have meaningful evaluation activities offered regularly during the first weeks.

2. Because there are still reports of some freshmen and sophomore classes that use only mid-term and final evaluations and some who do not report evaluation results to freshmen students in a timely manner, it is likely that students in these classes may be less inclined to access supportive resources before it is too late in the term to recover.
3. NMHU should fully deploy the pre-enrollment early-alert system that is part of the current partnership with Ruffalo Noel Levitz, as it is a compliment to the existing post-enrollment early-alert.

Pre-enrollment early-alerts, like the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Retention Management System Plus™ (RMS Plus), provide for the identification of dropout-prone students who could benefit from institutional intervention before they begin to display behaviors associated with at-risk status.

Both pre- and post-systems represent salient opportunities to improve student success at NMHU and are based upon the following assumptions.

- Most decisions to dropout occur early in a student's interaction with an institution.
- Many dropout-prone students do not voluntarily seek out institutional support services to assist them with problems that may ultimately lead to attrition.
- It is easier to anticipate a problem and intervene than to let the problem evolve and attempt to solve it.
- Many student problems are treatable if identified early.
- Most students respond positively to direct contact in which potential or actual problems are identified and a resource of help is offered.

Advising

1. Require "mandatory" advisement of all students prior to all registration periods.
2. While freshmen students do receive required advising for their first two terms, extension of that requirement has been perceived as a barrier. There is good reason to believe that NMHU students, like students nationally, would not object to a required advising every term provided their advisors were accessible and knowledgeable. NMHU personnel must have the courage to require experiences that are known to encourage student success, and required advising is one of these.
3. Reduce the number of new first-time students who are admitted, advised, and registered in the last weeks just prior to the beginning of a term.
4. Data collected during the student retention predictor (SRP) modeling process suggest that the last students to enroll at NMHU are also the first to leave. These students often find themselves in classes that are less conducive to freshmen success and may also have exaggerated financial aid, housing, and other obstacles related to late admission.
5. Review the academic advising program to ensure it provides opportunities for relationship-building as a result of a highly structured, intrusive program that is built around "front-end loading and progressive responsibility" for all NMHU students as they matriculate.

The current advising system includes talented and passionate advisors but remains a "lightning rod" for dissatisfaction of both NMHU personnel and students. Especially important in redesign will be to encourage the development of meaningful advisor-advisee relationships, which often make the critical difference between student success and failure.

It will also be necessary to provide improved class scheduling support. Many of the advising criticisms are actually related to the availability of courses, cancelling of needed classes, and/or infrequent offering of specific courses needed for graduation. In addition, students reported the wait-time for a

substituted class to be approved for graduation was excessive. The registration deadlines and registration periods also appeared to be less structured than necessary for optimal effectiveness.

All effective advising delivery models should meet the following criteria:

- Be accessible and available to students;
- Be consistent with respect to the quality of advising across the institution;
- Provide accurate and timely information;
- Have institutionwide credibility;
- Be provided by knowledgeable, trained, and evaluated advisors;
- Promote building an advisor/advisee relationship;
- Characterized by reasonable advisor loads; and
- Result in high levels of student satisfaction with their advisor and the advising process.

Wes Habley, who recently retired from ACT, has identified seven delivery models presented in a modified taxonomy in the most recent NACADA advising survey. This revised taxonomy includes the following five advising models.

Organizational Models for Academic Advising

Self-contained model	All advising occurs in a center staffed primarily by professional advisors or counselors; faculty may also advise in the center
Faculty-only model	All advising is done by a faculty member, usually in the student's academic discipline
Shared supplementary model	Professional staff in a center support advisors (usually faculty) by providing resources/training
Shared split model	Faculty provides advising in academic discipline while staff are responsible for a subset of students; e.g., undecided, pre-majors
Total intake model	All incoming students are advised in an advising center; students may be assigned elsewhere later

The current advising system at NMHU does not fit cleanly into this taxonomy, but can be best described as a "total intake," as most students are advised in the academic support services center and assigned to faculty beginning with their third term if they have declared a major. While many campuses like NMHU think of schedule planning first when advising is described, it is more often the relationships that are built around this and other activities that have the greatest potential for improving student success and, ultimately, the college's performance outcomes of persistence, retention, and graduation. Additional advising through a freshman seminar/orientation program such as NMHU's I-Seminar represents a complementary delivery option, which can provide excellent new student developmental advising. In fact, one potential good practice currently in place at NMHU links advising and I-Seminar so new student advisors are assigned to support designated sections of this seminar.

Terry O'Banion proposed a five-step advising model that is generally recognized as the origin of a developmental approach to academic advising. This model recognizes that the advising process involves a set of sequential steps. His model assumes a developmental approach to academic advising that involves more than course selection and scheduling. Rather, these necessary but mechanical activities must be accomplished within a broader context that needs to be discussed and developed by the advisee and the advisor.

The quality of academic advising at NMHU could be greatly enhanced by placing more emphasis on and devoting more time to steps one and two of the O'Banion model. Academic advising definitions should be redefined so that these developmental functions (exploring, integrating, and synthesizing a student's life, career, and academic goals) are central to the process.

Developmental advising is a student-centered approach that integrates the activities of career/life planning and academic advising to assist students to develop a personally relevant educational and career planning experience.

O'Banion Developmental Advising Model

1. Exploration and confirmation of life goals and values.
2. Exploration and confirmation of career goals.
3. Selection of a major or program of study to achieve life, career, and educational goals.
4. Selection of courses in any given term.
5. Scheduling of courses.

Developmental advising should not be confused with personal or psychological counseling; the focus of academic advising remains the student's instructional program and how the program contributes in a coherent manner to career and life goals.

Campus Employment

1. Strengthen and expand campus-based employment opportunities for specific, targeted at-risk populations as a retention strategy and provide required training for all student workers and supervisors. A central point of access for all campus work opportunities should be developed to ensure full and equal access for all students.

NMHU personnel are making a substantial effort to provide on-campus employment for students. They recognize that campus-based employment programs are not only friendlier to the learning process than most off-campus work assignments, but also provide inherent advising experiences that often contribute to improved satisfaction, retention, and graduation rates. Most students who work on campus interact regularly with their supervisors, who often develop meaningful and long-lasting relationships with their student workers. These college personnel typically are also aware of college/community resources that can help address student's needs as they become evident.

Quality Service

1. Develop and implement an aggressive program of cross-training for front-line workers and others who regularly interface with students.

One key to developing an effective quality service culture is to reduce barriers between departments and increase the awareness and understanding across departmental and functional lines. Focusing conversation and interaction on "cross-training" that can include specific quality service improvement deliverables represents a practice that will contribute to a shift toward a more student-centered culture that will increasingly promote student success.

2. Provide customer service training for all university service areas that includes ongoing departmental conversations on this topic and a measurement system that will encourage improvements.

It was apparent that many employees make extra efforts to provide the best possible customer service, but this remains an opportunity to improve understanding and support for developing the optimum context for addressing student needs.

3. Provide more opportunities for cross-disciplinary communication for all campus personnel.
4. A desire on the part of many NMHU personnel, for a more student-centered campus culture was evident in the frequently reported examples of student “runaround,” phones going unanswered, and calls not being returned. Interdepartmental empathy and understanding can be expected to increase as the frequency of communication and contact between functional areas increases.

Campus and Residential Life

1. Promote and encourage additional campus and residential life programming.

The current development of the outdoor recreation center is an example of a much-needed expansion of campus life. NMHU should extend themselves to promote this and other existing activities and continue to engage students to identify other opportunities, especially those that can support campus involvement on weekends.

2. Increase the frequency and transparency of communications about the use of student fees used to promote campus life.

It is common to involve student governments in the allocation of student fees and in the planning of campus events. NMHU should increase student involvement in this process and improve the awareness of this involvement along with increased promotion of the available experiences so students can more fully realize the benefits derived from these experiences supported by student fees.