Strengthening the Quality of Student Life and Learning Plan
A Strategic Retention Planning Workbook

New Mexico Highlands University

Las Vegas, New Mexico

"...activities that serve to generate significant improvements in the organization as a whole ultimately serve to improve student retention."

Dr. Laurence Smith
Mobilizing the Campus for Retention
ACT

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About Ruffalo Noel Levitz

For more than 60 years, Ruffalo Noel Levitz has helped institutions meet their enrollment challenges and exceed their goals for enrollment, student success, and fundraising. Ruffalo Noel Levitz represents the combination of higher education consulting firms into one company dedicated to your success.

RuffaloCODY formed in 1991 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to provide enrollment and fundraising services for higher education. Over the next 23 years, the firm would grow and expand its reach around the globe, working with colleges and universities as well as nonprofit organizations in North America, Europe, and Asia.

The roots of Ruffalo Noel Levitz stretch back to 1973, with the establishment of the admissions consulting group Williams Crockett in Chicago (and its relocation to Littleton, Colorado in 1982). In 1984, Drs. Lee Noel and Randi Levitz formed their own higher education consulting firm in Iowa City, Iowa. The two organizations joined in 1992 to form Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

RuffaloCODY and Ruffalo Noel Levitz came together in 2014 to form Ruffalo Noel Levitz. With our combined resources and expertise, we provide strategies and services to help campuses engage with students for life: from prospective students seeking colleges, through current students working toward their educational goals, to proud alumni who pledge loyalty and support of their alma maters for life.

About the Facilitator

Dr. David Trites, Senior Associate Consultant

As a consultant, Dr. David Trites offers expertise in assessing organizational effectiveness, applying Baldrige approaches to continuous improvement, and increasing enrollment, student success, and retention.

During his 20-year career in higher education, Dr. Trites served as enrollment and total quality manager at Alexandria College (MN) before assuming the responsibilities of dean of student services. In that capacity, he supervised the offices of recruitment, admissions, financial aid, health services, the college bookstore, and student life. Through his leadership, Dr. Trites increased enrollment by nearly 30 percent, and the college's persistence, annual return, and graduation rates have not only exceeded national averages, but serve as benchmarks of two-year college performance. He has also served as an advisor to the chancellor of Minnesota's Public College System and served as interim president at Rainy River College (MN).

Dr. Trites has been active in the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) and the Minnesota Council for Quality, among other national and regional organizations. He also served as a peer reviewer for The Higher Learning Commission (NCA) and participated in the design of the Academic Quality Improvement Process, an alternative higher education accreditation option. He is a frequent conference presenter, has published a curriculum on institutional effectiveness, and has received numerous awards including the Chamber of Commerce Outstanding Educator and Minnesota Governor's Commendation for Superior Performance in Education.

Dr. Trites has used his knowledge of recruitment and enrollment to counsel institutions such as the College of the North Atlantic (Newfoundland), Cottey College (NV), Davidson County Community College (NC), De Anza Community College (CA), Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Fisher College (MA), Midlands Technical College (SC), Oral Roberts University (OK), Owens Community College (OH) Southern University (LA), Tabor College (KS), Texas A&M University and the University of West Florida.

Dr. Trites holds a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Minnesota (MN).

Retention Planning Workshop Agenda

Thursday, November 3, 2016

Time	Event	Activity Leader(s)
11:00 a.m.	Workshop setup	Dave Trites and project leaders
12:30 p.m.	Retention planning workshop begins with welcome	Senior leader
12:40 p.m.	Workshop introductions, overview, and expectations	Project leaders and Dave Trites
12:55 p.m.	"Introduction to Retention Planning" presentation	Dave Trites
1:20 p.m.	SRP data overview	Dave Trites
1:40 p.m.	Small group discussion on SRP data-informed target selection	Dave Trites
2:00 p.m.	Break	All participants
2:20 p.m.	Target population consensus exercise	Dave Trites
3:15 p.m.	Small group analysis of 35 Good Retention Practices Survey	Dave Trites
3:45 p.m.	Session plus/delta evaluation day one and wrap up	Dave Trites
4:00 p.m.	Day one of planning workshop adjourns	Dave Trites

Friday, November 4, 2016

Time	Event	Activity Leader(s)
8:00 a.m.	Set up	Dave Trites
8:30 a.m.	Reconvene workshop	Dave Trites and project leaders
8:40 p.m.	Introduction to strategy selection (National Best Practices Research Summary)	Dave Trites
8:55 p.m.	Current NMHU "Good Retention Practices" presentations (approximately three at six minutes per practice)	NMHU Selected Participants
9:30 p.m.	"Voices of Students" overview (SSI/ASPS/ CSI]) and focus group affinity)	Dave Trites
10:00 a.m.	Small group analysis of "student voices" information	Dave Trites
10:45 a.m.	Break	All participants
10:55 a.m.	SWOT analysis with gallery walk	Dave Trites
11:30 a.m.	SWOT prioritization exercise	Dave Trites
Noon	Working Lunch (Force field discussion)	All participants
12:30 p.m.	Small group strategy selection discussions	Dave Trites
1:10 p.m.	Strategy Selection Consensus Exercise (finalize strategies to impact subpopulation targets)	Dave Trites
2:30 p.m.	Break	All participants
2:45 p.m.	Review targets and strategies to ensure each target has at least one strategy to attain target	Dave Trites
3:00 p.m.	Action Plan Development and plan deployment approaches to ensure optimum results	Dave Trites

3:15 p.m.	Closing evaluation and planning session conclusion	Dave Trites
3:30 p.m.	Retention planning session ends	

Essentials of Retention Planning

Fundamental to any successful enrollment management plan is developing and implementing an annual retention plan. The purpose of retention planning is to help institutions gain more control over the enrollment future by developing the capacity to achieve enrollment goals through improved retention efforts.

Definition of a Retention Plan

A retention plan, by definition, is a set of clear and unambiguous goals with associated strategies (enabling objectives) and activities (action plans) that, when taken in totality, lead to the achievement of the program's goals. The plan establishes the direction for the retention activities during the time period set for the completion of the goals. Further, it establishes, in advance, responsibility, resources required, timetables, and methods of evaluation, thus facilitating control of progress.

Goals for the Retention Planning Workshop

The following are proposed goals and agenda for this consultation:

- Facilitate a data-informed, highly interactive, and consensus-building annual retention planning summit.

- Create visibility and support to help sustain the initiatives to improve the quality of student life and learning.

- Facilitate discussions and reflection on opportunities to enhance retention of targeted populations.

- Review Student Retention Predictor (SRP) variable diagnostics data to determine high-impact targets for retention improvement which may be integrated in the current NMHU retention plan.

- Review national retention best practices research to inform NMHU "vital few" strategy selection.

- Use "voices of NMHU students" focus group, Student Satisfaction Inventory™ (SSI), Adult Student Priorities Survey (ASPS) data and consultant recommendations to inform the selection of the "vital few" priority strategies to be integrated into the strategic retention plan.

Characteristics of Successful Retention Programs

Ten Elements of Successful Retention Programs

1. Collect, compile, and analyze pertinent retention data and research

2. Implement early identification/alert and intervention strategies

3. Commit to both "front-loading" and "progressive responsibility" philosophies and strategies

4. Concentrate energies on the importance of the teaching and learning process

5. Emphasize a deliberate strategy of student engagement and involvement

6. Address students' affective, as well as cognitive, needs

7. Create programs and services based on meeting students' individual needs and differences

8. Develop a student-centered institution

9. Monitor, on a systematic basis, student expectations and levels of satisfaction

10. Establish an organizational structure/mechanism of life and learning issues and an institutional change process

Retention Principles

1. The ultimate goal of a retention effort is improved educational experiences for students, rather than retention, per se.

2. Improving the quality of student life and learning is a continuing and important priority for all institutions of higher education.

3. Engaging in a quality of student life and learning (retention) improvement process should provide an approach to organizing a systematic effort, while at the same time enhancing overall institutional quality, effectiveness, and student success.

4. Increases in retention rates are a function of the current state of efforts to improve the quality of educational programs and services. Most institutions engaging in a systematic and comprehensive retention effort should be able to expect, over time, a "lift" in cohort graduation rates between 10 and 20 percent and improvements in annual retention rates of 2 to 5 percent.

5. Improving retention is a complex task; retention and attrition are multi-variant phenomena and are not subject to "quick-fix" strategies.

6. Retention tools, systems, staff development activities, computer software, and professional consultation can make a significant contribution to an organized retention effort.

7. Retention strategies already in place can serve as an excellent foundation for developing an ongoing, more systematic approach to improving the quality of student life and learning (retention).

8. Retention is a key component of a comprehensive enrollment management program.

9. Some attrition is inevitable and acceptable.

10. Dropouts are expensive, and improvements in retention rates can add to the annual operating budget.

11. Attrition is a problem for which there is a solution, and retention is one aspect of an enrollment management program over which an institution can exert considerable influence and control.

12. Single, casual factors of student attrition are difficult to ascertain.

13. Some attrition is predictable and preventable by focusing special efforts on selected target groups of students.

14.	Effective retention strategies focus on improving campus programs, services, attitudes, and behaviors and result in quality educational experiences for all students.
15.	Educational programs and services cannot compensate for the absence of competent, caring, and conscientious faculty and staff.
16.	Key to improving the quality of student life and learning (retention) are student-centered policies, procedures, and programs.
17.	Persistence depends upon the extent to which an individual has been integrated into the academic and non-academic components of the campus environment.

Retention Planning Principles

- *Recruiting:* Providing students with adequate and accurate information will assist in the selection of an institution that best matches their needs, which in turn will increase their chances of persisting.

- *Admissions Selectivity:* Academic ability is a strong predictor of student retention and there is clearly a relationship between the degree of admissions selectivity and institutional retention rates.

- *Financial Aid:* The type and mix of financial aid provided to a student can have either a positive or negative influence on a student's decision to remain in college, depending upon their circumstances and background.

- *Orientation:* Orientation programs are important to the successful integration of students into the academic and social components of the campus environment. They can also be helpful in developing consonance between student expectations and the actualities of the educational environment.

- *Academic Advising:* The importance of academic advising as a retention strategy is well documented in the literature. Advising provides the most significant mechanism by which students can clarify their educational/career goals and relate these goals to academic offerings.

- *Sectioning/Placement:* Homogeneous grouping of students based on their level of academic ability is a common educational and retention strategy. Mandatory assessment and placement of students helps ensure that they can compete successfully academically.

- *Teaching/Learning:* Academic programs and experiences must be consistent with, and relevant to, students' educational/career goals. There is no substitute for good instruction in promoting academic integration. Some studies have shown a strong relationship between student learning and increased persistence.

- *Academic Support:* Retention literature documents that academically under-prepared students are more dropout-prone. Institutions should ensure that students enter with, or have the opportunity to acquire, the skills needed for academic success. Learning support programs improve a student's chance of persistence.

- *Academic Enrichment:* Academic boredom is a common reason talented students drop out of higher education. Providing enriched or accelerated programs can have a positive impact on the persistence of some of these students.

- *Residential Living:* The quality of on-campus residential living is an important element in social integration.

- *Counseling:* Personal counseling can be important in assisting students to overcome problems that interfere with the degree of academic and non-academic integration.

- *Extracurricular Activities:* Literature indicates that significant and meaningful participation in extracurricular activities can contribute to student retention.

- *Under-represented Students:* Some racial/ethnic groups experience a higher dropout rate than do others. Special programs and efforts can be successful in reducing the attrition rates for these groups.

- *Undecided Students:* Retention research identified this group as being highly dropout-prone. Lack of a clearly defined educational or career goal is often an important reason for a student deciding not to pursue a college degree. Model programs for undecided students have proven to reduce attrition rates.

- *Early-Alert:* Prediction of dropout-prone students, when combined with early warning strategies, can increase retention.

- *Exit Interviews:* Even though their observed impact on persistence is lower than most other intervention strategies, exit interviews can gather significant information on why students leave and how the institution might change to improve the retention for other students. In addition, a few individuals may remain in the institution as a result of assistance gathered through an exit interview.

- *Policies/Procedures:* Colleges and universities whose policies and procedures have been redesigned to be student-centered often show improvements in their retention rates.

- *Faculty/Staff Development:* The frequency and quality of faculty/staff and student interactions has been shown to contribute positively to student retention, and in-service faculty/staff development efforts can result in a more competent, caring, and concerned group of individuals.

- *Recruit-back Program:* Continued, systematic correspondence with students who have dropped out can be an effective way to attract students back to the institution.

Development of a Retention Plan

"Planning is the organization of hope."
Steven Blum

Fundamental to any successful enrollment management program is developing and implementing a retention plan. The purpose of the planning process is to help an institution gain more control over its enrollment future by developing the capacity to achieve retention goals through improvements, enhancements, or new educational programs and services.

Planning does not ensure results, but it provides a disciplined appraisal, goal-setting, and strategizing that can minimize failure. A well-conceived retention plan is simply an organized thought process and communication tool that describes *what* the institution wants to achieve and *how* it will accomplish it. It has been said there are two excellent ways to fail:

- Do an equally good job of everything (all things are not equally important).

- Do an excellent job of the wrong thing.

A thoughtful retention planning process helps set meaningful goals and identifies the most important strategies and activities necessary to achieve these goals.

There are many benefits that can accrue from the retention planning process. Retention planning:

- Provides a 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 enrollment "game plan"; and

- Provides a basis for future planning.

Retention plans will vary considerably in scope, format, content, nomenclature/terminology, and size depending on institutional differences, preferences, and inclination. In developing a retention plan, it is important to remember that the elements mentioned above are not nearly as critical as the ability to develop an understandable and workable plan to guide efforts and achieve results. Regardless of the exact nature of your plan, effective retention plans should always be:

- Results-oriented;

- Understandable to others, including those who must implement them;

- Sufficiently complete and specific to provide direction (neither over- nor under-planned);

- Workable and realistic to accomplish; and

- Adaptable to changing situations.

A retention plan, by definition, is a set of clear and unambiguous goals with associated strategies (enabling objectives) and activities (action plans) that, when taken in totality, lead to the achievement of goals. The plan establishes the direction for the enrollment enterprise during the time period designated for the completion of the goals. Further, the plan establishes in advance responsibility, resources required, timetables, and methods of evaluation, thus facilitating control of progress.

A word of caution about retention planning: planning without execution is meaningless. The old adage, "Plan the work, but work the plan" is still a good principle to follow. Dwight Eisenhower once said, "The plan is nothing. Planning is everything." To paraphrase Eisenhower, "Planning is nothing. Implementation is everything." In short, the degree to which you implement the components of the retention plan will be the key to success.

The purpose of this workbook is to assist in the development of an effective retention plan. The workbook is organized into the following sections:

- Steps in the development of a retention plan
- Retention S.W.O.T. analysis
- Setting goals
- Formulating strategies (enabling objectives)
- Developing action plans
- Avoiding excessive activity syndrome in retention planning
- A retention plan outline
- A final word

Steps in the Development of a Retention Plan

Developing the annual retention plan is a key component of a systematic and comprehensive retention effort. The plan should follow the following format:

Establish Goals: Every good plan begins with a clear understanding of the critical goals that must be accomplished in order to succeed. Goals should be determined for persistence and/or annual return rates for targeted populations. Most important, goals should be mutually agreed-upon by all whose efforts must achieve them.

Formulate Key Strategies: The 80/20 rule suggests that 80 percent of the results of an endeavor typically derive from 20 percent of the activities. In other words, most results will depend on complete and careful implementation of the critical 20 percent of effort on planned activities. Key strategies must be fully and effectively implemented to ensure success.

Develop Action Plans: Each key strategy requires a set of action or activity plans, complete with timetables and budgets. The activity plan describes the actions or tactics that will occur in order to implement the strategy and achieve the goal. The action plan should:

- Assign responsibility;
- Include clear beginning and ending dates;
- Include measurable objectives when appropriate;
- Include budget information; and
- State control/evaluation procedures.

Retention S.W.O.T. Analysis

Prior to developing the retention plan, conduct a situational analysis. This phase of the planning effort usually involves the following tasks:

- Reviewing the institutional mission statement that describes the basic reason for the existence of the organization;

- Reviewing the institutional strategic plan, if one exists: the strategic plan and mission statement need to be consistent with each other;

- Assessing current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats;

- Compiling and reviewing historical enrollment and retention data, both overall and by specific program;

- Reviewing appropriate demographic trends and environmental data;

- Results from the student satisfaction survey;

- Conducting a program-by-program analysis and establishing desired enrollment state and retention needs;

- Reviewing project and consultant recommendations; and

- Clarifying definitions and nomenclature that may be used in the planning process.

Strengths	Existing internal characteristics – physical, human, and traditions that clearly contribute to institutional success and the achievement of the retention goals
Weaknesses	Existing internal characteristics that detract from institutional success and the achievement of retention goals
Opportunities	External factors that have the potential to be developed into strengths for the institution
Threats	External conditions that are obstacles to institutional success and achievement of enrollment goals

Setting Goals

Setting goals that are motivational and obtainable are the second step in the retention planning process. The following points are important to the goal-setting process:

- Goals are an expression of the important outcomes of the retention program.

- Goals are derived directly from the retention planning process.

- Effective retention plans begin with a clear understanding of the goals that must be achieved in order to succeed.

- Goals should be stated as simply and concisely as possible.

- Goals are most often, but not always, expressed quantitatively and relate to desired enrollment outcomes. If a goal is not measurable, it should at least be recognizable and qualitative in character.

- Goals must always be supported by one or more strategies (enabling objectives).

- Goals should be mutually agreed-upon by all whose efforts must achieve them.

- Goal-setting is important and necessary, but not a complicated task.

The following sample retention goals illustrate examples of goals that could be established to support the overall retention increases currently in the NMHU retention plan.

Sample Retention Goals

Overall Goal: The overall goal is to improve the quality of student life and learning through improvements, modifications, and additions to the institution's educational programs, services, and facilities.

Goal One: Achieve an annual return rate of TBD percent for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen entering the institution in fall 2017 and an annual return rate of TBD for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen entering the institution in the fall 2018.

Goal Two: Increase the annual return rate by 2 percent each year for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen entering in the fall years 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Goal Three: Achieve a cohort graduation rate (in five years) of TBD percent for new students entering the institution in fall 2016.

Goal Four: Increase the term-to-term persistence rate of commuter students by 3 percent effective with 2017-2018.

Goal Five: Increase the retention rate of underrepresented students who begin fall 2017 by 3 percent.

Goal Six: Increase the retention rate of fall 2017 students who enroll fewer than 110 days prior to the beginning of their first term by 3 percent.

The following goal information is from the current NMHU 2016-2020 Retention Plan.

Goal 1: Increase Retention

Table 1. Historical Retention and Graduation Rates and Measureable Goals

Freshmen	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2020 Goal
2nd term	69	72	71	78	72	74	75	78	74	85
2nd yr.	53	45	45	48	51	55	47	48	52	55
4-yr	6	3	6	5	9	8	6	10	8	12
6-yr	25	21	19	19	21	16	18	17	18	25
Transfers	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2020 Goal**
All 4-yr	43	51	50	48	41	42	40	41	39	50
All 6-yr	51	48	49	57	55	55	51	49	48	60
AA 4-yr	71	72	65	68	67	65	69	69	67	80
AA 6-yr	80	74	81	75	75	73	76	75	72	90

* Percentage rates in the year reported

Goal 2: Increase Student Success

Table 2. Historical Student Success Data and Measureable Goals

Freshmen First Semester	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2020 Goal
% Not on Academic Probation	74%	68%	71%	67%	71%	67%	75%	77%	79%	85%
Average Credits Earned	12.1	11.1	11.2	11.2	11.0	11.2	12.0	12.9	13.1	15
% Earning Lottery Scholarship	53%	54%	53%	50%	49%	47%	57%	53%	63%	75%

Formulating Strategies

The next step in the planning process is to formulate appropriate key retention strategies designed to achieve the goals you have established. Most goals have multiple strategies. Like goals, these key strategies (enabling objectives) should be hierarchical, quantifiable, and measurable whenever possible, clear, specific, and realistic. You want no confusion about your retention strategies. You should spend the necessary time to ensure formulation of the key strategies that will produce the best results.

Do not be confused by terminology: strategies typically represent the broad class of actions with long-term outcomes; action plans represent the immediate, short-term action steps that collectively form each strategy. Some people prefer to think of enrollment strategies as enabling objectives. Regardless of what they are called, failure to identify and implement key enrollment strategies will prevent you from achieving your full enrollment potential.

Use the 80/20 rule to make your retention plan a truly effective document: identify only those retention strategies that are "key" or critical to achieving the goals. Remember the 80/20 rule states that 80 percent of the results generally are derived from 20 percent of the effort. The challenge is to know which 20 percent to focus on to produce results. On a day-to-day basis, it is very tempting to be diverted from the key 20 percent: your retention plan should serve to focus staff attention on the critical actions that will determine retention success or failure. When attempting to determine what potential quality of student life and learning (retention) strategies are most likely to result in significant and real improvement, institutions should apply the following key critical process criteria:

- Do students experience problems with the process/system?
- Will students benefit or care about the improvement?
- Is the process important to ongoing effectiveness and quality?
- Can the university control the improvement of the process?
- Is the university willing and able to dedicate the appropriate financial and human resources to improve the process?

Possible Retention-related Actions/Strategies by Category

Organizational Structures (including data analysis) which support strategy development and implementation

1. Establish a permanent, institutionwide quality of student life and learning (retention) committee as a structure and forum for the ongoing coordination, development, and review of all retention-related issues and initiatives.

2. Appoint a retention coordinator.

3. Purchase a customer relationship management (CRM) system; i.e., Hobsons, Starfish.

4. Develop or purchase a computerized degree audit system.

5. Provide guided pathways with fewer course options to keep students moving to graduation.

6. Review all promotional materials to ensure that they are creating accurate pre-entry expectations of the institutions.

First-year Transitions

1. Develop well-designed campus visit experiences that realistically portray the institution to prospective low-income, first-generation, and students of color (under-represented students).

2. Determine if admissions criteria are enrolling students of color and other under-represented populations who are likely to be successful at the institution.

3. Develop outreach programs to inform, encourage, and prepare under-represented students for college.

4. Design an intake system that includes a seamless orientation, assessment, advising, and registration.

5. Encourage college credit courses for secondary school students.

6. Offer summer bridge programs for academically under-prepared students.

7. Conduct summer orientation programs.

8. Change the emphasis of the orientation program from providing information to activities designed to build more interpersonal affiliations and bonding to the institution.

9. Design and deliver orientation experiences for special groups of students (e.g. adults, transfers, international, athletes, selected majors, commuters, resident students).

10. Track a cohort group and describe their enrollment behaviors/status each term by selected student characteristics.

11. Initiate an integrated freshman program.

12. Require a mandatory first-year experience orientation course.

13. Develop programs specifically for transfer students and/or intending to transfer students.

Academic Advising/Coaching/Degree Planning

1. Encourage students to participate in campus employment (with training for supervisors and students).

2. Establish a centrally located, integrated student success center to better meet student needs.

3. Establish an academic advising center.

4. Implement a comprehensive ongoing advisor development program.

5. Develop an institutional academic advising plan that includes the components associated with successful delivery and organization of advising services.

6. Design an evaluation program that will assess the effectiveness of the institution's advising program, as well as individual advisors.

7. Provide required professional advising for all freshmen.

8. Provide individual advising for students approaching graduation to ensure they are on track.

9. Assign success coaches to specific groups of students.

10. Intentional electronic and printed communications to stay in touch with all students at specified intervals.

Alerting

1. Administer a retention instrument to identify dropout-proneness in new students.

2. Identify students who may be dropout-prone by observing "behavioral cues" (e.g., residence hall rooms, failing to apply for housing, financial aid, pre-registration, requesting a transcript).

3. Systematically survey/interview all new students within the first six weeks.

4. Design an early monitoring and alert system that routinely identifies students who are experiencing some type of difficulty.

5. Train residential staff to recognize and refer students displaying at risk behaviors.

Academic Support

1. Mandate pre-entry assessment and placement.

2. Offer developmental courses to improve academic skills.

3. Provide supplemental instruction for "killer courses."

4. Establish academic support services (e.g., learning center, math lab, writing lab).

5. Provide tutorial services.

6. Develop a peer mentoring programming.

7. Provide programming for first-generation students.

8. Implement an extended orientation course (e.g., freshman-year experience).

9. Offer a student success course (e.g., Becoming a Master Student).

10. Provide a credit life/career-planning course.

11. Conduct special workshops on topics of interest to students (e.g., stress, time management, substance abuse, study skills).

12. Organize a parent participatory/support program.

13. Establish appropriate student support groups (e.g., OWLS, multi-cultural).

14. Conduct financial literacy programming.

15. Identify the student subgroups that have special needs and design appropriate educational programs/services for these special populations (e.g., honors, adults, academically unprepared, students of color, transfers, international, and exploratory/undecided).

Academic Recovery

1. Clarify institutional expectations of students via contracts or other methods.
2. Provide personal counseling and referral services where appropriate to students experiencing personal or social adjustment problems.
3. Require that students on academic probation participate in a "survival" program.
4. Communicate with students who are in good standing who fail to enroll.

Qualified Recruit back

1. Use telecounseling to contact students experiencing difficulty or planning not to return.
2. Identify reentry dates for students who are leaving.
3. Remain in touch with students who leave.

Quality Services

1. Conduct student satisfaction surveys on a systematic basis.
2. Focus on the "gaps" between student expectations and satisfaction of educational programs and services.
3. Conduct exit interviews to ascertain student reasons for leaving.
4. Pay attention to issues of diversity and the development of an inclusive campus climate.
5. Review all policies, procedures, and processes to ensure that they are student-centered and student-friendly.
6. Create a position of student ombudsman.
7. Provide ongoing quality service training for all front-line support staff and supervisors.
8. Design an internal communication plan to keep faculty and staff informed about issues and initiatives related to the quality of student life and learning.
9. Develop and communicate a clear service strategy at all levels of the institution.
10. Provide programs specifically designed for veterans.

Second-year Transitions

1. Provide a required second-year experience class for sophomore students.
2. Require on-campus housing for second-year students.
3. Implement a required second-year student orientation.
4. Provide career services during the second year to help students see connections between coursework and careers.

Co-curricular Programming

1. Strengthen and offer a wide array of student extracurricular activities that encourage engagement by under-represented populations.
2. Design high-interest residential living programs and activities.
3. Organize student-to-student interactions and groups (e.g., peer discussion groups, peer advisors).
4. Increase participation in campus activities whenever possible.

5. Develop planned weekend activities for resident students.

6. Online social networking to engage students in online communities.

Engaged Learning

1. Establish a faculty/staff-mentoring program.

2. Develop strategies that will encourage formal and informal contact between faculty/staff and under-represented students.

3. Encourage cooperative and collaborative teaching/learning strategies.

4. Provide students practical work experiences in their major.

5. Provide incentives and rewards for faculty and staff involved in retention-related initiatives.

6. Offer an academic capstone experience for upper-class students.

7. Assure that there are appropriate faculty/staff role-models for students from under-represented populations.

8. Review availability and when and where classes are offered to be sure student needs are being met.

9. Eliminate or reduce large lecture classes.

10. Establish an office devoted exclusively to the improvement of the teaching/learning process.

11. Eliminate low-demand courses and increase availability of high-demand courses.

12. If a student cannot enroll in a required course because it is filled, the tuition for the course would be waived when the student enrolls in a subsequent term.

13. Provide honors programming for academically advanced students.

14. Provide each student with an academic roadmap of courses.

Resource Allocation

1. Enhance the physical plan and facilities particularly important to students (e.g., residence halls, recreation, student center, computer lab).

2. Assist students with short-term loans for financial needs (e.g., childcare, transportation, textbooks).

3. Establish a position devoted to providing financial aid counseling.

4. Develop a plan to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of all retention-related initiatives and programs.

5. Develop or acquire the computer software to implement an effective retention monitoring/tracking communication system (i.e., Hobsons/Starfish).

The following strategy (category) information is part of the current NMNU 2016-2020 retention plan. Additional details are included in the matrix in appendix III.

1. Coordinate and synchronize retention efforts.

2. Increase opportunities for student academic integration.

3. Increase opportunities for students to achieve social integration.

4. Support students with coursework needs.

5. Develop and evaluate interventions to support student learning.

6. Collect student data related to needs and barriers.

Developing Action Plans

While the strategies represent broad statements with longer-term implications for improvements in student life and learning, activity/action plans represent the immediate, short-term steps that collectively describe how the strategy will be accomplished. Good activity/action plans must include the following components:

- **What exactly are you going to do?** Specific description of the activity that is generally quantifiable and measurable.

- **When will it be completed?** Timetables that clearly show key dates and deadlines.

- **Who will be responsible?** Clear assignments of responsibility for performing important tasks.

- **How much will it cost?** Budget information showing the cost of implementation.

- **How will you know whether it has been accomplished?** The methods of assessment, evaluation, or control that will be used to monitor progress or measure success or failure of the actions.

Anatomy of an Action Plan

Activity/Description	Timetable	Responsibility	Budget	Control/Evaluation Procedures

Developing good activity/action plans is the most important, detailed, and time-consuming part of the quality enhancement (retention) planning process. The activity/action plans are the "heart" of the plan. Your effort in devising activity/action plans that have the following characteristics is essential to the creation of an effective overall plan:

- Important to the accomplishment of the designated strategy;

- Results-oriented;

- Understandable and clear to those who must implement them;

- Complete and specific enough to provide direction for implementation; and

- Realistic to accomplish.

Effective Action Plans

The following reminders are designed to help you develop effective activity/action plans:

1. One or more activity/action plan may be needed to implement the key retention strategy.

2. Provide a complete description of the activity.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the activity/action plan may be an individual, a committee, or a functional area of the office.

4. The timetable should include a date when the activity is to begin, and a date by which it should be completed. It is also permissible to designate "ongoing," if appropriate.

5. Include in the budget section any anticipated new direct expenses not currently budgeted that will be incurred in implementing the activity. If none, so indicate.

6. Evaluation and control may be as simple as indicating that the activity has been fully or partially accomplished.

7. The activity/action plan should be complete enough to provide direction to those responsible for its implementation.

Avoiding Excessive Activity Syndrome in Retention Planning

In retention planning, we urge institutions to avoid what Richard Chang has labeled "excessive activity syndrome" (EAS).

EAS Definition

The condition that exists when many different activities have been widely implemented, with limited measurable and visible results to show for the effort over a reasonable amount of time.

Change depicts the major differences between activity- versus results-oriented efforts as follows:

Activity-oriented	Results-oriented
Redefining problems/issues	Recommending specific actions to address problems/issues
Failing to set priorities	Establishing top priorities
Focusing on trivial and non-critical problems/issues	Selecting the problems/issues that are the most important and that make the biggest difference
Working to improve too many procedures simultaneously	Working to improve a small number of critical processes
Over-analyzing and disputing the data	Using the data to develop plans

Action Plan

Goal:

Key Strategy:

Description/Explanation:

Implementation Schedule/Timetable

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date

Coordinator:

Budget:

Evaluation/Control:

Sample Action Plan

GOAL: Increase the first-to-second year retention of first-time, full-time students entering in fall 2017 by three percent.

KEY STRATEGY: Improve academic advising.

DESCRIPTION/EXPLANATION: Currently, academic advising is seen on campus primarily as a process of getting students registered for classes, rather than as an ongoing relationship that fosters student success and guides students in attaining their educational and career goals. In order to change that, the university needs to hire a part-time coordinator of faculty advising and implement a training program for all advisors.

Implementation Schedule/Timetable

Steps	Responsibility	Completion Date
Form a committee of faculty members interested in advising	Vice president of academic advising	October 1, 2017
Support attendance at NACADA conference for at least two members	Vice president of academic advising	November 15, 2017
Write a job description for the coordinator of academic advising	Advising committee	December 1, 2017
Discuss at Dean's Council meeting	Vice president of academic advising	December 15, 2017
Finalize job description	Vice president of academic advising	January 15, 2018
Post position internally	Human resources	January 30, 2018
Conduct interviews	Advising committee	February 28, 2018
Hire coordinator	Vice president of academic advising	March 15, 2018
Develop a plan for the academic training program	Academic advising coordinator	May 1, 2018
Write advising manual	Academic advising coordinator	June 1, 2018
Review manual	Deans	July 1, 2018
Conduct advising workshop	Academic advising coordinator	August 17, 2018
Conduct first of four advising workshops	Academic advising coordinator	October 15, 2018
Get feedback from faculty advisors regarding workshops	Academic advising coordinator	October 31, 2018
Continue ongoing training opportunities	Academic advising coordinator	May 1, 2018
Coordinator: Dr. Sue Black, professor of psychology		

Budget:	
Adjunct replacement for four courses at $2,200	$8,800
Additional stipend for coordinator (summer months)	$10,000
NACADA conference for two at $1,500	$3,000
Advising budget	$2,000
Total	$23,800

Evaluation/Control:

Was the coordinator hired?

What percent of faculty attended the workshops?

Was the manual produced?

What changes did the evaluations suggest?

What difference in student satisfaction with advising is there on the SSI?

What will be done differently next year in the ongoing training program?

A Retention Plan Outline

Remember, the actual format and content of the retention plan may vary depending on institutional preferences. What follows is a suggested retention plan outline.

Section	Description
Table of Contents	Subjects covered in the plan and location
Introduction	Rationale and uses of the plan
Executive Summary	Summary of major provisions of the plan
Institutional Mission and Goals	A statement reflecting the institution's basic mission, philosophy, and goal: what distinguishes the institution from other post-secondary institutions? Whom is the institution attempting to serve? Where does the institution wish to go?
Situation Analysis	Facts on which the plan is based (SWOT Analysis).
Organizational Structure for Leadership of Retention Activities	A description of the organizational structure for addressing retention, including roles and responsibilities for implementing the plan.
Retention Goals	An expression of the results to be achieved in the enrollment program. Goals provide targets for the direction and guidance of the marketing, recruiting, and retention efforts. This should include overall and individual program enrollment goals.
Key Enrollment Strategies (Enabling Objectives)	The broad statements that, implemented successfully, will lead to the accomplishment of the goals.
Action Plans	Specific tactics/activities to accomplish the key strategies. Include a description, timetable, responsibility, resources needed, and procedures for measuring, controlling, and evaluating the planned actions.
Summary of Goals, Strategies, and Activities	This final section should summarize what is contained in the plan by listing each goal with the strategies and activities designed to accomplish the specific goal. Provides a quick and concise overview of the total enrollment plan.

A Final Word

The purpose of this retention-planning workbook is to help you develop an effective annual plan that will achieve your enrollment goals. It follows four very clear steps:

1. *Conduct a retention SWOT (situation analysis)*. This includes collecting, developing, and/or compiling all pertinent data and information.

2. *Set goals*. It is true that if you do not know where you are going, any road will get you there. Every good plan begins with a clear understanding of the critical goals that must be accomplished in order to succeed. Goals should be quantifiable, measurable, and realistic. Most important, they should be mutually agreed-upon by all whose efforts must achieve them.

3. *Formulate key strategies/enabling objectives*. Apply the 80/20 rule to planning: i.e., 80 percent of the results typically come from 20 percent of the activities. The trick, of course, is to know which 20 percent to focus on to produce results. Key strategies represent that 20 percent, and by definition, must be fully and effectively implemented to ensure success. Expect to identify only the "vital few" strategies for inclusion in the retention plan.

4. *Develop action plans*. Each key strategy requires a set of action or activity plans complete with timetables and budgets. The activity plan describes the actions or tactics that will occur in order to implement the strategy and achieve the goal. The action plan should assign responsibility, include clear beginning and ending dates, include measurable objectives when appropriate, and include budget information.

Happy planning!

Appendix

- Appendix I: Consultant Observations and Recommendations
- Appendix II: Student Affinity Diagram
- Appendix III: Current NMHU Action Plan Matrix
- Appendix IV: 35 Good Practices Survey
- Appendix V: Student Satisfaction (SSI) Results
- Appendix VI: Adult Student Priorities Survey (ASPS) Results
- Appendix VII: SRP Variable Diagnostics
- Appendix VIII: Life Stage Groups