Overview

The sophomore year is a time for students to develop a sense of purpose and self-efficacy related to their undergraduate educations. This takes the form of declaring a major, finding community, and developmentally exploring their places in the world. All of these issues affect retention, satisfaction, learning and development.

How can we better address the unique needs of sophomore students at the University?

“
A successful sophomore year student is one who can articulate the reasons for the curricular and co-curricular choices in the context of advising and plans.”

Assistant Dean Chris Kearns
College of Liberal Arts

Findings

• Four-year graduation rates have improved from 37% in 2005 to 50% in 2008.
• The U Twin Cities campus lagged behind peers until 2008. (Table 1)
• Drop out rates are higher for students in the bottom 50% of their high school class and those who scored <24 on the ACT. (Table 2)
• 60% of students with a GPA below 2.5 during their first semester will not persist into the third year.
• Students of color show decreased persistence into the third year. (Table 3)
• Development of relationships with faculty increases student academic success.
• When combined with heavy credit requirements for degrees, liberal education requirements can impede progress towards timely graduation.

Elements of the Successful Sophomore Year

The sophomore year develops a project identified of opportunity where sense and purpose are found. Focused efforts would yield improvements under the following recommendations.

All of the seven represent learning and development.

Quick wins that can be implemented using existing resources.

• Modify Academic Progress Audit System (APAS)
• Leverage existing “Student Experience in survey data.
• Refine the “Wild Card Module for the University of Minnesota” in the SERU survey.
• Collegiate exit surveys for students transferring
• Leverage Graduation Planner
• Integration of APLUS across campus
• Communications Plans

It’s like freshman year is about figuring out college life and the sophomore year is about figuring out your career and what you want to do for the next 10 years.”

Sophomore Student, Class of 2014

Recommendations

The project team identified areas of opportunity where focused efforts would yield significant improvements in sophomore student experiences, retention and graduation rates.

Of the sixteen recommendations, seven represent quick wins that can be implemented using existing resources.

• Modify Academic Progress Audit System (APAS)
• Leverage existing “Student Experience in survey data.
• Refine the “Wild Card Module for the University of Minnesota” in the SERU survey.
• Collegiate exit surveys for students transferring
• Leverage Graduation Planner
• Integration of APLUS across campus
• Communications Plans

Sophomore Year Experience & Retention Initiative

Selected References


Special Thanks

To our sponsor, the Office of Undergraduate Education, Dr. Laura Coffin Koch, Leekim Melin, Dave Dorman, Maggie Heier, Usability Services, our supervisors, coworkers, and fellow P.E.L participants.