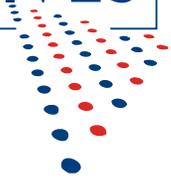


PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



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2014-2015 Series:

Inspirational Innovation

CHAPTER

2

Goal Realization:

Diverse Approaches for a Diverse Generation



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Goal Realization:

Diverse Approaches for a Diverse Generation

Dr. John R. Broderick, President, Old Dominion University

Student retention, persistence, and graduation (RPG) rates have been widely accepted by institutions of higher education as the leading measures of student success. “In a joint session of Congress on February 24, 2009, President Obama set forth a goal that ‘by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.’” (Russell, 2011). More recently, however, student success is being characterized by post-graduation achievements. In August of 2013, President Obama put a new spin on college goal realization when he proposed a federal college rating system designed to improve institutional affordability and accountability. As a consequence, a new student success goal came into focus: graduate earnings.

RPG goal realization requires attention to numerous student idiosyncrasies, and this can be challenging. Establishing and achieving goals based on graduate earnings heightens the challenge. This is especially true with today’s generation of college students, who, according to Levine and Dean (2012), are characterized by numerous inherent contradictions. Although raised in one of the worst recessions in years, this generation yearns for the economic opportunities of their parents’ generation. They are seeking independence, yet are more dependent on their parents than any other generation. Provided with global outreach via technology, they are still ill-informed of other cultures. They are always connected, yet have difficulty with face-to-face communications.

Old Dominion University, a public Research I institution enrolling nearly 25,000 students, serves one of the most diverse student populations in Virginia. To meet retention and graduation rate goals, the approach to supporting student success must be as diverse as the population served.

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The populations served by institutions such as Old Dominion University range well beyond first-time, traditional-aged freshman, and the diversity of students encompasses far more than gender, race, and ethnicity. As is the case with many large, metropolitan, public universities, the students at Old Dominion University present diversity characteristics based upon age, campus site, course delivery mode, military affiliation, first generation membership, family income, transfer status, academic preparation, nationality, and other growing demographic segments of our population.

Unfortunately, the federally mandated reporting system for federally funded colleges and universities, as well as many national ranking and rating systems in the U.S., are not inclusive of all student diversity modes, leaving out many of the populations that will assist the nation in achieving its degree-completion goal. The national system, in most of its measures, is still considering only first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen in its cohort reporting and tracking methodology.

Although the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) was established in 1986, it was not until 1990, with the enactment of the Student Right-to-Know Act, that the federal government became involved in the collection of graduation rates from institutions (Gold & Albert, 2006). The data collection was conducted with the IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey (GRS). According to Cook and Pullaro,

IPEDS GRS was created to provide data on graduation rates for student athletes compared with a similar group of non-scholarship students; in other words, the first-time, full-time population. However, according to 2008 IPEDS data, the GRS cohort at baccalaureate institutions accounted for 61 percent of the fall entering class. This means that nearly 40 percent of students entering in the fall at baccalaureate institutions are not included in IPEDS GRS. Because this number does not account for students who enrolled in a semester other than the fall, students in the GRS cohort actually account for significantly less than 61 percent of the total entering class of 2008. (2010, p. 10)

Forty percent of national college enrollment is missed in the traditional measures, including populations such as transfers, part-time, and non-traditional learners. These are important groups in the nation's quest to be unrivaled in college completion. Irrespective of required reporting and ranking systems, universities such as Old Dominion University, with a mission to serve a diverse student body, must use engagement approaches that are as diverse as the students themselves. Retention initiatives that ultimately lead to higher graduation rates and post-graduation accomplishments should speak to the students to whom they are directed. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work with a multifaceted student body. Institutions have an obligation to constantly evolve their student success strategies to ensure each population segment has the best opportunity to graduate and become productive citizens.

First-time freshmen, transfer, military, online, and international students are a few of the population segments at Old Dominion University that have been identified to receive specialized assistance to match their student-success needs. These needs are determined through directed assessment and predictive analytics that take hundreds of data points into consideration to ascertain which students in each population segment are at risk of not succeeding. Customized interventions can then be developed for these students.

The first-time freshmen are a traditional and thriving population segment at Old Dominion University and account for approximately half of the new undergraduates each year. A growing residential campus environment supports them with engagement opportunities such as living-learning communities. Predictive analytics are used to assist students by identifying their individual needs. This method also ensures the most efficient use of resources. There are a number of examples that illustrate a multifaceted approach used at Old Dominion University to ensure the success of this diverse group of students, under the leadership of our Vice President for Student Engagement and Enrollment Services, Dr. Ellen Neufeldt.



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One example is targeted programming using predictive analytics for first-year students in specific risk groups. About one-third of Old Dominion University students are Pell eligible, indicating significant socio-economic diversity. Predictive analytics inform decisions on how much financial aid impacts the likelihood of students' first-year retention. One such program is student employment which provides an opportunity for students who need additional financial resources. The Learn and Earn Advantage Program (LEAP) is specifically designed to help first- and second-year students get jobs on campus, thus providing them with needed financial resources and a strong connection to the university. This unique student work program assists its participants in identifying major- and career-related internships by their junior year and may lead to greater chance at satisfactory post-graduation earnings and other accomplishments beyond their university employment experience.

Another subgroup of students identified through predictive modeling includes those less likely to become engaged on campus. Targeted programming to this group assists the students in establishing meaningful affiliations with the university. Examples include small group learning activities such as a Freshman Summer Leadership Institute and a program designed for women in engineering. Involvement counselors also serve as peer mentors to assist students with campus connections.

Academic risk factors are likewise identified so as to serve those most in need of tutoring, coaching, and mentoring. An example is supplemental instruction (SI) tied to the most challenging classes for students at risk of academic failure. Data at Old Dominion University show that students who complete the SI classes in certain math subjects will outperform those who do not. Again, meeting the unique needs of specific students in an attempt to overcome their challenges and set them on a course for success.

Through targeted programming, Old Dominion University has raised the freshman retention percentage from the mid-seventies to the low eighties in just over six years. Another significant population segment is the transfer students who make up the other half of the new undergraduate student enrollment. Transfers span all demographic groups, with many living on campus as traditional students while others attend as adult learners. There are two specialized orientation sessions offered that ensure vital content is provided in a flexible manner suited to each population in both face-to-face and on-line formats. Numerous articulation agreements have been created to ensure seamless entry for community college transfer students and a formal agreement for guaranteed access admission (GAA) provides early advising opportunities for students still enrolled at their community colleges.

Located adjacent to the largest naval base in the world, Old Dominion University enrolls a quarter of its students who are in some way military affiliated – active duty, retired, reserves, or family members. The University's Military Connection Center provides a specialized orientation and onboarding program. The center coordinates programs such as peer mentoring and links with specialized assistance across campus: career services, accessibility support, and counseling services, among others. Education on how to serve and meet the needs of this special population, diverse in its own right, is offered to faculty and staff.

While Old Dominion University students taking classes online from a distance come from a demographic that is majority female with a mean age of 35, there are some risk factors that are universal. A population segment often forgotten in the retention and success metrics and interventions that cover their on-campus freshman counterparts, online students are most at risk for persistence early in their program. Executive coaches assist online learners with assimilation into the university and academic program processes to ensure a smooth start. Another important resource, the Career Management Center, provides 24/7 services through a cyber-center that offers specialized events for online students such as virtual resume writing workshops, mock interviews, job search strategies, and employer recruitment.



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International students are another unique population segment. University administrators know all too well that admitting international students requires a planned success track. Examples at Old Dominion University include the English Language Center for pre-program proficiency instruction, individualized arrival assistance, and housing options that offer 12-month or academic-year contracts. Throughout the first semester, peer mentors are available along with comprehensive specialized programming to assist international students with the transition to a new culture and learning environment.

In summary, institutions of higher education must look beyond the “measures of the day” required by state and federal reporting agencies and address the very real concerns and needs of the students who make up the rich diversity of their campus enrollments. By doing this, the external agency-required measures and targets will be met and, more importantly, the student success goals of the institution will be achieved. Individual students who have their own personal talents and challenges will be encouraged to grow and be supported in a fashion that is uniquely appropriate for them. Goal realization is not a one-size-fits-all proposition as one of my faculty colleagues, Dennis Gregory, reminds me, but requires diverse approaches for a diverse generation.

References

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Dr. John R. Broderick is the eighth president of Old Dominion University. Since President Broderick took office in 2008, he has positioned the University as a leader in education, research, economic development, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. President Broderick has guided an ambitious University master plan and two strategic plans, which have resulted in more than \$338 million in capital projects. In addition, he is credited with establishing the University's Sea Level Rise Initiative in 2010 and has been at the forefront of ODU's growth in modeling and simulation, bioelectrics, and distance education.

President Broderick has lent his expertise in higher education to numerous state and national committees and organizations, including the Governor's Commission on Higher Education; the Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and Investment; and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities Council of State Representatives. His contributions have been recognized by numerous organizations in the Norfolk area, Virginia, and beyond.

Prior to becoming president, he served as ODU vice president of institutional advancement and admissions and chief of staff to the president. Before he joined Old Dominion, President Broderick was a faculty member in the University of Pittsburgh system and an administrator at St. Bonaventure University. He received a bachelor's degree from Northeastern University and a graduate degree from St. Bonaventure. President Broderick and his wife, Kate, are the proud parents of three sons, Ryan, Matt, and Aaron, and a granddaughter, Allison. They live in Norfolk, Virginia.