
UNIVERSITY *of* WEST FLORIDA

PERFORMANCE FUNDING
IMPROVEMENT PLAN

2014-2015 / KEY AREAS OF FOCUS





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OVERVIEW

The core of the University of West Florida’s mission is a commitment to ensuring student success. As outlined in the 2012-2017 UWF Strategic Plan, the University is dedicated to planning and investing strategically to enhance student success and educational attainment.

UWF is concentrating on three key areas of focus that provide the University the greatest ability to make a positive impact on students during 2014-2015. This plan is aligned with the priorities highlighted within the Board of Governors Performance Based Funding Metrics and driven by national best practices in retention and completion.

THREE KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

Metric 4. Six-Year Graduation Rate for First-time-in-College (FTIC) Students

Metric 5. Academic Progress Rate

Metric 9. Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded Without Excess Hours



HISTORY

Our efforts toward student retention and graduation rate began in earnest in Fall 2012 upon the approval of our 2012-2017 Strategic Plan by the UWF Board of Trustees. A one-year retention plan, geared toward FTIC students, included the hiring of a Director of Student Retention and a statistical modeling of our students’ progress historically. In addition, the UWF Haas Center surveyed all non-returning FTIC students to determine reasons why they had not re-enrolled. We began a focus on early warning and significantly increased the number of faculty who provided information to trigger alerts. We formed a university-wide committee on retention efforts (CORE) and began to look at institutional barriers to retention. We identified gateway courses that may be problematic to students as well as advising issues.

Noel Levitz, a leading enrollment management consulting firm, was selected as a partner to assist with market research and to conduct an analysis of current enrollment practices. The assessment began in November 2013 and will end in June. Recommendations from this assessment will be included in UWF’s Strategic Enrollment Plan.

STRATEGIES & RATIONALE

The following content outlines the specific and measurable actions and initiatives that will be completed during the 2014-15 academic year. UWF is concentrating on three key focus areas, as positive progress related to one metric is likely to increase the University’s standing related to another. Therefore, UWF has adopted a holistic approach to increasing the institution’s standing by focusing on strategies to maximize impact on student success.

Create a comprehensive, centralized unit for student support services.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Create a separate College dedicated to student success. The College will be known as <i>University College</i> and will have overarching responsibility for student academic support, professional readiness, retention initiatives and University advising.	Add advising training module into curriculum for department chair development program.
Hire a dean for <i>University College</i> .	Create a comprehensive advising plan for implementation in Fall 2015.
Appoint an advising “czar” to oversee and coordinate all University advising.	



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Rationale: During the fall semester, UWF will create *University College* to streamline student services into a comprehensive unit that will enhance the effectiveness of student support services. A centralized, “one-stop-shop” for student support is a common model in 21st century American universities. The college will consist of three major units: (1) academic programs, which will include the University Honors program and general studies; (2) University advising, which will coordinate campus-wide advising; and (3) professional readiness to provide high impact programming with demonstrable impact on student career success. Creation of *University College* will include hiring of a Dean of *University College* and appointing an advising “czar” to oversee and coordinate all University advising.

By May 2015, a training module for advising will be added to the curriculum of the current *Department Chair Development Program*. At UWF, departmental advising is key to a student’s effective progress toward degree. With changes in policies and online support, department chairs will need to be individually equipped to guide the advising function within their programs. Additionally, UWF will create a comprehensive advising plan that will provide the construct for an integrated approach to student advising university-wide.

Increase the number of full-time faculty members and academic advisors.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Hire 3 new academic advisors.	Hire 18 new full-time faculty members (including 6 dedicated to General Studies courses).

Rationale: Hiring 18 new full-time faculty members will enhance the student-to-faculty ratio to ensure that students are provided the courses and attention required to progress toward completion of a degree in a timely fashion. Hiring 18 new faculty members will better equip the institution to meet the curricular needs of students in growing programs and ensure that students are obtaining enhanced mentoring and high impact learning experiences, which lead to greater success in degree completion. Six of these faculty lines will be dedicated to General Studies courses.

While UWF has been actively engaged in enhancing and strengthening advising services through the campus, hiring 3 new academic advisors will provide support in areas of identified need. One of the advisors will be assigned to University College. The other two will be assigned to the College of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities and the College of Science, Engineering & Health. This will ensure that a professional advisor in each college to support the faculty advisors.

Develop degree completion tools for students.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Create and disseminate a <i>Financial Literacy Program</i> .	Develop and disseminate a <i>Graduation Guide</i> for students after completion of 60 credit hours.

Rationale: Some of the major factors that slow students in making timely progress toward a degree are a myriad of financial obstacles. UWF seeks to better equip students to understand the complex landscape of options and requirements that often accompany paying for a university education by developing a *Financial Literacy Program* for all students. The program will raise awareness among students about financial resources and more importantly, provide financial aid literacy information. Financial Literacy materials will be distributed to all students throughout the academic year.

Additionally, a significant number of UWF students are working adults and must accommodate their employment needs by enrolling in fewer credit hours. On average, more than 50 percent of the UWF student population enrolls in 12-13.5 credit hours per semester, and more than 60 percent of UWF students indicated in the Beginning Student Survey (conducted during Fall 2013) that they expect to work while attending classes.

Therefore, a *Graduation Guide* will be developed to provide to students who have completed 60 credit hours. The guide will ensure that students receive a series of communications throughout their junior and senior years that reinforces the importance of staying on track and completing the requirements of their degree.



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Purchase and implement new degree audit and planning software.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Implement <i>DegreeWorks</i> degree audit system. Integrate 8 semester degree plans.	Implement <i>DegreeWorks Student Planner</i> module.
Purchase and implement <i>College Scheduler</i> software platform in order to create more refined, targeted and critical course scheduling. Integrate with <i>DegreeWorks</i> .	Provide training to faculty and staff on <i>College Scheduler</i> .

Rationale: A degree audit system supports an effective advising model, and serves as an invaluable tool to ensure students monitor their academic progress and advance toward graduation. *DegreeWorks*, a web-based degree audit system, will replace the current in-house system and allow UWF the flexibility to provide students with robust data that encourages timely graduation.

By enhancing the degree audit system, UWF students will have the ability to develop a long-term plan for degree completion, verify that the courses included in the plan fulfill degree requirements, explore different degree plans, and fully understand remaining degree requirements. The *DegreeWorks Student Planner* will further enhance the advising experience by providing advisors a platform to create and track a long-range academic plan for students.

College Scheduler, a separate web-based schedule-planning tool, will provide students with scheduling options to ensure they register for the maximum number of credit hours, therefore decreasing their time to degree.

Revise current and develop new University policies to support progress to obtaining a degree.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Secure approval of <i>Progress to Degree Policy</i> .	Begin implementation of <i>Progress to Degree Policy</i> .
Secure approval of revised <i>Attendance Policy</i> .	Begin implementation of revised <i>Attendance Policy</i> .

Rationale:

Progress to Degree Policy

The University’s goal is to provide students with access to high-quality, relevant and affordable learning experiences from enrollment through graduation. The *Progress to Degree Policy* is central to and aimed at assisting students’ progress toward degree in an efficient manner while effectively meeting their academic goals. Embedded within the policy will be graduation benchmarks that begin with two and four-year plans of study, and are intended to support progress toward graduation.

The policy will include limitations on changing or declaring a major, minor or dual degree, set limits on the number of course withdraws and redefine the grade forgiveness policy.

The impact of this policy will be significant in relation to a variety of factors. For example, based on a historical data comparison, juniors and seniors represent more than 40 percent of the student population that request to change their major. Modifying the process to require the student to be counseled by an advisor to ensure that students are fully informed of all of the implications, including excess hours and graduation. One of the aspects of the policy will be the inclusion of a departmental approval requirement for junior and senior students to change their major. This requirement will reduce the likelihood of students changing programs without making an informed decision. This preventive measure will create a proactive approach to assist students in degree completion in the most efficient fashion.



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Revised Attendance Policy

UWF expects students to take full responsibility for their academic work and progress. To progress satisfactorily, students must meet the requirements of each course for which they are registered, and successful work depends, to a large extent, on regular class attendance. A *First-Time-in-College Student Class Attendance Policy* will be developed and approved to encourage engagement and support retention. Class attendance is regarded as an academic matter, therefore, this policy will set the expectation that each faculty member record attendance for all FTIC students enrolled in a General Studies course and provide the students with a written attendance policy.

Implement additional tools, strategies and programs aimed at increasing retention and graduation.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Administer <i>The Student Strengths Inventory</i> © to FTIC students through Beacon software.	Implement a <i>Supplemental Instruction Program</i> for students enrolled in courses associated with high failure rates.

Rationale:

Administer Student Strengths Inventory© through Beacon software

Last year, UWF conducted a pilot program through the software *Beacon*. The program administers *The Student Strengths Inventory*© (SSI), which is an assessment designed to help UWF develop data-driven, evidence-based student success solutions. The SSI is administered to incoming FTIC students at UWF during summer orientation and identifies individuals who might be at risk based on non-cognitive factors, such as resiliency and academic self-efficacy. The results provide predictive models needed to develop and suggest programs, plan interventions and offer assistance to specific targeted students.

Implement a Supplemental Instruction Program

High DWF (drop, withdraw and fail) rates represent unsuccessful enrollments in a course. The assumption is that these high rates lead to eventual attrition from the institution. The implementation of a *Supplemental Instruction Program* will emphasize the development of organizational skills, questioning techniques, and test preparation strategies in an effort to increase retention and improve grades in historically difficult courses. This will ultimately lead to the increase in graduation rates of UWF students.

Supplemental instruction will be a “free service” offered to all students in a targeted course. Supplemental instruction is a non remedial approach to learning as the program targets high-risk courses rather than high-risk students.

Increase communication with students regarding the Excess Hours Policy.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Distribute a supplemental <i>Excess Hours Guide</i> to all faculty, staff and students.	Provide a series of training programs for new advisors regarding the <i>Excess Hours Policy</i> .

Rationale: UWF has been meeting the statutory requirement of communicating to students about excess hours. However, following a 2013-2014 assessment of the effectiveness of the related communication methods, we discovered that meeting the minimum requirements of the law did not serve the full needs of students. Based on that data, we identified a series of areas in which our system of connecting with students could be improved.

The *Excess Hours Guide* will be used as a resource to ensure UWF faculty, staff and students are fully informed of all aspects related to excess hours surcharge. The guide will provide relevant information on credit hours that count toward excess hours and semester-based exemptions, and is used as a resource to educate students on the implications of changing their major and excessively withdrawing from courses.



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As new advisors come on line, it is important to give them specific training in the Excess Hours Policy due to the complexity of the statute.

Implement Summer Success Program for FTIC students on academic warning.

DEADLINE: December 2014	DEADLINE: May 2015
Evaluate 2014 <i>Summer Success Program</i> pilot.	Recruit students for the 2015 <i>Summer Success Program</i> .

Rationale: The Summer Success Program is targeted towards students on academic warning at the end of the spring semester of their first year. Students will be provided a financial aid grant to offset the cost of tuition for a summer course. The program gives students two options: First, students could repeat a course for which they qualify for a grade forgiveness option. Second, students will have the option of taking an academic foundation course geared toward at-risk freshman. A pilot program is currently being conducted during Summer 2014. An evaluation of the pilot program will be conducted during the Fall 2014 semester. During the Spring 2015 semester, at-risk FTIC students will be recruited into the 2015 Summer Success program.



SUMMARY

UWF is dedicated to creating and enhancing programs, policies and services that remove barriers to degree completion and increase the institution's profile in the SUS Performance Based Funding Model. By embracing accountability measures and implementing actionable, measurable steps, the University will better equip students to move into successful careers.