The Phoenix Project: An Intrusive Retention Initiative for At-Risk Students

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Introduction
- Universities competing for a smaller pool of students; need to retain them once we admit them
- More Support services and programs are needed
- The Phoenix Project targets dismissed/readmitted students and students on probation after their first semester.
- Pilot Year: 2013 – 2014

Objectives
- Assess results of intrusive advising initiative
- Avoid dismissal and increase retention
- Change status back to good standing within three semesters
- Increase graduation rates of at-risk students within five years
- Prepare graduates to launch satisfying careers

Methods
Sophomores, juniors and seniors on probation
- Registration hold placed until they meet with advisor and sign contract
- Required 3 meetings with advisor throughout semester

Readmitted students
- Mandatory 1 credit UNIV 1030 Academic Recovery Course first semester back

Freshmen probation students
- Revised academic schedules after fall grades posted
- Enrolled in recommended 2 credit UNIV 1030 Academic Recovery Course for spring 2014

The Academic Recovery Class
Classroom Instruction
- Study skills, time management, test taking
- Reflection papers
- Study skills assessment (LASSI)
- Group work on success topics

One-on-One Coaching
- Intrusive academic advising
- Career and life coaching

Mandatory Study Lab
- Two hours in supervised study lab
- Two hours of their choice at approved locations

LASSI (Learning and Study Strategies Inventory)
0 – 50 = Needs improvement
50 – 75 = Consider Improvement
75 – 100 = Not a high priority for improvement

Students’ perception of their skills is considerably higher in the second administration, indicated by much less red in the second chart

Two Examples
Gabe:
Dismissed with a 1.86 CGPA
Fall 2013 made Dean’s List with a 3.65!
Admitted to BBA

Adam:
Dismissed with a 1.43 CGPA
Fall 2013 earned 3.46
Admitted to BBA

Fall Results
- 89% retention rate
- 74% reached Good Standing (2.0 CGPA)
- 17% made Dean’s List and invited to join Lee Honors College
- 67% who were BBA eligible (2.5 CGPA) gained admission
- Positive anecdotal feedback
- Improved study skills (see LASSI chart)

Going Forward
- Assistant Director position charged with directing and further developing the Phoenix Program has been created
- Provost is encouraging other Colleges to develop and expand similar programs
- More collaboration is taking place across University
- Vision to create WMU Study Lab

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