

Everyone a Learner, Everyone a Teacher

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Introduction

Everyone a Learner, Everyone a Teacher is the title of a University of Nebraska–Lincoln report guided by a simple question: How do we better prepare our students to be intentional learners? This institution-wide effort grew from a Noel-Levitz consultation during the 2001–2002 academic year. At that time, focusing on the recruitment and retention of first-year students was a new topic for UNL. Because of senior administrative support and efforts by administrators, faculty, and staff representing all segments of the university, retention rates for first- to second-year returning students have risen from 80.9% in 2001 to 83.9% in 2008. Four- and five-year graduation rates have also increased.

Background

In the fall of 2003, the senior vice chancellor for academic affairs at UNL formed the Transition to University Task Force, comprised of a group of faculty, staff, and students. Prior to developing recommendations, the Task Force reviewed a number of university documents and the 2002 AAC&U report, *Greater Expectations: A Nation Goes to College*. Faculty responsible for teaching first-year courses, faculty noted for their teaching expertise, and student affairs personnel and administrators held conversations regarding best practices. Focus groups were conducted with groups of UNL students representing various academic constituencies and all levels of study. In December of 2003, the Task Force outlined a number of goals in the report, *Everyone a Learner, Everyone a Teacher*.

The Chancellor formed the Enrollment Management Council in 2003 to provide an integrated, university-wide coordination of efforts to manage enrollment and to enhance the recruitment and retention of students. The Council is cochaired by the dean of undergraduate studies and the dean of admissions. Membership of the Council includes associate deans from each

of the undergraduate colleges; directors of the University Honors Program, Division of General Studies (undeclared majors), University Communications, Extended Education, Scholarships and Financial Aid, Registration and Records, Student Involvement, University Housing, and representatives from Institutional Research and Planning and the Chancellor's Office. Two subcommittees were formed to contribute to the activities of the Council, one to focus on recruitment and admissions and the second on advising and retention. Recognizing the relationship between advising and retention, the advising and retention subcommittee has representation from each college, general studies, the honors program, the office of admissions, and the athletic department. A corollary to this forum is that advisors become much more active in translating policy to students and in sharing information with upper-level administration.

Members of the Transitions to University Task Force were reunited in December 2006 to review progress toward the recommendations of the report. The group recommended that they continue to be involved in campus-wide efforts to stimulate discussion about the importance of student retention, serving as an informal advisory group to the dean of undergraduate studies. This article focuses on three initiatives that have had a major impact on our undergraduate student population.

Mid-Semester Check

Students who participated in the Transitions to University Task Force focus groups indicated that their initial orientation (new student enrollment) to UNL was beneficial, but that they needed follow-up. Mid-Semester Check was implemented in fall 2004.

Held during the last week of September, Mid-Semester Check activities are scheduled purposely at a time in the semester when incoming first-year students are ready to move past issues related to college adjustment, and academic issues begin to surface. It is a time to check on how the students are doing and to suggest where they can turn for assistance. New students have the opportunity to reconnect with the new-student enrollment leaders from their summer