

Noel-Levitz.

October 29, 2013

Dr. John Crain
President
Southeastern Louisiana University
SLU 10468, Room 114
Hammond, LA 70402

Dear Dr. Crain,

I would like to thank you and members of the Southeastern Louisiana University (SELU) community for their hospitality during my recent visit to campus. Please thank your faculty, staff, and students for their energetic and enthusiastic participation during the two days. I appreciated their candor and openness, especially those members of the Retention and Progression Task Force, with whom I was able to discuss immediate actions to increase retention rates for this year's cohort. Please extend a special thanks to Lori Fairburn for all her work in arranging the visit and the senior leader leadership team for sharing their time so generously.

The primary purpose of the Retention Opportunities Analysis was to identify opportunities to strengthen retention and completion efforts through both immediate action and planning for future implementation. I conducted the analysis in three parts: pre-visit preparation, the campus visit, and the exit briefing. At the exit briefing I provided a summary of major findings and recommendations, and included comparisons of persistence, progression, retention, and completion rates to national norms, a review of SELU's retention and graduation targets as determined by the Louisiana Board of Regents, a brief discussion of the retention framework that I used to identify strengths and challenges, and immediate and longer-term priorities for action. I have included a copy of the PowerPoint presentation as Appendix B.

Once you've had time to review this report, please schedule some time with me should you have questions or concerns about any of the contents of the report, or if you would like to talk about possible next steps. You can contact me at 610-743-3060 or claire-berardini@noellevitz.com at any time.

Sincerely,



Claire Berardini
Executive Consultant

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Pre-visit Preparation

With the assistance of Lori Fairburn, director of enrollment services, I was able to review information about retention efforts and student support services at Southeastern Louisiana University, as well as retention data and other documents prior to my on-campus meetings with faculty, deans, students, staff, and executive leadership. The list below represents all data and information that were shared and reviewed prior to the visit.

- Academic and demographic profile of student body
- Retention report for the fall 2012 cohort
- “Vision 2017” (Southeastern Louisiana University’s Strategic Plan)
- Division of Academic Affairs “Vision 2017” Action Plans
- Information from the 2012 Common Data Set on the following:
 - Financial aid
 - Enrollment and persistence
 - Student life
- Beginning freshman admission criteria
- Administrative organizational charts
- Core curriculum and major requirements
- Results from the *Current Student Survey 2012-2013: Student Activities and Student Life*
- Percent of courses taught by full-time faculty (fall 2011)
- Developmental course enrollment (2008-2012)
- ACT scores for freshman cohorts 2008-2012
- Results of the Entering Freshmen Survey 2010 2011
- Results of Spring 2011 ACT Student Opinion Survey
- Non-returning Student Surveys results (2011, 2012)
- 2012 NSSE™ data
- 2012 FSSE™ data

Visit Agenda

Below is the agenda that I developed with Lori Fairburn's input and that guided my conversations with faculty, staff, and students.

Tuesday, October 8, 2013

- 7:30 a.m. Review agenda and enrollment data with Lori Fairburn, director, enrollment services
- 8:00 a.m. Meet with Dr. John Crain, president and Dr. Tammy Bourg, provost and vice president for academic affairs to discuss previous work with Noel-Levitz, retention planning, structures that are in place, and the current state of retention activities, challenges, and opportunities
- 8:45 a.m. Meet with Mindy Notariano, senior advisor, Center for Student Excellence and Carolyn Blackwood, learning assistance coordinator to discuss first-year advising, registration for incoming freshmen, the First-Year Seminar, and learning support.
- 9:45 a.m. Meet with enrollment services staff to discuss orientation
- 10:30 a.m. Meet with President's Cabinet to assess current state of retention activities, challenges, and opportunities
- 11:30 a.m. Meet with student affairs staff to discuss orientation, student engagement
- 12:15 pm Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Meet with deans to discuss retention activities, challenges, and opportunities: developmental courses/enrollments, course availability, progression within majors, etc.
- 2:00 p.m. Meet with Retention Committee to discuss current efforts and longer term goals
- 4:00 p.m. Meet with students

Wednesday, October 9, 2013

- 9:00 a.m. Exit briefing with Dr. John Crain, Cabinet, and others as appropriate
- 12:00 p.m. Depart campus

Current State Assessment

The current state assessment that follows is based on the data and information I reviewed prior to the visit and the meetings with academic affairs, enrollment services, student affairs, and students.

Retention and Graduation Benchmarks

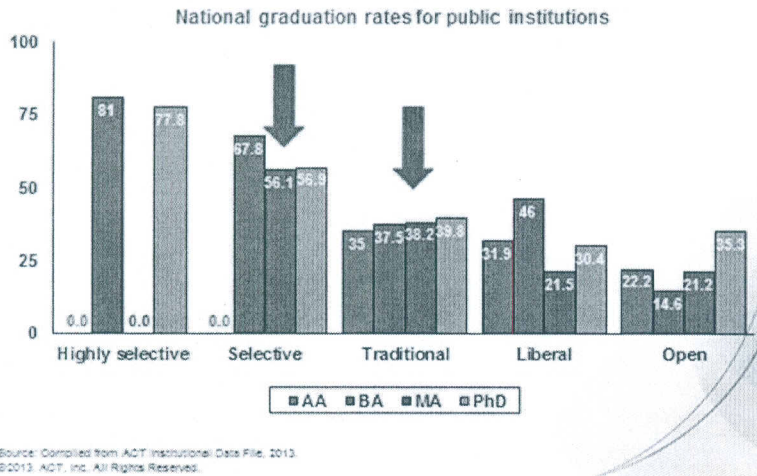
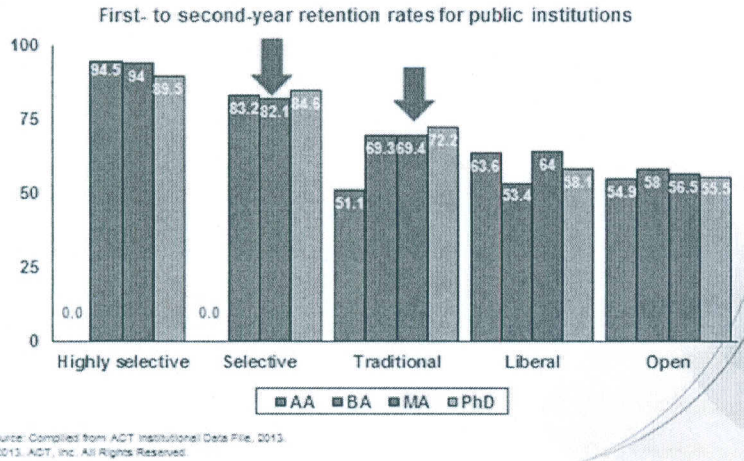
In order to benchmark Southeastern Louisiana University with respect to retention and graduation rates, I used ACT selectivity levels (see below). ACT uses the middle 50 percent or middle quartiles of the ACT composite score range to define selectivity level. According to the latest information as provided on the IPEDS website and other institutional data, the middle 50 percent ACT score range for Southeastern Louisiana University is 20-24. This score range would establish the University as somewhere between traditional and selective.

Institutional Admission Selectivity

Selectivity level	ACT middle 50%	SAT middle 50%
Highly selective	25–30	1710–2000
Selective	21–26	1470–1770
Traditional	18–24	1290–1650
Liberal	17–22	1230–1530
Open	16–21	1170–1480

Source: Compiled from ACT Institutional Data File, 2012.
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The university currently reports a fall-to-fall retention rate of 63.3 percent for the fall 2011 class and a five-year graduation rate of 25.6 percent. The tables below reveal that traditional to selective universities offering masters' degrees have an average retention rate between 69.4 and 82.1 percent and a five-year graduation rate between 38.2 and 56.1 percent.



Retention and Graduation Goals

As a result of the Louisiana GRAD Act, the retention and graduation targets below have been established for Southeastern Louisiana University by the Louisiana Board of Regents. SELU experienced a decline in first- to second-year retention for the 2012 cohort and for the first time since 2009 fell below the minimum retention target. In order to ensure operational autonomy and flexibility, SELU will have to increase its first- to second-year retention rates to reach these targets.

Cohort	Target	Actual
2009	65.0% – 69.0%	67.0%
2010	65.8% – 69.8 %	69.5%
2011	66.5% – 70.5%	66.9%
2012	67.0% – 71%	63.3%
2013	67.5% – 71.5%	
2014	69.0% – 73%	

Observations about Campus Culture

- Based on feedback from faculty, students, and staff, I was able to identify key elements of the campus culture relevant to SELU’s retention efforts.
 - Students love SELU. They feel pride in the University, they value faculty and like that they are known by name. They like the Hammond community and they like the campus.
 - It’s not clear that staff understand how their attitudes and behaviors are perceived by students. The students with whom I spoke felt that front-line staff are often rude to or dismissive of them.
 - It’s not clear that staff who perform operations not directly connected to teaching and advising understand their impact on retention.
 - Staff felt that colleagues often focus on enforcing rules rather than helping students successfully navigate them.
 - It appears that some policies have created barriers to student success. For example, there is no longer a drop/add period; students may not make changes to their course schedules once a semester has begun.
 - There was general consensus that SELU is very siloed communication channels and habits are not consistently effective. For example, faculty and staff advisors don’t consistently/routinely know of changes to curriculum or requirements for their degrees. Students complained of getting the “runaround” when seeking information or answers from student service areas.
 - Data is available but it is not consistently or effectively used. For example, students are surveyed regularly but it is not clear for what purpose. It is not clear that students are being asked questions that will elicit useable or actionable information. Additionally, it appears that data is not yet routinely part of conversations about or planning for retention.
 - The institution is facing substantial financial challenges which limit its ability to invest additional resources to support retention efforts.

New Student Intake

- As we discussed in the exit briefing, strategies associated with the intake process should be designed to promote retention as well as impact enrollment yield. Ideally, the intake process should help students feel affiliated with the institution; build relationships with staff, faculty, and fellow students; understand and feel confident in their first-semester course selections; and feel confident in their overall readiness to begin their lives as students. However, it does not appear that Southeastern Louisiana University is utilizing the early-to-middle parts of the summer to accomplish these goals. Efforts are hampered by the large number of students attending each session and a general lack of clear vision and purpose.
 - Attendance at each of six events ranges from 250-500 students, although staff reported the typical range to be closer to 400-500. Additionally, 300-400 parents attend each event.
 - A review of the freshmen event program, together with conversations with staff and students, indicate sessions are designed primarily to provide information rather than encourage engagement. Students browse information tables, attend information sessions by college and sessions on financial aid. Students attend some of these sessions as a single large group and others in smaller groups that can be as large as 50-60 students.
 - It appears that the program is trying to provide all information to students and parents, and generally there is little confidence that students or parents will remember it later when they need to. Because there is no “kick-off” style orientation prior to the start of classes staff feel pressured to provide as much information as they can in the early summer events.
 - Students spend a relatively small amount of time with each other in the smaller groups. It appears that there is only a short amount of time dedicated to student-to-student interaction.
 - Students and staff reported that advising during the program is inconsistent across colleges and departments. Students reported that advising is rushed, the event is chaotic, and that after the first two or three dates, it becomes harder and harder for freshmen to get classes. One student said that “it seems like some advisors think it’s a hassle to advise you.”
 - Students have the option to stay overnight on campus. Participation in evening activities for students who stay over is voluntary and does not appear directed at achieving any particular outcome. Options include a dance, a movie, or shooting pool.

First-Year Transition

- SELU has two main strategies in place to support students in making a successful transition to both college in general and to SELU: SE 101 and first-year advising. No one I spoke with during my time on campus feels either is accomplishing what it needs to.

- Freshmen are advised by professional advisors in the Center for Student Excellence (CSE). Students are assigned to advisors by major. Students are assigned a new advisor in the Center at any point they change their major
- There are too few advisors to be able to provide proactive and intrusive advising. Staff estimate advising loads of 190-200 freshmen this semester. They report that they are unable to develop relationships with students and in fact, began advising students for spring registration in September to assure they can meet with everyone. That advising appointment is likely their only contact with their advisees.
- It appears that some departments and some schools are working around the CSE advising center by asking their freshmen to come to them for advisement.
- I did not see evidence that advising is being assessed.
- It became evident that college-level leadership do not support a centralized advising center. Although I had prepared questions for the academic deans about program attrition, requirements, gateway courses, sequencing, and the availability of courses, their attention and energy were solely focused on first-year advising. They seemed to be in agreement that creating advising offices in each college would improve the quality of advising significantly. The deans felt very strongly that affiliating students with their discipline is of primary importance, even above ensuring an overall solid transition to the college
- The dean of the College of Business shared that his college has implemented its own version of a first-year seminar. Deans supported this model and suggested interest in implementing this in their own colleges.
- While I understand the deans' perspective on advising and acknowledge their belief that the best way to transition first-year students to the University is through affiliation with their major, creating centralized advisement offices in each college may well result in the same problems affecting the Center. Since the resources needed to hire college advisors or advising coordinators are scarce, advising loads will likely remain what they are now; a strictly major-based advising model and major-based transition model will not serve students who want to or who want to consider changing majors in their first year; and an already siloed institution will likely become more rather than less so.
- It appears several factors are impacting the CSE's ability to provide tutoring for students struggling with course content.
 - Space is extremely limited. 2,350 students are in the 2013 freshman cohort but the coordinator reports that the Tutoring Center is furnished with only five tables.
 - There are not enough tutors to meet current needs. The coordinator reports that students are not able to receive one-on-one tutoring. Students sign up for tutoring appointments and are tutored in groups of four.

- Students who do not make appointments far in advance will not be able to get tutoring support.
- Despite their direct impact on student success, tutors are paid at a lower rate than students in other campus jobs.
- No evening hours are available.
- Early identification of, and intervention with, new freshmen experiencing difficulty is a critical retention practice. An effective early-alert system requires an organized and timely method for soliciting feedback from faculty, a mechanism that allows faculty to report concerns, a timely and effective means of communicating with students who are of concern, and adequate support services, both academic and emotional/psychological, so that intervention is purposeful.
 - Currently, SELU is collecting midterm grades but has no process in place to identify at-risk behaviors of new freshmen prior to midterm and before they result in poor grades.
 - Historically, SELU has asked faculty to enter midterm grades only for students in math and English classes. However, this fall they have extended that to all 100-level classes.
 - Advisors in the CSE do not have time to meet with and counsel students who have been identified by the midterm warning process.
 - As I indicated above, tutoring is available on an extremely limited basis and is likely not available later in the semester.
- Regular contact with and adequate support services for second-semester freshmen on academic probation are not available.
 - Academic counseling is provided on an individual basis by one advisor in the CSE. Freshmen on probation are invited to make an appointment at which the advisor will explain what it means to be on probation and talk about factors that may have impacted their success in the fall and set goals. Students may, if they choose to, attend a 15-minute follow-up meeting each week. However, it was reported that only about half of the students on probation came for an initial meeting and of them, only about 10 percent came for a subsequent meeting.
 - Any effort is hampered by the limited availability of tutoring support.
- While my review of student engagement opportunities was not comprehensive, based on my conversations with staff and students it appears that greater effort is needed.
 - Several of the students with whom I met indicated that they needed to have more direction and encouragement in their first year regarding involvement. They did not appreciate the value of being involved until much later.
 - Given that the majority of students who attend are commuters, I expected to discover student activities and programming aimed at this population of students.

However, it appears that the University's efforts are directed primarily at residential students. Greek organizations appear to provide the greatest opportunity for involvement.

- Students also indicated that they would have benefitted from having a student mentor in their freshmen year.

Recommendations

For Immediate Action

Because the 2013 cohort is only about half way through the first semester, SELU has time to take two immediate steps to help increase student success and retention rates:

- To decrease the number of 2013 cohort freshmen beginning their second semester on academic probation, the Retention and Progression Task Force should continue with its plan to widen the reach of its midterm warning and outreach process to include all 100-level courses. In the time I spent with the Retention and Progression Task Force, we outlined the following actions to help organize and implement the process.
 - Review the final D, F, and U course grades entered in fall 2012 to determine which courses are most likely to have the highest number of D, F, and U grades.
 - To offset the limited availability of tutoring, design workshops to address difficult subject matter and study strategies.
 - Consider mailing a schedule of workshops to students' home address as well as communicating directly to students.
 - Enlist faculty support in announcing workshops in their 100-level classes and encouraging students to attend.
 - Take full advantage of willingness of CSE and residence life staff to collaborate on the delivery of study skill and content-based workshops in the residence halls.
 - Enlist the support of the provost and departmental leadership to communicate the purpose and importance of this effort to faculty, and establish expectations for their support.
- Design and implement an academic recovery requirement for second-semester freshmen on probation in spring 2014.
 - To minimize the staff time required to support this effort, consider replacing periodic one-on-one meetings with a six to eight week probation. Depending up staff availability, cap seminar sections as appropriate to ensure that a manageable number of students (10-20?) are registered. The requirement should allow for an increase in the number and regularity of contacts with students.
 - Use the seminar to address GPA calculations and recalculations; goal setting; planning; course repeat strategies.

- Use probation numbers from the 2012 freshman cohort to estimate the number of 2013 cohort freshmen likely to be on academic probation in spring 2014 and plan the number of sections accordingly.
- Use probation numbers for the 2012 freshman cohort and CSE records to estimate staff time saved by eliminating one-on-one meetings with freshmen on probation.
- Consider registering students for the seminar rather than asking them to register for it. Let students know that the course will be added to their spring 2014 schedule. Design a letter informing students of their probationary status. Include information about probation: what is probation, what are possible causes (poor study habits, wrong major, etc.), possible implications (credit restrictions for spring, loss of progress, financial aid, etc.).
- Make sure students can make appropriate changes to their spring 2014 class schedules to maximize chances of academic recovery.
- Begin to gather actionable data about the freshman cohort. Determine what information can be gathered and used for what purposes and administer an end-of-semester survey through SE 101. Anticipate modifications to the first-year advising structure and gather information that will help in the planning process.
- Actively/aggressively promote opportunities for engagement before the end of the fall 2013 semester. Work through SE 101 to cultivate interest and promote membership in clubs and organizations and to help students understand how to join.
- Consider administering the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™ to students at the end of the fall 2013 term to help open a campuswide dialogue about customer service and communication. The survey is designed to identify what students care most about and how satisfied they are with the instructions performance in related areas. This survey is relatively inexpensive and results are prepared shortly after the administration closes. You can find information at noellevitz.com.

New Student Intake

- Design a required kick-off orientation for incoming freshmen to take place immediately prior to the start of classes. This event should be separate event from Traditions but identify areas where freshmen can take advantage of the Traditions offerings.
- Redesign the series of mid-summer on-campus registrations so that they strengthen affiliation, build relationships, and establish confidence, and so that they establish a pathway to the kick-off orientation.
 - Articulate a philosophy and set of goals for these summer orientation sessions that establish a strong foundation for student satisfaction, success, and retention.
 - Require students to attend in order to be registered for fall classes.
 - If enough staff, faculty, and space are not available to provide a quality experience for groups of 400-500 students, consider increasing the number of sessions and

limiting attendance at each. Consider a one-day rather than a two-day event in order to allow for more sessions.

- Focus on connecting students with each other.
- Target the delivery of the information on what parents and students need at this point in the process and that will prepare them to take the next steps in the intake process.
- Design new materials (electronic and paper) and create a new communication flow and a process to promote and manage the reservation process. Consult with admission staff.
- Commit to creating the number of seats needed in courses targeted for incoming freshmen.
- Include students in the selection of courses, provide them with quality advising, and register them while they are on campus. Students should go home with their schedule in hand.
- Include student affairs, admission counselors, academic advising, financial aid interested faculty, in the redesign and implementation.
- SELU has the potential to support new freshmen by using parents to extend its reach. Design programming for parents so that delivering information is means of establishing partnership with them. Help them understand common issues students face transitioning to college, how advising works, how students will be registered for their first-semester courses, FERPA, and next step financial aid information.

First-Year Transition

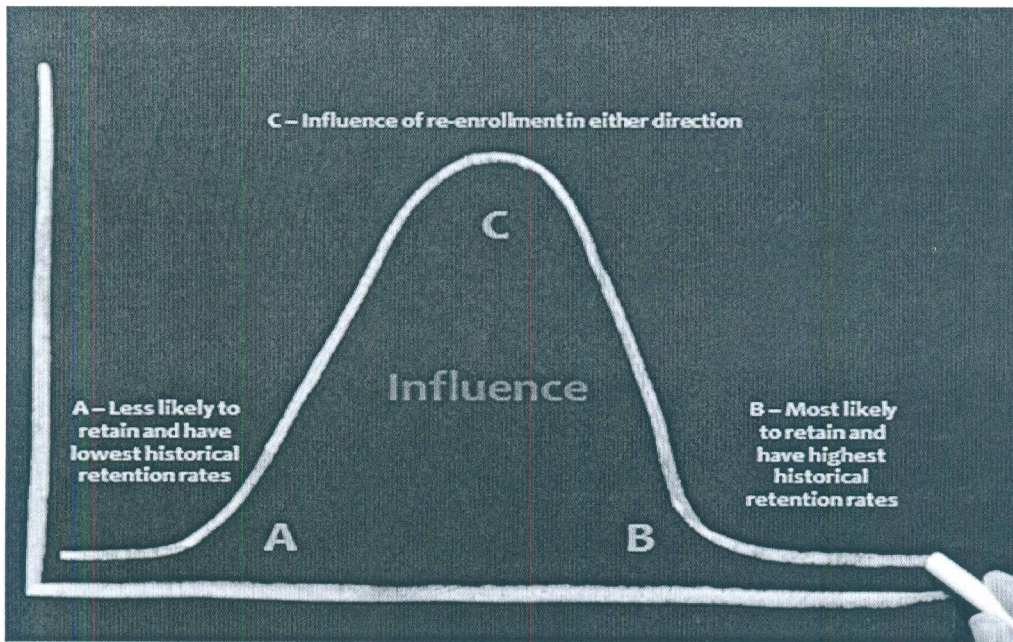
- Modify the current freshman advising model to develop a comprehensive structured first-year advising program rooted in a philosophy of advising.
 - Identify the standards you will use to assess the effectiveness of advising and plan a delivery model that will allow you to meet those standards.
 - To the extent possible, ensure that advisor-to-student ratios allow advisors to provide individual attention to and regular contact with advisees.
 - Increase the number and quality of advisor-advisee contacts with the assigned advisor; ensure that students see their assigned advisor rather than others.
 - Redesign SE 101 so that it operates as a component of a comprehensive advising rather than a stand-alone transition course.
 - Develop a set of retention analytics to identify and proactively address at-risk freshmen students and ensure that information is sent to advisors. Use analytics to inform the content of the first-year seminar.

- Analyze historical institutional data in order to establish your first-year attrition curve. Use the curve to optimize the use of limited resources by becoming more intentional with strategy development and outreach. See Appendix A.
- Enable effective outreach to and follow up with students identified through the alert process.
- Develop and implement an assessment plan.
- Continue to require freshmen to participate in a first-year seminar but develop a more robust course.
 - When considering a redesign identify those competencies a student needs to make a successful transition to college that cannot be addressed explicitly anywhere else in the curriculum or outside the classroom.
 - Consider including instruction on the role of advising, student responsibilities in the advising process, and how to use various resources such as degree maps.
 - Develop and implement an assessment plan.
- In anticipation of the more stringent GPA requirements for academic standing that will go into effect in 2014, design and implement an **early-alert** process specifically for first-semester freshmen.
 - Ask SELU faculty teaching first-year courses to provide feedback on students that includes missed classes, missed assignments, poor performance, and any other behaviors of concern prior to midterm so that students can take corrective action (ideally, no later than the end of the third week of the semester).
 - Academic leadership should consider encouraging faculty who teach freshmen-level courses to administer some type of assessment *within the first several weeks* of the semester for the purpose of identifying those students who either do not complete it or who perform poorly on it.
 - If one does not exist, design a method for faculty who teach first-semester freshmen to report this information.
 - Develop a timeframe for the delivery and return of feedback reports and the outreach to and follow up with students.
 - Enlist the support of the provost and departmental leadership to communicate expectations to faculty.
- Since any early process is only as effective as an institution's ability to provide meaningful intervention and adequate opportunities for assistance, increase the availability of tutoring and other academic support services.
 - Work with the coordinator to determine additional funds needed to hire the number of tutors needed in what areas.

- Refresh the practices and processes associated with recruiting peer tutors. Promote tutoring among the student body as a prestigious campus job and as an opportunity to develop key skills sought by employers.
- Allow the Tutoring Center to employ graduate assistants as evening supervisors/tutors so that students can access support services in the evenings.
- Work with the campus to find alternate or supplemental space so more tutors can provide more hours of individual tutoring to students.
- Academic leadership should encourage faculty who teach historically-difficult or gateway courses to explore supplemental instruction.
- Discuss the consolidation of math tutoring as a way to reduce costs associated with duplicated efforts.
- Identify and track milestones at appropriate points throughout the first semester and first year and use them to inform ongoing planning and program improvement.
 - Class attendance and other behaviors (early-alert feedback)
 - Performance on early course assessments
 - Billing holds cleared
 - Registration advising appointment
 - Midterm progress
 - Completion of developmental courses
 - GPA end of first term and end of year
 - Credits completed end of first term and end of first year
 - Declaration of major
 - Change of major
 - Need to change major, i.e., not meeting progression requirements

Appendix A

The theory underlying an attrition curve is similar to any normal distribution. The X axis, represents a likelihood to retain or not to the second year. Students with lower values are less likely to retain and students with higher values are more likely to retain. The distribution is described by examining the tails and the area under the curve. There are just as many students (tail A) who are less likely to retain at SELU (due to lower historical retention rates of similar students – that is students who had a combination of variables which predicted higher rates of attrition) as there are students (tail B) who will likely stay at SELU (due to higher historical retention rates of similar students – that is students who had a combination of variables which predicted lower rates of attrition) – no matter what attempts are made. Students in the area labeled C are most likely where SELU will experience its retention rate growth. An example table which produces an attrition curve is below and does not represent SELU data.



X-Axis	Count Persisted	Count Non-Persisted	Persistence Rate
0.00-0.09	0	2	0.0%
0.10-0.19	8	7	53.3%
0.20-0.29	28	14	66.7%
0.30-0.39	53	19	73.6%
0.40-0.49	67	24	73.6%
0.50-0.59	93	18	83.8%
0.60-0.69	67	7	90.5%
0.70-0.79	51	3	94.4%
0.80-0.89	9	0	100.0%
0.90-1.00	0	0	0.0%