Frequently Asked Questions on
Student Success Plan Updates

October 2015

1. Which template should we use?

Use the one denoted as "Update" and that has the prose from Provost Licari and I on the front page. I have attached it again for you here. It is also available on the Office of Student Success website along with other resources helpful for plan updates: http://www2.indstate.edu/studentsuccess/DepartmentSuccesPlans.htm.

2. What exactly should go into the Retention Benchmarks and Completion Benchmarks cells labeled "Fall [year] official:"?

The default is "latest department" data, but if you feel that what is most relevant to your department for informing your plan efforts is "original department", you may use that. Or you may use both if you want or add a few additional benchmarks that link more directly to particular goals and/or action steps important to you as noted on the template. The template is not locked down; you can add/adapt things.

Last week (9/21) I sent you the "latest department" data for freshmen retention and 4-year completion that is likely what most of you will be placing into your templates. This is the exact data you can obtain from Blue Reports; I provided it to you so you can get a quick comparative (department and college) perspective on these most recent two years of data. With respect to retention, the 2013 cohort data would go into the "Fall 2014 official" box and the 2014 cohort data into the "Fall 2015 official" box. I did not provide you data on the 2012 cohort, so you can either ignore the "Fall 2013 official" box or go to Blue Reports and obtain it yourselves. With respect to completion, the 2010 cohort data would go into the "Fall 2014 official" box and the 2011 cohort data would go into the "Fall 2015 official" box. I did not provide you 2009 cohort data so again, you can either ignore the "Fall 2013 official" box or obtain it yourselves from Blue Reports.

3. How does "cohort" data contrast with "class year" data?

Anything labeled "cohort" means that the students in that data set all started at a given moment in time (e.g., Fall 2013, Fall 2014). "Class year" equates to Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, or Graduate student and does NOT necessarily equate to a student being here 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, or 4 years. That obviously varies by student. Looking at the data by class year, though, provides a valuable window into what may be lower or upper division challenges that students face.

4. How do I see where students go when they leave us for another major and when? How about if they come to us from other majors? Knowing those departments/programs could be helpful in seeing how we might better collaborate with those departments with

respect to examining transferability of Foundational Studies courses, elective course impact, etc. with time to degree implications.

This is among one of the truly exciting aspects of Blue Reports. From the Academic Chair/Retention & Graduation/Department Migration window, enter your department name in both cells on top and the results (broken out by class year) will show up for the terms you select (Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 if you want the most recent data). For additional insights on this feature, or other finer point questions on Blue Reports, feel free to reach out to Linda Ferguson in IR.

5. How comprehensive does our plan need to be?

The updates focus down into just two key areas, retention and completion, basically the areas we have the greatest potential ability to impact. So, focus there with a mix of immediate term types of actions (activities that have the potential for impact by August 2016. *Examples*: Pre-graduation checks of seniors, group advising of upperclassmen done via in-class discussion in key major classes with respect to pathway to completion by end of summer where sometimes seniors may miss the boat) and longer term types of actions (e.g., activities that may take a year or two to start realizing impact. *Examples*: Curricular refinement, program adjustment, student learning outcomes attention, plan to seek participation in the next Course Transformation Academy, competency needs assessment to inform whether such needs can be combined into a singular course or met in some other way, summer "get back on track" or "prep" experience for tough fall course to come, new/expanded partnership with Career Center for career readiness, attention to advising of sophomores and higher as informed by the about to be released Advising Task Force Report). See also the *Ten Things Academic Departments Can Do* via the above weblink. That said, departments are welcome to include goals around enrollment or post-college achievement if they wished and are linked to activities that you feel are important.

6. I've been told we need to be "aggressive". What does that mean?

A 2% increase in retention or completion annually is a solid gain when one looks at national data for universities. Gains of 3% or higher annually are characteristic of a smaller number of high achievers. At ISU, a 1% gain in retention or completion equates to about 25 students, not a very large number and one that makes individual attention matter regardless of department size. In sum, this is really a contact sport with n's of 1 mattering. That said, what "aggressive" means at the departmental level is relative to your department size knowing that smaller numbers will generally realize greater volatility in retention or completion rates. If we are going to land somewhere between a 2-3% improvement annually as a university, that range of annual increase at the department level could be considered appropriately aggressive. Do keep in mind, though, that this is not an exercise designed to "zap" a department for not reaching an annual target. It is an exercise about focusing energy in a common direction using the tools of strategic planning, execution, assessment, and recalibration based on what has been learned.

7. What are the University goals for retention and completion?

The current Strategic Plan has a goal by 2017 to have a freshmen retention rate of 68%, a 4-year graduation rate of 30%, and a 6-year graduation rate of 50%.

8. What about graduate students?

Although this activity is primarily focused on undergraduates, as noted before, departments with graduate programs are welcome to consider goals focused on graduate student success. Participating in this plan process also enables your department to speak to key activities that will ultimately be shared with the Board of Trustees.