

Six Roles for Faculty in Student Success

How the academy can support institutional efforts to improve retention and completion

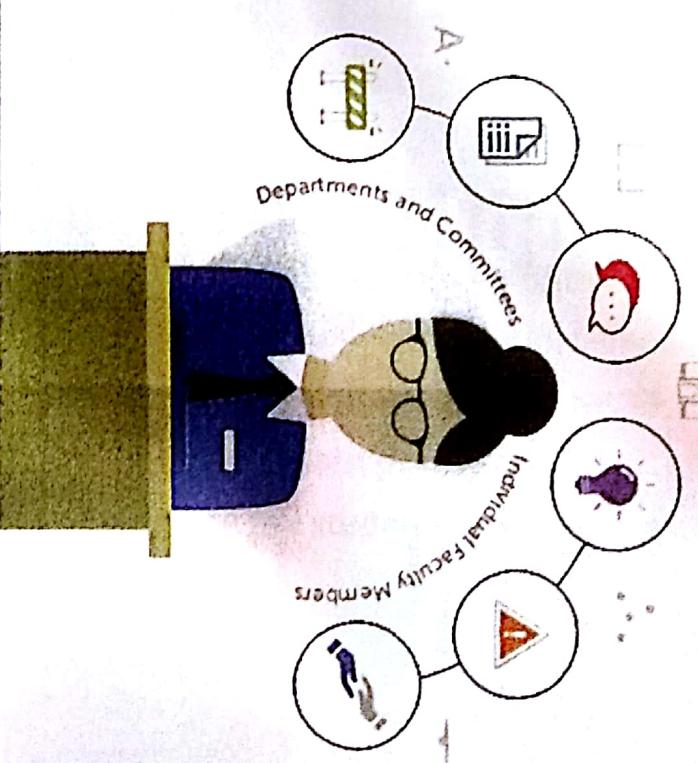
Faculty play a critical role in shaping the student experience but are surprisingly underleveraged as allies in student success strategy. Here are six key ways that academic units and individual faculty members can help students successfully navigate their academic careers.

Addressing Curricular Barriers to Completion

Decisions about curricula are often made within departmental silos, underestimating or even ignoring their institution-wide impact on student success. How can we equip academic units to enact progression-based curricular reforms?

Redesigning Academic Policies

Rules and regulations that govern degree planning, course registration, and advising can unintentionally force students off track. How can we identify and adjust these obstacles?



Recommendations

Arm Units with Data
On-demand enrollment analytics help faculty to assess the consequences of proposed curricular changes

Create Role-Based Working Groups
Subcommittees with specific tasks make better use of faculty time (and expertise) than large task forces.

Skip the "Pilot" Phase
Curricular reforms are most effective when treated as full-scale, managed projects, rather than one-off experiments.

Recommendations

Balance Forgiveness with Proactive Advising
Course repeat and probation policies should encourage students to explore alternative pathways to graduation.

Use Degree Plans as Guardrails
Critical course and grade 'milestones' can help faculty and staff evaluate students' academic risk.

Incentivize Timely Progression
Students are more likely to graduate on time if attempting (and completing) 30 credits per year is treated as default.

Evolving Academic Advising Models

3

Helping students register for courses is only the tip of the iceberg—faculty and staff advisors are now expected to counsel, coach, and intervene with struggling students on a regular basis. How can we prepare our departments for these broader expectations?

Recommendations

Outline and Differentiate Roles	Leverage Faculty in Advisor Trainings	Consider Units' Unique Staffing Needs
Faculty time is best spent on mentoring and academic consultation, not transactional or administrative activities.	Involving faculty in regular staff trainings builds mutual trust and collaboration.	Moving to a centralized advising model requires an investment in distributed administrative support.

 **5**

Flagging Signs of Student Risk

By tracking student attendance, performance, and engagement in class, faculty can help inform your early intervention strategy. *How can we build greater awareness and utilization of early warning systems?*

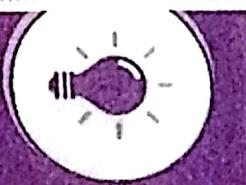
Recommendations

Make It Simple	Make It Flexible	Communicate the Impact
Early warning systems should be easy for faculty to use, with a single referral point for academic and behavioral concerns.	Faculty should be able to determine the time period and early academic assessments, within reasonable boundaries.	Messages about the importance of early alerts in helping to connect students with critical support services should come from senior academic leaders.

Enhancing the Learning Experience

4

It's clear that great teachers have an outsized impact on students' success in college and in their careers. How can we encourage more faculty to innovate in the classroom?



Recommendations

Harness Grassroots Activity	Reduce the Risk of Adoption	Focus on Critical Courses
It should be easy for innovative instructors to apply for course redesign grants and generate scalable pedagogical models.	Targeted support and recognition alleviates the pedagogical, technological, and social concerns of instructors.	Courses with high failure rates should be prioritized to maximize the impact of funded reforms on student success.

 **6**

Mentoring Rising-Risk Student Groups

Talented, high-achieving students seek out mentorship opportunities on their own, but many don't establish connections with faculty until it's too late. *How can we engage more students in meaningful interactions with faculty mentors?*

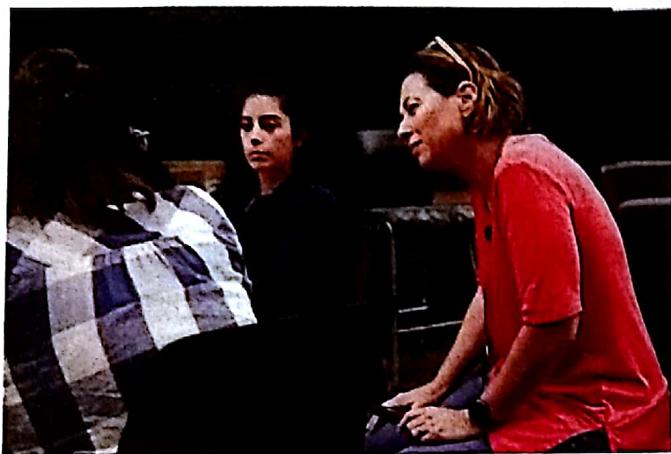
Recommendations

Target Less-Engaged Students	Monitor Transcript Requests	Conduct Exit Surveys
Faculty mentoring efforts should be focused on students who aren't already participating in honors programs or living in learning communities.	Students may reconsider transfer to another institution after connecting with faculty in their field of interest.	Information gathered from stop-outs and transfers can help to guide your intervention and engagement strategies.

TEACHING

How One Email From You Could Help Students Succeed

AUGUST 09, 2018



Jarod Opperman for The Chronicle

Zoë Cohen speaks with students in her physiology class at the U. of Arizona.

may want to catch up on — including one we recommend from *The Chronicle's* archives.

One Quick Way to Boost Student Success

A few years ago, Zoë Cohen noticed a troubling sign in her “Physiology of the Immune System” course: A larger number of students than usual had failed the first exam. Cohen had changed up the way she taught the course that year, part of a broader push toward active learning at the University of Arizona, where she is an assistant professor. The different style was probably a big adjustment for her upper-level students after years of taking lecture-based courses, she thought.

Hello and welcome to Teaching, a free weekly newsletter from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

This week, Beckie describes how one professor’s light-touch way of supporting students fits into what we know about “nudges” in higher ed. Dan shares a reader’s perspective on the benefits of collaborating with an instructional designer. Keep reading for a call for proposals and some articles you

How Can You Make Big Classes Feel Smaller?

Emails, sent at key moments during the semester, are one strategy for helping personalize the large lecture.

- Small Ways to Help Students Feel Noticed
- Insights From Other Instructors



Cohen wanted to help those students. But the course is a large one, with between 160 and 200 students, and she didn't want to increase her workload. So she came up with a low-touch way to intervene: sending a personalized, supportive email. For a small investment of time, Cohen was able to signal to students that she cared. And she thinks the move even boosted recipients' performance in the course.

Cohen's email is an example of a classroom-based "nudge," or intervention that encourages, but does not mandate, a certain behavior. Nudges have caught on as a way to help students through the many complex processes of higher education. Cohen's effort fits into the broad spirit of this work, which is: "Let's all stop waiting for students to come and ask for help," said Lindsay C. Page, a scholar who has designed and tested a number of successful nudges. After all, said Page, an assistant professor of education and a research scientist at the University of Pittsburgh, colleges often have a good sense of which students could use a bit of support, sometimes before the students themselves know.

Cohen had the option, she told me, to give an adviser in her department a list of struggling students to email. But she wondered if a message that came directly from her and took a more encouraging tone might be more effective.

So Cohen crafted an email explaining that “the student didn’t do as well as expected on the exam, however, it was still early in the semester, and that changing habits now could turn their grade around,” as she wrote in an article for *The Evolution*, an online news site run by Destiny Solutions, a software vendor. She sent the message from her own email address, and personalized it using each student’s name.

The message didn’t offer any additional support to its recipients. Rather, it asked whether they knew why they hadn’t performed well, and whether they’d taken advantage of existing resources, like office hours and study groups.

The professor braced herself for backlash. Perhaps students would blame their performance on Cohen’s teaching style. “The fact is,” she said, “I got zero of that.” Instead, more than half of the 20 students Cohen emailed wrote back expressing their appreciation for her message and taking responsibility for their grades.

Cohen has continued sending the email to students who fail the first exam. And while she doesn’t have a clear sense of whether or how the message has changed recipients’ behavior, she has noticed that the growth in scores between the first test and the final grade is larger for this group than for the overall class, which she sees as an encouraging indicator.

That tracks with the nudging literature, said Page, the researcher who tests behavioral interventions. She pointed me toward one study in which a group of researchers conducted a randomized control trial where the treatment group got similar messages from an instructor — and earned higher grades in the course than the control group.

Cohen is also probably right to think that the nonjudgmental tone of her email made a difference, Page added. Other research has pointed to the importance of the language used in these efforts.

In one study being prepared for submission to a journal, researchers tested a revised version of a university’s letter informing students they were being put on academic probation. Students who got the new version, which made an effort to destigmatize probation and clarify its impermanence, reported feeling less shame and more

determination than those who got the old version. They also went to see their advisers at higher rates, and a higher proportion of them were no longer on probation the following year.

Have you ever used a nudge in one of your classes? How do you help your students before they ask? Tell me about it at beckie.supiano@chronicle.com and your example may appear in a future newsletter.

Get the Teaching Newsletter

Asking for Help

We recently asked readers whether they'd approached people outside their discipline for help with their teaching, and Janice M. Kinsinger, who retired last year as an associate dean from Illinois Central College, described how she had been "blessed" during her 38 years there to be able to consult with an instructional designer.

"Asking for help or support is the biggest step a faculty member can take; the actual question is insignificant if you have talented and insightful professional staff," she wrote to us in an email. When a faculty member asks a question, even if it seems narrowly technical, it's an invitation, she said, for an instructional designer to listen carefully, ask follow-up questions, and broaden the conversation to teaching practices and processes.

A common example is when a faculty member wants help setting up his or her grade book in the college's course-management system. What starts out as a technical question soon turns into a larger philosophical conversation – about grades, how they're weighted, how points are awarded, and what rubrics are used.

"If the instructional designer follows up to see how things are going in a week or two," she wrote, "the faculty member may just ask another question and the experiments in pedagogy continue." And change, she said, "makes us better teachers."

ICYMI

- How do textbook prices affect student behavior? *Inside Higher Ed* examines some new surveys that tackle the question in this article.
- Working in a lab as an undergraduate is often the first step in a research career. That raises the stakes for whether professors ensure these opportunities are distributed equitably, writes Terry McGlynn in a blog post for Small Pond Science that suggests ways to do just that.
- How can colleges foster conversations about teaching across disciplines? Neil Haave describes one model, known as teaching squares, in Faculty Focus.
- This Twitter thread is about research careers, but along the way, Douglas Webber argues that “your teaching is probably the most impactful thing you will ever do.”

Call for Proposals

The Teaching Professor conference, which will be held June 7-9, 2019, in New Orleans, is accepting proposals for sessions and poster presentations. It is also accepting applications for a new kind of session, in which presenters tackle “a single teaching or learning question with actionable advice in just 20 minutes.”

Is there an upcoming conference or call for proposals that you think your fellow readers should consider? Tell us about it here.

Back-to-School Nightmares

It's the first day of class. You're running massively late, and there's no way for you to communicate that to your students. Or else you're standing in front of a packed lecture hall, with no idea what you're supposed to be teaching. Or maybe you aren't a professor at all, but a student all over again, and must take a final for a class you haven't attended. If you've ever had a version of the “exam dream” — or even if you haven't — the start of a new academic year is a great time to revisit this 2011 story on the phenomenon by our colleague Eric Hoover.

Thanks for reading Teaching. If you have suggestions or ideas, please feel free to email us at dan.berrett@chronicle.com, beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com, or beckie.supiano@chronicle.com. If you have been forwarded this newsletter and would like to sign up to receive your own copy, you can do so [here](#).

— Beckie and Dan

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This article is part of:

[How Can You Make Big Classes Feel Smaller?](#), [Teaching Newsletter Archives](#)

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4 design choices undermining new program success

Expert Perspective | March 15, 2018

In the face of tightening budgets, uncertain enrollments, and declining tuition revenue, colleges and universities need new strategies for growth. Many institutions are confronting this challenge by launching new programs. But often, newly launched programs don't achieve their enrollment goals, or they experience "profitless growth" due to errors in the program design and launch process.

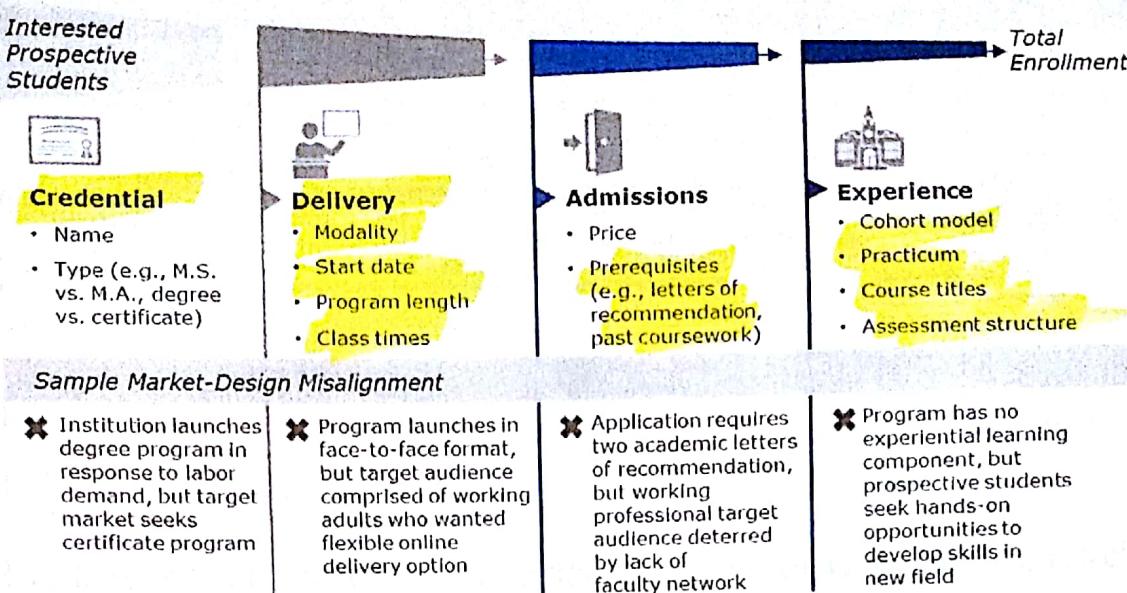
One of these mistakes is only designing programs around traditional academic program elements, rather than around student preference and need.

Exclusive focus on traditional program designs can undermine new program viability

In today's market, institutions must do more than identify promising areas of demand. Even if a program is launched in the right field or discipline, miscalculations in program design can deter students from applying and ultimately enrolling. For example, institutions might design a bachelor's program when the intended audience needs a master's program or launch a traditional face-to-face master's program when prospective students require a flexible, online format. The four key areas to consider are:

1. Credential type
2. Delivery
3. Admissions process
4. Experience

Representative Enrollment Decision-Making Process of Prospective Students



Align credential and delivery with prospective student needs

The most important design consideration to get right is the alignment of credential type, delivery method, and program length with prospective audience need. To ensure this alignment, faculty and administrators must understand who the intended audience is and what their needs are. To do this faculty and administrators should ask themselves:

- How does the audience plan to use this credential? To change careers? To accelerate careers?
- How will the audience pay for the credential? Tuition reimbursement? Self-pay?
- How much time will the audience dedicate to the program? Full-time? Part-time?

For example, if the target audience is millennials, institutions might consider stackable certificates, second bachelor's, and bootcamps because most millennials are working, want to move through programs quickly, are targeting specific skills sets, and need to keep costs reasonable.

Emerging Preference	Stackable Certificates	2nd Bachelor's Degrees	Bootcamps
Description	General and specialized certificates that can be combined into full master's degrees	Accelerated undergraduate programs for bachelor's degree holders. Students complete only major, not foundational, coursework	Intensive, face-to-face, non-credit programs that teach specific skills
Millennial Demand Drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer limits on tuition reimbursement Students seeking specialized credentials to enhance long-term careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High number under- & unemployed graduates Greater salary premiums for STEM-focused bachelor's degrees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students preferring intensive, face-to-face learning experiences For-profit start-ups targeting millennials in bootcamp marketing
Example	 <p>THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY WASHINGTON, DC</p>	 <p>Oregon State University</p>	 <p>RUTGERS</p>

Design audience appropriate admissions requirements and competitive pricing

There are two main ways that the admissions process can deter potential students from enrolling: unreasonable application requirements and improper pricing. For example, working adults that have been out of school for a decade may forego applying to a program if it requires they submit two letters of recommendation from professors. Instead an institution could allow letters of recommendation from supervisors to stand in for faculty recommendations.

Getting the price right is critical because students are increasingly cost-conscious. While no silver bullet exists to determining price, Northeastern University's College of Professional Studies has found a way to bring some rigor to the process.

Northeastern has three steps for setting graduate program pricing. First, they analyze IPEDS and student earnings data to set an initial strawman price. Then, they compare that price to their competitors' using formulas they developed to quantify the relationship between different pricing options.

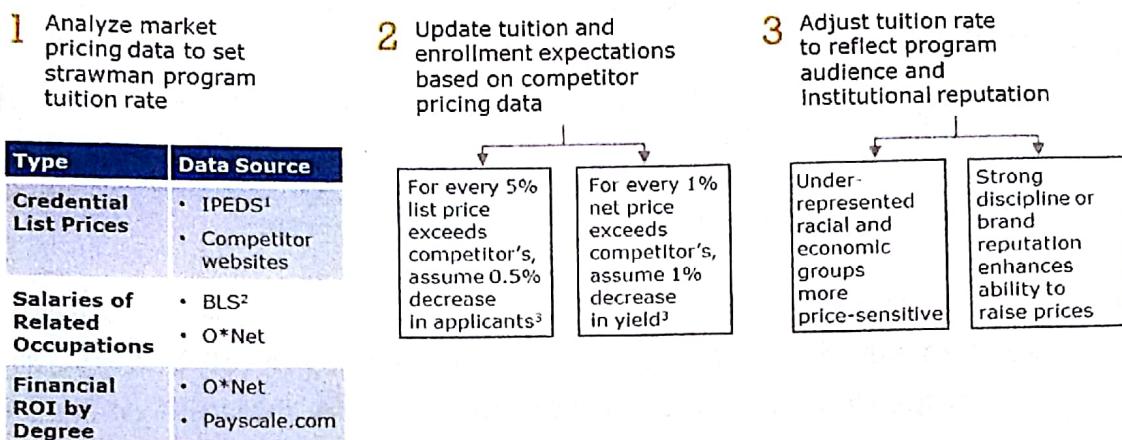
Northeastern has found that for every 5% that list price exceeds competitors', they get 0.5% fewer applicants. For every 1% net price exceeds competitors', they get 1% fewer enrollees. Both effects work in reverse, too, if their prices

are lower. Finally, they fine-tune price for qualitative factors, like student demographics and brand, allowing some flexibility in the formulas.



Northeastern University

College of Professional Studies' Price-Setting Analysis for New Academic Programs



¹ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

³ If program is priced lower than competitors, assume the opposite effect.

Coordinate experiential learning opportunities with audience interest

The academic and co-curricular opportunities of a program are often deciding factors for students, particularly in crowded markets. Institutions can use the experience design element to help distinguish their programs from competitors and attract students. For example, the University of Denver's MBA program requires their students to complete four diverse practicums that allow them to explore different sectors while gaining hands-on experience.

Compare such an approach to the University of Texas at Austin's MBA "CleanTech" concentration option, which specifically targets students interested in renewable energy careers. Like the University of Texas, George Washington uses a special focus, in this case health informatics, to narrow their target audience – federal employees and policymakers in the DC-area. Finally, Indiana University has tapped into student's concerns over career outcomes by adding a Silicon Valley-based counselor to build relationships with key tech employers and support students' job searches.

Representative Experiential Design Strategies

Institution	Program	Differentiation Strategy
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER	Master of Business Administration	Students complete four experiential learning projects to gain hands-on experience in entrepreneurship, corporate strategy, social enterprise, and international business
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY WASHINGTON, DC	M.S. in Management of Health Informatics and Analytics	Unusual focus on public health informatics attracts federal government policymakers and civil servants
INDIANA UNIVERSITY	M.S. in Data Science	Silicon Valley-based staff member coaches students through job search and develops relationships with employers in tech industry
UTEXAS The University of Texas at Austin	Master of Business Administration	"CleanTech" concentration appeals to students interested in renewable energy careers

To help faculty and administrators institutions make the right design choices, EAB developed the **Market Alignment Checklist**, which lays out key questions to consider when designing (or revitalizing) a program.

Additional resources to help institutions avoid the most damaging program launch mistakes

For assistance in overcoming miscalculations in market demand potential, program design, and costs, use EAB's program launch resources on marketing, market demand, and market alignment available as part of our **Academic Program Innovation Resources**.

Topics

Academic Affairs , Academic Planning

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