In Practice: A Comprehensive Advising Program

The University of Illinois Springfield

The University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) is a public university serving more than 5,000 students in 23 undergraduate programs. Formerly an upper-division campus, the institution opened its doors to freshmen and sophomores for the first time in 2001.

“Now we were admitting students from city schools, rural schools - a broad spectrum in terms of academic preparation,” said Karen Moransky, associate vice-chancellor for undergraduate education. “We wanted faculty to be supported in identifying any students who were not performing well so we could intervene.”

UIS created an Advising Center to complement the work of faculty advisors. The Advising Center tried a variety of case management and early alert tools, including paper files, spreadsheets, and the MAP-Works product. However, advisors became frustrated by a lack of student success analytics, and UIS began looking for a long-term solution to help advisors manage and track their efforts to reach more students, more effectively.

In February 2011, UIS implemented the Starfish® system and began pulling student information from Blackboard and Banner by Ellucian. “We had lots of data in different places, and we wanted something that was user-friendly. Starfish provided the most comprehensive system,” said Carmalita Kamayo, PhD, undergraduate academic advisor.

Celebrating Early Outcomes

UIS credits the Starfish system with enabling the institution to consolidate its data about at-risk students, expand access to a variety of users based on roles and permissions, and improve the ability to measure their efforts. “The first time we ran a report in Starfish, the system paid for itself!” said Kemayo.

“I am also seeing more student engagement,” continued Kemayo. “Students who felt like school wasn’t important, or felt that they could succeed without any help — they are responding to the Starfish system and coming in for support, and we are making a difference for them. I personally see it happen in my office.”
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**Engaging Faculty in Student Success**

For UIS, faculty input has been critical to identifying and intervening with students at the first sign of concern. UIS deploys a Progress Survey at three critical points in each term to prompt faculty to give feedback about students’ performance and behavior. “We encourage faculty to report concerns as early as possible,” said Kemayo.

Prior to implementing the Starfish system, fewer than 30% of faculty teaching in lower-division coursework areas responded to requests for their observations. Today, almost 75% of that same group of faculty provide feedback, and response rates are even higher for critical English, math, and science courses.

**Expanding the Program’s Reach**

Faculty are not the only stakeholders in student success at UIS; the institution makes a concerted effort to enlist input on student risk factors from other campus sources, including residential life, the Living Learning Communities, the career counseling office, disability services, and athletics.

Recently, UIS expanded the use of the Starfish system to all 100- and 200-level courses, and academic departments are expressing interest in using the tools. For example, the Chemistry department has chosen to use the Starfish system to manage faculty office hours, enable students to schedule appointments, send reminders, and capture the outcomes of student meetings.

**Looking Ahead**

In the next three to five years, UIS hopes to increase fall-to-spring retention for first-year students to 92 percent, and increase fall-to-fall retention for first-year students to 80 percent. To support that initiative, UIS is planning a long-term research project on retention metrics to evaluate the impact of their student success programs, of which Starfish is a significant component.

“We appreciate how Starfish collaborates with us to create new initiatives,” said Kemayo. “We have an organic system that can grow with us, and we see tremendous potential for improving what we’re doing. I am very happy that we chose Starfish.”

**To Learn More**

UIS recently told their story in a Webinar presentation, now archived at the Starfish Retention Solutions website (www.starfishsolutions.com).