Helena College University of Montana

Helena College University of Montana is a public two-year college focused on providing access to lifelong educational opportunities. Central to its mission is enhancing student persistence by aligning student support programs and reducing barriers to access and success.

New Pressures to Ensure Student Success

Student success and retention progress have always been important to Helena College, but when the state implemented an outcomes-based funding model, student persistence became an even greater focus. The school needed a solution to help staff enhance retention initiatives, identify success measures, and track progress. A Montana University System competitive grant opportunity gave Helena College the resources to explore new approaches to its student success practices, and the school decided to partner with Starfish by Hobsons in December 2012.

Quick Stats:

- Website: www.umhelena.edu
- Profile: Public, two-year college in Helena, Montana
- Population: 1,454 students
- Demographics: 87% White/Non-Hispanic, 4% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian

“Starfish helps us improve retention by providing a user-friendly tool to let our students know that their success is our number one strategic goal.”

– Daniel J. Bingham
Dean/CEO, Helena College University of Montana
A Committed Team
Helena College assembled a beta group of key faculty and support staff in the spring of 2013 to begin implementation. This team developed the required email notifications for students, identified and created surveys, and established a plan for full implementation beginning in Fall 2013.

“We could not have been successful without the amazing support and service provided by the Starfish team dedicated to our implementation,” said Elizabeth Stearns Sims, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs/CSAO.

Strategic Integration
Helena College integrates Starfish into its required new student orientation program, designed to inform and connect students to campus support programs. After orientation, all student affairs appointments are made through the system. Through the use of Starfish Early Alert and institutional surveys, the school shares student successes and struggles with those in the student’s support network in a timely manner to facilitate proactive interventions.

Increased Access to Success
Quality advising is important to Helena. Starfish allows advisors and students to plan an academic course for success together and to share this information quickly within students’ support networks campus wide, rather than keeping the information in a folder on an advisor’s desk.

Faculty have embraced the use of Starfish and information on the system is included in every course syllabus. Starfish also helps faculty and staff communicate with students and provide the support students need to be successful.

“We’ve seen direct results of the program connecting our students to support services they either didn’t realize they had access to or didn’t think they required,” said Daniel Bingham, Dean/CEO.

Finally, Starfish has helped lower the financial aid barrier for students. Students can connect with financial aid staff quickly to receive the appropriate financial literacy and loan information, resulting in the right financial aid funding at the right time.