In 2011, the university set a goal to increase its six-year graduation rate from 64.2 percent to 70 percent by 2017. A new advising system was essential. The system would streamline processes, increase collaboration across campus, and improve the student experience. To retain students, UNL had to transform the advising culture. A committee of faculty, staff, and academic leaders chose the Starfish by Hobsons platform because of its early warning system and easy user interface.

“Our campus has found the Success Plan feature as a crucial tool to help retain students and improve their academic planning toward graduation.”

– Heather Reed
Director, First-Year Experience and Transition Programs

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is a public research institution serving more than 20,000 undergraduates across eight academic colleges. Founded in 1869, this land-grant institution has three main missions: teaching, research, and service.

Quick Stats:
• Website: www.unl.edu
• Profile: Public research institution in Lincoln, Nebraska
• Population: 24,445
Resolving the Disconnect

Research suggests students left UNL because they felt disconnected from services and said the institution was unconcerned about their success. The academic colleges used different systems to record students’ advising records, from paper files to electronic systems. The systems were not able to connect across units. There was no cohesive way to collect data about the processes to evaluate their effectiveness.

Innovative Advising and Support Efforts

Since implementing Starfish in 2012, faculty are now using Starfish Early Alert™ to identify and support at-risk students. UNL’s academic support offices use Starfish’s online scheduling and documentation tools, and the academic probation recovery program uses the Success Plan feature to strengthen students’ academic planning, academic standing, and retention. Predictive scores help identify struggling students and direct them to additional resources.

Results

UNL is on track to reach its goal. The six-year graduation rate is the highest in the institution’s history at 67 percent. Data recorded in Starfish is used to evaluate advising programs and improve professional development. UNL filled gaps in its support services by creating advising centers and advising programs for specific student cohorts. Students in UNL’s academic recovery program earned higher GPAs compared to cohorts who did not use the program. Eighty-six percent of eligible students filed a success plan within Starfish in the first semester of an academic probation recovery program. More than 60 percent of UNL’s undeclared students declared a major in Fall 2014, compared to 30.6 percent of undeclared students in Fall 2012. Using Starfish to improve the advising culture has helped UNL retain students, improve the student experience, and increase overall collaboration across campus.

Hobsons helps students identify their strengths, explore careers, create academic plans, match to best-fit educational opportunities, and reach their education and life goals. Through our solutions, we enable thousands of educational institutions to improve college and career planning, admissions and enrollment management, student success and advising for millions of students around the globe.