Youngstown State University Improves Course Completion Rates

Youngstown State University (YSU) is a public urban research university in Ohio, serving more than 12,000 students. Founded in 1908, YSU is known as a student-centered university, emphasizing a creative, integrated approach to education, scholarship, and service.

A Long-Term Plan

In December 2010, YSU launched Strategic Plan 2020, which recognizes that the evolving profile of YSU students will require “differing types and amounts of support during their academic careers.”

YSU needed a user-friendly online system with the ability for all stakeholders to access the same information in a central place. The system needed to complement their academic support procedures. YSU chose Starfish by Hobsons and it went live in 2012.

Quick Stats:

- Website: www.ysu.edu
- Profile: Public, urban research university in Youngstown, Ohio
- Population: 12,551
- Demographics: 47% male, 53% female; 17% minority students, 1.7% international students

“Starfish is a super-easy and useful way to let students know that I care and I want them to be there.”

– Dr. Jennifer Behney
Assistant Professor of Foreign Languages, Youngstown State University
Case Study

Hobsons.com/Starfish

**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, and student success and advising for millions of students around the globe.**

Challenges

YSU’s homegrown early warning system did not provide timely support to students and only 2 percent of the faculty used it. Faculty never knew who was addressing a particular concern, and advisors and staff often had to search through multiple systems to find student information.

A New Approach

Today, the Starfish platform connects all the programs that inform YSU’s student success initiatives. Students receive warnings about academic and administrative concerns. Progress Surveys prompt faculty to indicate concerns about specific students and to acknowledge improvement and excellence with Kudos notifications. During orientation, first-year students at YSU are paired with a peer mentor who is listed in the Success Network of the Starfish platform, making it easy for students to communicate with them.

Encouraging Results

Students who receive notifications have expressed their appreciation, and are motivated to take action to resolve issues that arise. Between Fall 2011 and Spring 2015, undergraduate course completion rates rose from 78.4 percent to 86.8 percent. Since implementing the Starfish platform, the percentage of YSU first-year students with failing grades due to non-attendance has dropped from 4.41 percent to 2.4 percent. The fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time, full-time students in the Fall 2011 cohort was 67.5 percent and increased to 73 percent in Fall 2015. Faculty participation in student success efforts rose from 2 percent to 47 percent. For its efforts to improve campus communications and help students succeed, YSU was named a 2014 Starfish 360 Award Winner.

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**Increased course completion from 78.4% to 86.8%**

**Increased faculty participation by more than 40%**

**Increased retention rate from 67.5% to 73%**