Report of Senior Outreach Project

Draft

At the behest of the Graduation Rate Improvement Plan committee (GRIP) a senior outreach project was initiated to contact and assist twenty-three students that were nearing the completion of their degree requirements, but had not applied for graduation, among other criteria. This report is intended to describe processes of the outreach, share early results, consider the viability of similar, subsequent efforts, and to offer suggestions on how to improve graduation rates.

The initial stage of the process was to simply assess the academic records of each student to recognize trends, possible areas for concern, and interventions based on the perceived level of need for each student. As an example, for an honors student graduating with a 4.0 GPA, it was apparent that a simple reminder to apply for graduation was all that was needed. Others had issues that varied remarkably, but shared the common thread of being more serious, and as a result, discouraging to the student.

As students’ records were reviewed, an analytical method emerged, lending to increased efficiency for any possible subsequent, similar outreach efforts (see Example A.) The analysis included units completed in both all-university and major courses, a units-to-degree gap analysis, recent grades, and units-enrolled trends. After the initial analysis, each student was contacted, most resulting in direct interpersonal communication, but with some, to no avail.

The message to students was intended to be positive and helpful (see Example B.) Because the outreach was conducted very late in the spring term it could have coincided with a last-minute rush to apply for graduation that may have occurred regardless of the outreach prompting. Also, several students with more serious issues had already put plans in motion that were not amenable to alternative suggestions.

For the purposes of understanding this particular cohort, it is helpful to characterize their needs into five basic categories. Students with ***minimum*** needs simply needed to be reminded that it was time to apply for graduation and are on-track to reaching that goal, many of which occurred this term. Students with ***moderate*** needs benefitted from the guidance and will be more likely to graduate in a timely manner because of it. Students with ***significant*** needs are in serious jeopardy of not graduating in a timely fashion, students with ***no response*** have not beenopen to our overtures (most with significant apparent needs) and finally, ***referrals,*** a group that have ties to unique programs, such as National Student Exchange, and were not contacted.

**Summary**

Minimum Moderate Significant No Response Referral Total

7 (30.4%) 6 (26.1%) 4 (17.40%) 3 (13.0%) 3 (13.0%) 23

**Anecdotal Remarks**

Minimum Needs

This sample of senior students validates the premise that many students have fulfilled graduation requirements, but are unfamiliar or passive about applying for graduation. Nearly a third of the students were just a nudge away from finalizing their degree and, as of May 17, all had applied for graduation for spring, 11 (although none of the degree check audits had been completed as of that date.)

Moderate Needs

These students have been contacted, the processes of how to apply for graduation were explained, and each expressed that they will apply for graduation (Example C.) One student perceives that she has fulfilled all graduation requirements but had not applied, one is taking a stop-out semester for travel during fall, 11 and is returning in the spring, one is taking a one-year leave for family reasons, and two are on-track to graduate in the fall.

 A nursing student differed from others in this group in that he is transferring to Lewis and Clark State College in Idaho to complete his degree in nursing there.

Significant Needs

These students, for widely varying reasons, are not close to graduation. One, a member of the military, is being deployed to Afghanistan and will likely complete his degree subsequently in the Sacramento area. We spoke about applying for graduation now, how to get approval of courses from his major advisor, updates to his major contract, and possible changes to his graduation date.

Another is a student-athlete (with the emphasis on athletics.) He has many units (112, many of which are elective PE courses,) and has many more to go (est. 73) to complete his degree in Kinesiology at HSU. Instead, he plans to go to CR this fall and then to University of La Verne to play football and continue his education there. I advised him that he was utilizing many of his financial aid-eligible units for PE electives and may incur a circumstance of running out of financial aid for major-related courses.

Another student is requesting retroactive catastrophic withdrawal from two prior semesters in which he is currently taking five incompletes, but is not likely to fulfill. He is discouraged with college, cynical about higher education, and unresponsive to suggestions about completing his degree. I advised and directed resources to him on teaching English as a foreign language, a viable career option given his education, interests and abilities.

Finally, a transfer student, majoring in forestry, has had difficulties with a learning disability, especially in the realm of test-taking. He has about 40 units to go, and is limiting himself with 13, 10, 12 and 11 units in recent terms. He has been placed on AP for grades in the spring, 11 term and considering a stop-out semester for fall, 11 to work in his field and earn income. He would then be within three or four semesters of graduating.

No Response (in Progress)

These students, in spite of repeated attempts to contact them, apparently do not choose to discuss their circumstances. As a result, their academic advisors were contacted in order to ascertain what the students’ respective needs may be and efforts to contact them will continue.

One student has reached 216 units, has a double major (NAS and Wildlife…a major they may have completed,) and has not made significant progress in recent terms.

 A second arrived at HSU in fall, 10, did not perform well the first term, has enrolled in only 10 and 11 units in her two terms, has had her advising hold removed, but is not enrolled in courses for fall, 11.

The third student needs only an estimated 27 units to graduate but was not enrolled in spring, 11 and has not had her academic advising hold removed for registering for courses in fall, 11.

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**Conclusions**

* Many senior-level students remain unaware, or passive to the requirement, and benefits of applying for graduation in a timely manner.
* Developing accurate at-risk indicators for seniors and initiating personalized, intrusive advising has great merit for facilitating satisfactory progress to the completion of a degree.
* Most students appreciated the effort to support their success and recognized the need for it.

**Recommendations**

* Identify senior-level students who may not be on track to graduate in a timely fashion through a single, or set of indicators, including:

 Ninety + units completed, have not applied for graduation.

 Any student with 140+ units.

 Grade point average below 2.0 for any recent term.

 Requests for leave, delay in enrolling in courses, or stop-out semesters.

 Shift from full-time status to part-time.

* Search for students with at-risk indicators soon after grades are posted so that the outreach can be conducted in a timely and effective manner.
* Develop direct and compelling methods that induce seniors to apply for graduation on a timely basis.
* As undesirable trends or barriers to students’ success become more apparent, changes in policy or procedures can be developed to mitigate or diminish the circumstance.
* This intervention model validates the merit of a more intrusive approach when working with at-risk students, at any point in their academic career.

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