

HLC Persistence and Completion Academy

Northeastern State University

Revised Project, Support Services and Data Source List

Northeastern State University (NSU) was accepted into the second cohort of HLC's Persistence and Completion Academy. It was clear from the feedback received regarding the application that the project itself was too ambitious and somewhat vague. Accordingly, the Persistence and Completion Academy team of NSU has revised the project in order to clarify and simplify its objectives, groupings, process and scope. What appears below represents the modified project, additional support services and the data sets and processes considered necessary to accomplish the project through the use of a data book. The remainder of the original Academy application, including infrastructure, support, etc. has not changed.

Project:

NSU's Persistence and Completion Academy project will focus on persistence rates of first-time freshmen and transfer students. While using several demographic variables to discriminate between those students who persist and those who don't, this project will drill down significantly below demographics to include several conceptual, hypothetically relevant variables in order to develop a profile of those who persist which accounts for a significant amount of the variance in the samples.

Secondly, the project will be iterative in nature, as it assesses persistence and its underlying constructs and data with a new cohort of freshmen and transfer students each year. After the initial profile has been developed, data-driven decisions will be made regarding modification of existing persistence support initiatives as well as the development of new student processes or programs designed to support students in their continued NSU education and ultimately, graduation. Therefore, this project is designed to annually close the feedback loop with regard to persistence. It will develop profiles based on both demographics and apriori constructs, and then will assess, beginning in the second year of each cohort, the effects of modified and new student support systems. NSU's overall goal is to, in an idiographic manner, enhance the persistence rates of both freshman and transfer students through detailed analyses of numerous student demographics, characteristics and perceptions, as well as the effects of annually modified or new support initiatives.

Of particular note to this institution are several variables: 1. Full-time versus part-time enrollment; 2. Gender; 3. Ethnicity (NSU's student census indicates an approximately 30% American Indian enrollment); 4. Developmental or remedial education courses; and 5. "DFW's"

(the relationship of the grades of D, F, and W by College, major and class associated with various characteristics of the two student samples.

While initial, pilot work will be completed on persistence profiles for Freshmen during 2014-2015, the actual project will begin its first year in fall, 2015. As 2015 will be the first year of the project, emphasis will be almost exclusively on the development of a predictive persistence profile. Numerous variables and data points will be included in the development of this profile. Such obvious demographics for Freshmen as high school GPA, ACT and degree of prior college preparation will be included. Additionally, gender, ethnicity, first-generation or not, employment, family constellation and SES will be included with additional demographic data. Non-demographic data, including measures of student intent, satisfaction, persistence attitudes, self-efficacy, among others, and data from focus groups will be added to the equation. In order to generate a predictive persistence profile, and since many of the data points are dichotomous, discriminant analyses will be used. Further, both parametric and nonparametric analyses will be utilized to further enhance the profile based on subsets of the data obtained.

Following the initial development of the predictive persistence profile as well as a comprehensive scripted interview with non-persisting students, discussion will focus on both the characteristics of the profile as well as what student support initiatives should be modified or implemented. This is in order to take advantage of the characteristics of persisting students as well as to address the characteristics of non-persisting students which led to their withdrawal from NSU. For the second year of the project and beyond, predictive persistence profiles will be developed and analyzed for any effects of the modified or new initiatives.

The project, while seeming straightforward, will need to be modified if profiles differ from year to year or when the inevitable unforeseen student, data or analysis problems occur. Throughout the project several data retreats will be held in order to carefully examine the processes and results. This project is designed to align not only with NSU's destination 2023 but also with the new NSU Strategic Plan (Nov. 2014).

According to the Academy data review guidelines, 'data sets may be used in conjunction to create deeper understandings of the reasons why students persist or not. It is not expected that institutions will have ready access to all of these data sets. The critical issue is the degree to which institutions can develop decisions or thought frameworks based on connections between and among different variables that affect student persistence, and the degree to which these variables point toward identification of risk factors.' Additionally, besides providing unique profiles among groups discriminating between those students who persist and those who do not, NSU intends to be iterative in its data usage in order to enhance persistence percentages through a student-specific, data-driven modification of existing programs and support systems as well as the development of new support processes and initiatives. This iterative process will

continue throughout the Academy and as long as the initiatives and support systems provided are shown to significantly enhance persistence rates.

Initiatives not Previously Highlighted:

During the initial Academy application process, to title III grants and a significantly revised, dual-advising model were not highlighted. However, they are certainly relevant to the current project.

Dual advising model: During academic year 2013–2014 an improved advising model was implemented that will bring clarity to a process that is currently seen by many students as overly complicated and confusing. A key element of the new model is the addition of 12 Academic Advisors, allowing for an improved team approach. University, Academic and Faculty Advisors will all play a specific role in the process. A total of 13 University Advisors will work with new students and those with undeclared majors, providing services designed to get them connected to campus services and guide them through their university and general education requirements. Students with a declared major will be assisted by one of 12 Academic Advisors (three per academic college) who will provide guidance related to all the intricacies of the academic plans of study. The addition of the new advisors provides the opportunity for periodic required appointments at certain checkpoints to ensure that students are on track and making progress toward their degree. Faculty now have the opportunity to meet with advisees in a more Mentor-like manner. Discussion topics will likely include student development through early identification with the discipline as well as discipline-specific trends and career advising.

Title III Program A: This 1.4 million dollar Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) grant allowed the development of the Student Academic Success Center (SASC). SASC's main responsibilities include early identification of at-risk students, significant contact and monitoring of these students using MapWorks, advising, counseling, outreach and referral to appropriate resources in order to ensure persistence and graduation when possible. As a value added component of SASC, in conjunction with other divisions of NSU, the new dual advising model was developed and implemented.

Title III Program F: This 1.5 million dollar Native American Supporting Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI) grant allowed for the development of the indigenous scholars development Center (ISDC). The main functions of the ISDC are quite similar to the SASC with an emphasis and mission aimed at American Indian students.

Taken together, the new dual advising model, SASC and ISDC will combine to enhance significantly the early identification and support of at risk students as well as provide for a seamless transition from entering NSU through persistence and completion.

Data Sets:

The data sets provided below fall into two basic categories; general data sets from which several student characteristics may be individually assessed, and those data tools designed specifically for either first-time freshmen or transfer students which assess characteristics of the samples and are thought to be relevant in delineating between those who persist and those who do not.

General Data Sets:

- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
- Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) Unitized Data System (UDS)
- Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE)
- Complete College America Data (NSU's Destination 2023)
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- NCAA National Persistence and Completion Report
- ETS Modified Proficiency Profile, 2012-ongoing
- Annual OSRHE Reports
- Banner Student Information System

Freshmen

- Demographics
- High School GPA
- ACT
- College preparation
- University Advisor satisfaction survey
- Early Warning Reports
- Ethnic Enrollment Reports
- Financial Aid Distribution Analysis
- First Year Experience & University Strategies course evaluations
- Developmental courses
- Semester GPA
- SASC or ISDC contact
- Online Course/Program Delivery Retention Analysis
- University Advisor satisfaction survey
- Persistence perception survey
- Self-efficacy survey

Transfer Students

- Demographics
- Prior GPA
- # of credit hours transferred
- General Education requirements met?
- How many & type of school transferred from
- Ethnic Enrollment Reports
- Financial Aid Distribution Analysis
- Advising touch points
- Developmental courses
- Semester GPA
- SASC or ISDC contact
- Online Course/Program Delivery Retention Analysis
- Academic Advisor satisfaction survey
- Persistence perception survey
- Self-efficacy survey

Non-persisting Students:

Contacts will include scripted interviews involving reasons for leaving, other factors that hampered persistence at NSU and plans for the future.