There are many facets of student success, from learning and grades to persistence in school, timely graduation, and satisfaction with the college experience. The Office for Faculty Development and Student Success (OFDSS) is charged with collaborating with units across campus to create and coordinate initiatives to promote these outcomes. We invite you to join us in creating a campus culture of success.

A recent analysis by Institutional Research showed that about 30% of freshmen have average GPAs below 2.0 in their first fall semester. In spring, freshmen GPAs are even worse: About 35% are below 2.0. From the perspective of promoting retention, helping freshmen get their grades up is one of the most important things we can do as an institution. When an instructor notices that a student is struggling, the instructor now has a powerful new tool to help that student recover: The academic early alert program GradesFirst. This past June and July, GradesFirst was piloted with a limited population of students taking summer classes. Although there were a few technical glitches (thanks to everyone involved for their patience and assistance), we now are ready to expand the coverage of GradesFirst to all freshmen in the fall 2011 semester.

Instructors who have freshmen in their classes will receive an e-mail request for feedback in the fourth week of the semester. We hope to receive reports on every freshman by the end of the fifth week of the semester. It takes less than a minute per struggling student for the instructor to click the link in an e-mail and select up to three buttons to indicate that a student is struggling. There is a field for optional comments, as well. When an instructor raises a concern about a student’s academic performance through GradesFirst, an “academic coach” receives the report and reaches out to intervene and offer whatever help the student needs to get back on track.

Universities with a high rate of instructor participation in early alert systems have achieved marked increases in retention rates. Making our early alert system a success is an institutional priority. We appreciate all instructors’ participation and assistance. Ideally, instructors have early graded assignments on which to base a report that a student is academically at-risk. However, if no grades are available early in the semester, instructors should use their best professional judgment. The key to early alert programs is that feedback is received from the instructors early in the semester. Mid-semester is much too late for most students to be able to save a failing grade. Earlier awareness and action (national best practices point to the fourth or fifth week as the right time) provide sufficient time for successful interventions. Readers who recall last year’s series in this newsletter on Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education will remember that one of the seven principles is prompt and meaningful feedback. Early alert is consonant with that principle.

Freshman are sometimes underprepared for the rigor of college classes, and we can do more to teach them proper study skills, time management and discipline. Ideally, all students would have those skills when they arrive in our classrooms. They don’t, so one thing instructors can do is make a conscious effort to teach those skills, especially in classes in which freshmen are a large population. (Contact jane.roads@wichita.edu for tips on how to teach study skills.) Another useful technique is to offer students opportunities to make up early assignments on which they did poorly. College is supposed to be about learning, so offering these second chances is consistent with our mission. Instructors also can do a lot to make students feel comfortable asking for help when they need it.
Honors Program: (316) 978-3375 • 
honors@wichita.edu

Upcoming Events

- The Ablah Library will host an Open House for students, staff and faculty from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Tuesday, August 30, in Koch Arena.
- The fall 2011 series of faculty development events kicks off with six informational sessions/demonstrations of the GradesFirst program, at 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., August 30, 31 and September 1, in various buildings around campus. See www.wichita.edu/ofdss/events for details.
- The Pre-Tenure Club will hold an organizational meeting from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., Friday, September 2, in Neff Hall 115B. All probationary faculty are welcome to attend. Please RSVP by calling 978-3209 or e-mailing qfdss@wichita.edu.

The Executive Director’s Corner

If you want something to change, change something. WSU doesn’t just want to change something, we need to. Not only do we have a mandate from the Kansas Board of Regents to increase our freshman retention and graduation rates (from 70 to 80 percent and from 40 to 50 percent, respectively, by the year 2020), the flourishing of our institution depends on increasing these rates. The additional tuition income from increased student success will partly offset decreased funding from the state. (I happen to think we also have a moral obligation to help students succeed, but I’ll leave that for another time.) What’s good for WSU, and our students, is also good for the state and the nation, in that a higher proportion of college graduates better prepares us to meet the challenges of the future. The motivation for establishing a culture of success at Wichita State could hardly be higher.

So what can we change? We can’t change the students we have. High school preparation in Kansas is what it is, and although a process is in place to increase the alignment between K-12 standards and true college readiness, we won’t see the impacts of that process (if any) for many years. WSU has a particular niche in the Kansas system of higher education, and for the most part, we won’t be able to recruit different types of students than we typically get. In short, we need to teach the students we have, not “ideal” students we might wish we had. The good news is that the vast majority of the students we have are capable of succeeding in college. Some of them need a little help to do it. In our helping attitudes and resources that WSU’s faculty and staff can make changes that will lead to the improvements in student success we need to make. Only collective effort can get us where we need to be.

Not every student who comes to WSU will succeed. The goal of student success programs therefore isn’t to try to “save” every student. Some students lack the skill and/or preparation, and some simply lack the will and drive to earn a college degree. Recognizing this reality, the strategy of Provost Pickus’ “Graduation Partnership” is to maximize the return on investment of our student success efforts by focusing on students who are capable, but who might not have succeeded without a little extra help. Among the tools we are employing to fulfill this strategy are the new academic early alert system, the new WSU 101 Introduction to the University course, increased offerings of Supplemental Instruction, expanded tutoring opportunities, and more. In choosing these particular interventions, we paid careful attention to national research on best practices and the particularities of our situation at WSU.

As our efforts to promote student success continue to evolve and grow, I look forward to your assistance and feedback. Early this fall, a faculty advisory council for OFDSS will be formed, and in September there will be a call for applications for the fall Student Success Faculty Fellows program. While we will be implementing programs for new freshmen during this academic year, we also will be designing programs for new transfer students (the other half of our new student group each year) that will be implemented in fall 2012. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you and your students succeed.

Have a wonderful semester! – Bill Vanderburgh
Executive Director, OFDSS

Fast Facts About. . .
The New Tutoring Program in OFDSS

The new website www.wichita.edu/tutoring serves as a central clearinghouse for tutoring programs around campus. When tutoring already exists for a given subject, this site can connect students to the help they need. When tutoring is not already available for a given subject, OFDSS will help find and hire tutors when they are needed. Refer your students—both those in need of tutoring and those who can provide tutoring—to this site.

Resource of the Month

The Teaching Professor is a monthly newsletter of research-based strategies for improving your classroom teaching. OFDSS has purchased an electronic subscription that makes The Teaching Professor free to all WSU faculty and staff. Go the Faculty Development channel on the Faculty/Staff Staff Resources tab in your myWSU account to find out how to get the newsletter delivered directly to your e-mail. Instructors can find a syllabus template and associated statements they can cut and paste into their own syllabuses (for example, from Counseling and Testing, the Office of Disability Services, Libraries, etc.) on www.wichita.edu/ofdss. Follow the “Syllabus Statements” link.