



EXEMPLARY PRACTICES

Program:

Academic Recovery Program

Institution:

Miami University, Hamilton and Middletown Campuses

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Institutional Information:

- 2-year, public, open enrollment institution with students completing most 4-year degrees on other campuses or at other schools
- Set in an urban setting in the Midwest
- Offers associate's degrees and certificates
- Core curriculum classes are foundation for bachelor's level programs
- 3,300 Hamilton students and 2,700 Middletown students (these numbers include students registered on all three Miami University Campuses, so they reflect some overlap)

Advising Delivery, Hamilton Campus:

The job for those in the Office of Academic Advising and Retention Services consists not only of advising students but also retaining them. However, graduation rates cannot be truly measured in an environment like the Hamilton campus, where students are expected or required to complete their degree elsewhere. Therefore, at Hamilton, retention is a measure of students who continue in good academic standing with at least a 2.0 GPA and probationary students who avoid suspension or dismissal.

Two full-time and one half-time academic advi-

sor as well as occasional volunteer help (about 10 hours per week) from a practicum graduate student make up the staff. The advisors are all generalists who are trained to work with all populations. Therefore, students can meet with whomever is available or they can request a particular academic advisor with whom they have previously worked. The typical case load is technically 1,100:1. While these numbers may seem high, and they are, not all students seek advising and a number of students receive advising through faculty advisors in their technical programs. Between October 1, 2005 and October 1, 2006, a total of 4,718 different students (5,263 individual interactions) came for advising. This means that each advisor saw approximately 700 students. During a 1-year period, students register for three semesters (fall, spring, and summer); many of these student appointments were with individuals returning to register for a subsequent term.

Program History:

As a regional campus where most degree-seeking students complete a degree elsewhere and some other students do not desire a degree, Hamilton is always searching for a way to measure student retention. Hamilton is an open enrollment campus, so a large number of students are either unprepared or underprepared for the rigors of college studies. Therefore, the percentage of students in good academic standing is a reasonable measure of retention.

In the past, intrusive advising was used with probation students. At the beginning of each semester advisors would examine every probation student's schedule and personally call each to suggest changes the student should make to his or her schedule before certain deadlines. Advisors look for intense course combinations or unmet course prerequisites in regard to their current schedule and then cautioned the students accordingly. However, advisors had wrong numbers on file, and students were not returning calls and were scrambling to make changes after first-choice classes were full. In the midst of this intensive time spent making phone calls, the advisors recognized the need to implement a program that could hold students accountable. Based on previous success with implementing registration holds on athletes and high school students taking college

classes, Hamilton advisors decided to force a face-to-face conversation about schedules via registration holds for students on probation. With the goal of assisting students better and in return increase retention of students on probation, the Academic Recovery Program, or ARP, was born.

ARP is the product of collaboration between offices and campuses. Academic advisors and learning specialists at Hamilton's sister campus in Middletown, Ohio, were facing similar challenges with probation students, so during the spring semester of 2005 the two sets of advisors joined together to create a program to benefit all of the students, including those who enroll in classes on both regional campuses during any given semester.

One tool useful in this partnership is the electronic software for note keeping that is available on both campuses. A student who meets with an academic advisor in Middletown can also meet with an academic advisor in Hamilton and receive consistent messages. The software also allows academic advisors to view records of all of the previous advising conversations with a particular student.

Program Description:

Step One

Once students are placed on academic probation, the registration hold is placed on a student's account by the Records Office. The hold prevents students from scheduling classes or independently making changes to their schedules. They receive a mailing containing a participation agreement, which informs them of the steps involved with ARP, and a learning contract, which guides them to the needed campus resources. Through this mailing, students are asked to make an appointment with an academic advisor and to bring with them the signed participation agreement and a one-page essay in which they examine both the reasons why they are on probation and their plan to be more successful the following semester.

Step Two

During their first meeting, an academic advisor reviews the student's essay to determine the barriers that are potentially keeping her or him from being academically successful. The advisor uses the information contained in these essays to then make specific referrals such as disability services, financial aid, or the counseling center.

The advisor calculates the projected GPA and informs the student of the semester GPA needed to avoid suspension (a 2.0 minimum in most cases) and the semester GPA needed to raise his or her cumulative GPA to a 2.0 (and therefore be off pro-

bation). Advisors also examine the student's intended major. Certain majors, such as education, business, and nursing are competitive enrollment programs and have much higher entrance GPA requirements than the other programs. Some students on probation may mean need a 3.0 average GPA for 3 subsequent semesters to raise their cumulative GPAs to the minimum to apply for a competitive-enrollment major. For others with low cumulative GPAs and a high number of attempted hours, successful entry into these majors may be mathematically impossible. When faced with students who cannot reach the needed GPA for their intended major, advisors discuss other options regarding an academic path and often refer students to career counseling.

In the final step of this meeting, the advisor and advisee create a course schedule. As a requirement of ARP, a student can enroll in a maximum of 14 credit hours a semester. Advisors also strongly suggest that students on probation enroll in a 2-credit-hour study-skills course.

Step Three

In the second meeting, usually between the 3rd and 7th weeks of the term, the advisee meets with a learning specialist (which is the academic advisor in Middletown and a separate staff member in Hamilton). The timing of this meeting is designed to give students an opportunity to obtain test grades and get a feel for how they are progressing in their courses. However, this meeting must take place before the 9th week, which is the deadline to drop classes. During this meeting the student discusses study skills and time management strategies in addition to any specific course concerns. Necessary referrals and schedule adjustments are again made.

Step Four

The registration holds are removed once the student is no longer on academic probation. However, if students on probation receive a semester GPA below a 2.0, they are suspended and must sit out of classes at Miami University for 2 terms. If students fail to achieve higher than a 2.0 GPA on their return semester, they are dismissed from the university for at least 2 calendar years and must petition to return. Course work taken elsewhere during the time of suspension will not be accepted as transfer credit. Therefore, advisors must reach students at the first sign of academic trouble.

Program Evaluation:

The first round of probation holds went into effect following spring grades posted in May 2005.