Retention and Student Success:
An Action Plan for Academic Librarians

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With student attrition rates reaching ever-increasing rates on campuses in the United States the inability of higher education institutions to retain their students is a significant issue. An Action Plan that offers librarians a useful entry point to contribute to the academic mission of colleges and universities is outlined. This paper details how to start inter-departmental partnerships and communicate a vision of library goals as effective strategies to prevent attrition.

Actions that invest on improving student engagement and retention in higher education are valuable not only to individual students' success but also to university planning and funding. Like other units within colleges and universities, academic libraries are subject to increasing internal and external pressures to demonstrate their contributions to institutional goals related to retention. As academic institutions grapple with decreasing enrollment and graduation rates, their strategic goals focus more on developing traditions and cultures that develop retention. The library can play a more explicit role in retaining students by creating a positive and supportive role by collaborating with other departments on campus.

Institutions of higher learning all have procedures in place that assess and track academic progress of students before grades come out. In order to retain students, these early warning signs that flag poor performance are critical. Librarians can positively impact other campus entities with a library action plan designed to contribute significantly to efforts already in place. With an active plan, librarians can help identify and participate in detection of at risk students. A proactive plan by Librarians that collaborates with the identifying and assessing process already in place can signifcantly contribute to the academic mission of colleges and universities.

The initial phase of the action plan is to identify the key risk factors which place students at risk of non-completion. Struggling students' research limitations and its implications for attrition rates are central to the librarian's focus. However, other factors that include mental health issues, disability, socioeconomic status and ethnicity also need to be addressed. The next phase is designed to seek out and communicate with other departments. A good working relationship established with people in other departments and knowing their roles is vital. Inter-departmental collaboration should not only reinforce their goals but librarians can also supplement their objectives with carefully designed targeted library oriented programs and services.

Student perceptions of librarians and the lack of awareness students have about the reference and research support provided by librarians can be a major hurdle. Furthermore

other faculty and staff on campus may share these same perceptions and lack of awareness. An encompassing plan of positive, consistent and careful cultivation of the profile of librarians integrated into other inter-departmental programs is an essential element for a successful action plan.

Library Student Support and Retention

University's strategic goal:

Engage students to significantly increase retention and graduation rates.

Library's Strategic Goals for Student Support and Retention:

IMPACT (5-7 YEARS)	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMESANNUAL	SERVICES/ACTIVITIES
• **Library improves University's retention and graduation rates**	• **University retention and graduation increases, based on collaboration among all partners.**	• **Library is active in each partner department**	• **Contact and build partnerships** • **Engaged and collaborative partners**

Goal	Objectives	Task to Complete Goal	Evaluation	Input
1. University Departments support Library efforts.	1.1 At minimum have 4-6 partnerships	1.1.A. Partner with organizations to provide strategies, programs, activities, information and resources 1.1.B. Build and maintain a communication	1.1. • Survey needs • Assess • Self-Assessment • Knowledge and Competency	1.1. Student Support Librarian, Reference Team members, University Librarian

		network with partners, leaders, advocates 1.1.C. Advocate for change and support of policies, programs and practices that impact Library and students. 1.1.D. Align with University Strategic Retention and Graduation goals. 1.1.E. Facilitate University Summit on Retention		
	1.2. 100 % of Partners will receive Library information and resources.	1.2.A. Develop and update Library services 1.2.B. Provide Library developmental training for students.	1.2. Manuals and Brochures developed, distributed, and maintained • Library development and implementation at department sites or library.	1.2. Student Support Librarian, Reference Team members, University Librarian.
2. Student Support Librarian serves as the "Hub"	2.1. Conduct Department advisory and update meetings	2.1.A. Address the strengths of the departments 2.1.B. Utilize asset mapping, forums, surveys to identify and address strengths and needs	2.2. • University Departments participate in decision making.	2.2. Department heads, tutors, students.
	2.2. Develop and maintain partnerships that promote and increase student retention and graduation	2.2.A. Partner and maintain partnership with departments to provide strategies and programs. 2.2.B. Advocate for changes and support programs, policies and practices that impact student learning. 2.2.C. Build relationships with College Experience, Student Success Center, Center for Advising & First Year Programs, Adult & Military Programs, Student Athletics,	2.1. • Students participate in programs and services • Utilize partners, surveys • Utilize University Statistics	2.1. Student Support Librarian, Reference Team members, University Librarian.

		Students on Academic Probation, Student Housing. 2.2.D Support national, local or campus campaigns or activities.		

After the initial ground work is laid a clear summary of library initiatives for retention can be laid out. The main goal of any action plan is best focused on how improving the information literacy of students can aid them on their path toward graduation. This can be meaningfully enhanced through constant communication of this goal. Communication of how library use is associated with retention, and, importantly, that library use in the early weeks of a student's first semester is associated with retention are salient points. Points to emphasize also include how students who used academic library services and resources at least once during the academic year had higher GPA and retention average than their peers who did not use library services. Many analyses also suggest that logging into databases and using library workstations were actions consistently and positively associated with students' success. A plan that includes outlines to students how to borrow books and find electronic journals is essential. Providing comfortable library facilities and student employment in the library are also effective strategies for student engagement that help prevent attrition.

By actively participating in assessment and retention initiatives, librarians can offer their services and improve student engagement in higher education. Developing an action plan allows librarians to become more explicitly connected to overall institutional goals and strengthen their positions in their schools' strategic initiatives more broadly.

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References

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