

UT MARTIN ASSESSMENT NEWSLETTER

MAY 2022

Our most important job is to help our students succeed!

Skyhawk Retention Summit Recap

UT Martin hosted its second Skyhawk Retention Summit last week, with almost 200 registered attendees from Tennessee and six other states meeting to share ideas, ask questions, and discuss new approaches to improving retention in postsecondary institutions.

The keynote speaker for the Summit was Dr. Emily House, Executive Director of THEC, who set the stage for the need to improve retention rates across all postsecondary levels. She shared the results of a new THEC report, *College Going and the Class of 2021* (available here: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/thec/bureau/research/college-going-reports/CGR-HSSO%20Report%20Draft_Final.pdf), which looks at college-going data from the Tennessee high school graduating class of 2021 and compares it to previous years. Some of the statistics include:

- The college-going rate for the class of 2021 is 52.8%, compared to 56.8% for the class of 2020, and continuing a general downward trend from the class of 2017.
- Gaps in college-going rates still exist across gender and race groups, with a 12.5% gap between the college-going rates of male (46.5%) and female (59.0%) students, a 13.6% gap between White (57.6%) and Black/African American (44.0%) students, and a 22.6% gap between White and Hispanic/Latino (35.0%) students. All of these gaps have widened since the class of 2017 graduated.
- The percentage of students opting to attend out-of-state institutions has increased from 11.1% for the class of 2017 to 14.4% for the class of 2021.

Keep in mind that the number of high school graduates is currently dropping each year, which makes these college-going rates even more ominous.

If you are thinking that these numbers don't affect UT Martin, consider these data:

- The college-going rate for Weakley County students has dropped steadily from the class of 2017 (when 69.8% of the graduating seniors went on to college) to the class of 2021 (when 57.3% of the graduating seniors went on to college).
- For Obion County, the rate has fluctuated from 62.2% for the class of 2017 to a high of 66.4% for the class of 2019, then back to 57.9% for the class of 2021.
- For Henry County, the rate went from 64.0% (class of 2017) to 68.9% (class of 2019) and back down to 47.1% (class of 2021).

That's just three of the counties that feed UT Martin enrollment.

The data presented by Dr. House align with national trends. According to the National Student Clearinghouse (see <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>), national postsecondary enrollment this spring fell 4.1% over enrollment last spring, with undergraduate enrollment dropping 4.7%. With these drops in enrollment, retention has become a necessary high priority for postsecondary institutions.

The Skyhawk Retention Summit allowed representatives from all types of institutions (2-year, 4-year, graduate, public, private, etc.) to share approaches they were taking to address various aspects of retention. Most of the sessions were set up with facilitators who shared experiences at their own institutions then provided a series of questions for table discussions that invited the participants to examine and/or share their own practices, challenges, or ideas for addressing various

situations. General topics focused on leveraging innovative course delivery models to promote retention and persistence to graduation; how the pandemic changed the way we think about student success, leveraging technology and third-party vendors to improve student success, more effectively employing programs and systems that we already have, effective strategies for helping students who are on probation get back on track, effective strategies for increasing persistence and success of men of color, engaging families in student success efforts, and leveraging data about sub-populations to improve student success.

Some of the shared ideas and approaches include:

- Using data focusing on instructional modality vs. DFWI rates to direct investments in instructional design;
- “Fresh Start” mini-terms that include drop-back classes and/or 1-credit hour courses that allow students to learn skills for success;
- Breaking 4-credit-hour courses into two, 2-credit hour half-semester courses that allowed students who were struggling with the first half of a course to drop back and repeat that first half without receiving a 4-hour F on their transcript;
- Reviewing software and identifying ways to expand the use of existing software rather than investing in additional systems, and using home-grown reports (e.g., Argos), to retrieve frequently-used data;
- Formalizing student check-ins by conducting “stoplight” surveys at 4 weeks, 8 weeks, and 12 weeks to identify students who are struggling (we could utilize Hawk Alerts to do this);
- For students on probation, utilize frequent contacts from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to assure the student that everyone stumbles once in a while and to set up additional contacts with their advisor;
- Provide “how to learn ____” classes for students to learn study skills for math, biology, and chemistry;

- Disaggregate student retention data by single or multiple sub-populations (e.g., race/ethnicity, sex, Pell eligibility, first generation, and combinations of these) to identify opportunities for improvement);
- Involving students to co-construct knowledge about these gaps in retention data and issues that impact retention;
- Increase the numbers of tutors and SI leaders of color and increase the utilization of these services by students of color;
- Better documentation and dissemination of how institutional processes work (e.g., how to change a major, how to access emergency funds, etc.);
- Learn to manage our own narrative; and
- Move from an institution-centered (“if only the students were more like us”) to a student-centered culture (“we can’t do it for them but we can do with them”).

Overheard at the Skyhawk Retention Summit

- “Success is rarely an accident.”
- “Your life does not get better by chance; it gets better by change.”
- “College happens both inside and outside the classroom; there is going to class, but there is also food, laundry, various group experiences, making new friends, etc.”
- “It is a moral imperative—if we admit them, we must support them.”
- “We have to meet our students where they are, but we can’t leave them there.”
- “To reach the students I have not yet reached, I need to do the things I have not yet done.”

The next Skyhawk Retention Summit is tentatively scheduled for May 24, 2023. Mark your calendars now!