

STAY@FAU

OFFICE OF STUDENT RETENTION NEWSLETTER

WHAT IS STUDENT RETENTION?

Retention is a University-wide initiative to ensure that all students have ample opportunity to complete a degree at Florida Atlantic University. The Office of Student Retention was created to coordinate activities between academic and student affairs divisions; support and monitor students' academic progress; coordinate with academic advisement units; provide referrals to campus resources and support services; and coordinate programs that foster the academic success of students. These efforts have been established in order to retain a greater percentage of students through the completion of their educational goals.

ECONOMIC ISSUES EFFECTING RETENTION

Typically, when unemployment rates rise and the economy turns sour, retention rates at Universities increase. We all hope that this will be true during the current national economic crisis. However, in order to do this, students must overcome potential barriers to their success as cost-saving measures are being discussed.

The entire University community is being asked to "do more with less." Although this is often taxing on already over-worked staff, we need to remember: The only thing within our control is our service to students. We must keep them our priority.

FLC UPDATE

This semester saw the start of an exciting new retention program at FAU, the creation of the Freshman Learning Community (FLC). The literature on retention shows that students who are undecided/undeclared about their major have a more difficult time connecting to the institution and seeing the value in coursework, and therefore are at greater risk for attrition. "Academic boredom" sets in for these students as they are unable to see the relevance of coursework as clearly as students with clear career goals do (Noel, L.; Levitz, R., Saluri, D. & Associates, 1985. *Increasing student retention*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco). The FAU retention committee decided to create an intervention for this group of undecided students to help them discover their career paths and have a greater chance of persistence.

The FLC is a cohort group of approximately 20 students who complete three general education courses plus the SLS 1503 (Learning Strategies and Human Development) course as a group. This provides them a University connection as they have "built-in" study groups and get to bond with a group of students. Each student is also assigned an individual faculty mentor to help them create an additional FAU connection and to provide the new student with some guidance. Finally, workshops and individual counseling sessions are provided on topics such as "choosing a

major" and other relevant subjects and students are asked to complete a career development plan. It is not intended that the student will necessarily select a major simply by joining the FLC, however, they will find other ways to make that ever-so-important connection to the University while learning about key resources to help them make that decision.

The FLC is currently being piloted for the Fall 2001 semester. Based on program evaluations, plans to increase the FLC for Fall 2002 are in the works, as well as plans for a "TLC" or Transfer Learning Community, which will target at-risk transfer students at all FAU campuses.

HOW CAN I HELP?

A regular question that we hear in the office of retention is: "What can I do as a member of the FAU community to enhance student satisfaction and retention?" Therefore, each Retention newsletter will contain the "how can I help" section with tips for faculty and staff—little things that you can do to help to retain students.

The "how can I help" tip for the Fall semester is to make sure that you (whether a faculty or staff member) are up to date and cross-trained, so you can provide all the information students need. Dr. David Zatz from Toolpack Consulting, LLC states that superior student service is essential for retention. Some of the tips he offers include:

- responding immediately to students who indicate that they want help;
- treating all students, regardless of appearance, with respect;
- providing all the information students need;
- letting student needs guide your actions;
- calming students when needed and listen actively;
- acknowledging students immediately if they must wait for service; and
- finding answers to questions you can't answer, and if pressed for time, providing accurate contact information for other personnel who have the answer. ("Recruitment & Retention in higher education" October 2001, vol. 15 No. 10.)



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: FAU CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER**Clarifying options...Defining potentials...Connecting you to a world of opportunity!**

In each issue of stay@fau, a particular office or service that works to improve student retention rates will be highlighted. In future editions look for: a focus on advising, counseling, financial aid, residential life, and student involvement opportunities.

Since "career relevance" is a key factor in student retention, many retention strategies nationwide are specifically related to career planning and counseling. Without clear career goals, students are more apt to drop out. The Career Development Center (CDC) offers a number of services to help keep students on track as they prepare for graduation and their future professions. The CDC encourages students to take responsibility for managing their careers and the directions they may take.

Career development is an ongoing process that begins with self-assessment, exploration and research, experiential learning, and career informed decision-making in choosing to enter the workforce or graduate/professional school. The CDC offers numerous services to help students on their road to graduation and success, including:

FAU CareerTRAK: the on-campus recruiting system, which lists companies coming to the CDC for Full Time, Internship, and Co-op opportunities plus additional resources that will help students in their career search.

On Campus Recruiting: Corporate recruiters from business and industry, education, government agencies, etc., visit the CDC each fall and spring semester to interview graduating seniors,

master's degree candidates, and alumni for professional career positions. Recruitment schedules are updated regularly at www.cdc.fau.edu.

Interview Skills Workshops prepare students for upcoming interviews. Students learn what recruiters look for in screening resumes, typical questions to anticipate, and how to prepare for the behavioral and on-site second interviews.

Choosing a Major Workshops: Students who are having trouble selecting a major or career path are encouraged to attend a workshop to learn how to get started on that ever important decision. They will learn about the resources that are available to help in their search. The Index of Undergraduate/Graduate Majors is also available to help students find direction. Each major is linked on the Internet to a Career Guide that provides information on student interests and aptitudes needed for success in the major as well as occupational opportunities in the field.

Career Days: Career Days are offered on the Boca Raton, Davie and MacArthur Campuses to provide a networking opportunity, linking students and alumni with corporate representatives. This event, offered each Spring and Fall semester, is an excellent opportunity for employers to recruit FAU students and alumni for Co-op, Internship or Career positions. The Career Development Center is currently planning its Spring 2002 Career Day for the Boca Raton Campus on Tuesday, January 29, 2002 and the Broward Campuses on February 27, 2002.

Grad Expo: In addition to a

Graduate School Fair, held in both Broward and Boca in the Fall, workshops on topics related to getting into graduate school are offered on the Davie campus.

A Protocol Training Luncheon is available on the Davie campus for undergraduate students while graduate students can attend a Professional Protocol Dinner. In the Spring on the Boca Campus, a pilot luncheon in dining etiquette will be offered to students in the co-op program.

Lifeforce: Is a program being developed on the Davie campus. It is geared toward assisting students to ensure that they have chosen the career that fits their knowledge, skills and abilities and linking that toward employment in the field with a focus on lifelong learning.

The Co-operative Education Program encourages students to "earn as you learn." As part of their academic careers, Co-op students work part-time or full-time in a position directly related to their academic majors in industry, business or governmental organizations. Co-op students earn a salary and may be eligible to receive credit pending approval by their academic department. This program is available to interested students in all colleges at FAU. The Co-op Program is based on the philosophy that gainful experience in the student's chosen field before graduation affords a number of opportunities not otherwise available: to apply methods and principles learned in the classroom to actual work situations and problems, to enhance academic motivation,

to assist in career selection and accelerate professional maturity, to help defray the costs of education, and to develop better opportunities for employment upon graduation.

Walk-in Advising is also available at the CDC for help in choosing a major and/or career; general information about Co-op, Internships, On-Campus recruiting, Career Day and the Alumni Career Mentor Program; critiques of resumes and cover letters; information on how to conduct a job search including use of the Internet; advice regarding negotiating job offers, salaries, etc. Students should visit the website for hours available on the Broward and Boca Raton campuses.

The Alumni Career Mentor Program was established by the FAU-Boca Campus Career Development Center with the support of the Office of Alumni Affairs. It is a program designed to assist FAU students as they prepare to make the transition from the University to the workplace. It was established to increase the resources available for FAU students to obtain information that cannot be found in books. It offers informational interviews and onsite visits or shadowing opportunities to learn more about specific careers, companies, and geographical areas. For example, students can learn which transferable skills employers are looking for and/or how to prepare themselves for a particular career field. FAU students can get the inside story about what it is really like to work in a specific profession or for a particular company. FAU students can also begin networking with key professionals who can make a difference in future career endeavors.

The varied services of the Career Development Center are available to help all FAU students "stay@fau." Please refer your students to the CDC and its website at www.cdc.fau.edu to enhance their University experience and their possibilities for the future.

STAY@FAU,

the University's Retention newsletter, is published bi-annually. Please look for future issues that will go in-depth with some of the key services that enhance student persistence, findings from student focus groups and surveys, and how YOU can help increase the retention rates of our students.