

Fall 2021

At Duquesne University, student retention is everyone's job. It's important that the entire community of faculty and staff at Duquesne play a role in helping students feel they belong on campus.

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Academic Affairs in Review

A SEMI-ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS, EVENTS AND NEWS

Retention

Retention Starts Before Enrollment

By Kelley Maloney, Assistant Vice President, EMG

All too many DU students are dropping out, approximately 600 every year. In the coming months, the University Retention Committee will begin a year-long effort of partnering with colleagues across the University to study and undertake aggressive action planning to address improving the student experience.

That student experience is promised, and expectations set, throughout the multi-year recruiting process. Through recent and strategic investments in tools that visualize and leverage available data, the Enrollment Management Group has expanded the ability to harness data to better inform decision-making on both long-term planning and day-to-day operations, including those that support retention.

Prospective sophomore and junior student leads procured through the “search” process, with College Board and ACT, can retain at a higher rate, by developing relationships earlier in the college search process, so that students develop an affinity for the University and receive much more customized information and build better relationships with the DU community.

- [Beyond test scores: Predicting retention using application behaviors](#)
- [“Enrollment Is More Than Recruiting. It’s Also Retaining Those Who Already Chose You.”](#)

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The **deadline** for submission to the spring issue of *Academic Affairs in Review* is April 4, 2022. For submission information, please contact Grace Sommers at sommersg@duq.edu.

Recently implemented or enhanced strategic efforts that further this strategy include:

- Territory-based admissions and prospect management – undergraduate admissions has shifted from program-based counselor territories to geographic-based territories. This supports comprehensive prospect management, which emphasizes the early identification, targeting and then conversion of those prospective students who are most likely to apply, be admitted and enroll.
- Duquesne is now a [Raise.me](#) partner. Raise.me is a micro-scholarship program where high school students, beginning in the 9th grade, can earn micro-scholarships for college preparation, extracurricular and academic efforts such as taking AP courses, visiting the DU campus and community service. The amount earned on Raise.me from Duquesne University will be the guaranteed minimum amount of institutional aid; students may receive even more in their scholarship or financial aid package once the completed application is reviewed for admission.
- Cutting edge, state-of-the-art analytics and behavioral intelligence marketing tools through our partnerships with new vendors.
- New financial aid packaging and scholarship strategies that are more competitive and address need-based gaps to support recruitment and retention, as well as reengineering retention fund processing to anticipate needs and better support current students before crises using retention indicators.

The Honors College

Who is an Honors Student?

Looking Beyond the FTIC Applicant

When attrition is an issue, it's tempting to assume that students aren't prepared for the rigors of college. But a recent analysis of Duquesne's freshman retention rate revealed a startling statistic: While some of the attrition could be attributed to poor grades, the majority didn't "fail out"; they had average GPAs of 3.7. The University's Retention Committee investigated this phenomenon. **One recurring qualitative theme in exit interviews suggested that far from feeling too challenged, those students didn't feel challenged enough.** Thus, each spring for the past five years, Honors College Director Dr. Kathleen Glenister Roberts listens to the faculty who identify standout freshmen. She also sends invitations to freshmen with high GPAs from their first semester. While up until then all Honors College students had begun their coursework in freshman year, now there is a growing population of sophomores beginning their honors experience with enthusiasm for the opportunities available.

One standout alumna is Maggie Allen, currently an Admissions Counselor in the Enrollment Management Group. Once she started in Honors, Maggie says, "I immediately felt the difference. My Honors College classes were smaller, stimulating and intensely engaging. Everyone made me feel like I had always been a part of the Honors College family." This sense of community among like-minded peers is one of the strengths of the initiative. Cocurricular programs, including the "Sophomore Soirée" welcome dinner, extend the Honors community beyond freshman housing. Diversity and excellence in student



inclusion is also a key element of the invitation process. Says Roberts, “When a professor is excited about a student who would love the Honors College, it shows how special Duquesne is. Our faculty really expand student horizons, and our Honors College will always be a community of learners with qualities that go far beyond their high school SAT scores.”

School of Business

In 2020 the School of Business altered its letters to academically dismissed undergraduate/graduate students. Historically the letters were direct and to-the-point, informing students of the dismissal and providing instructions to reapply. Our letters have been revised to provide the same information, with a more supportive and encouraging tone. The following excerpts reflect the changes:

Previous letter:

The [Student Standing](#) Committee has reviewed your academic progress after the Fall ____ semester and we regret to inform you that you have been dismissed from the University for accumulating three or more ‘F’ grades in one semester.

In order to reapply for admission to the University for the Spring ____ semester, you must submit a letter via email to the Student Standing Committee at soba-ssc@duq.edu. Appeals requesting readmission for the Spring 2020 semester must be sent to the School of Business Advisement Office no later than _____.

Revised letter:

I am writing with guidance to help you to recover from a difficult semester and get back on track toward graduation.

Toward that end, there are two steps in the process:

- Because you received three or more ‘F’ grades in the Fall 2020 semester, in accordance with the [Academic Standing Policy in the DU Undergraduate Catalog](#)), you have been dismissed from the University.
- **However, you can, and I encourage you to, reapply for admission to the University for the Spring 2021 semester.**
 - In the vast majority of cases, students who have been dismissed are readmitted.

- The key to successful readmission is to reflect on the challenges you experienced in the Fall 2020 semester and how you plan to approach the new semester differently.

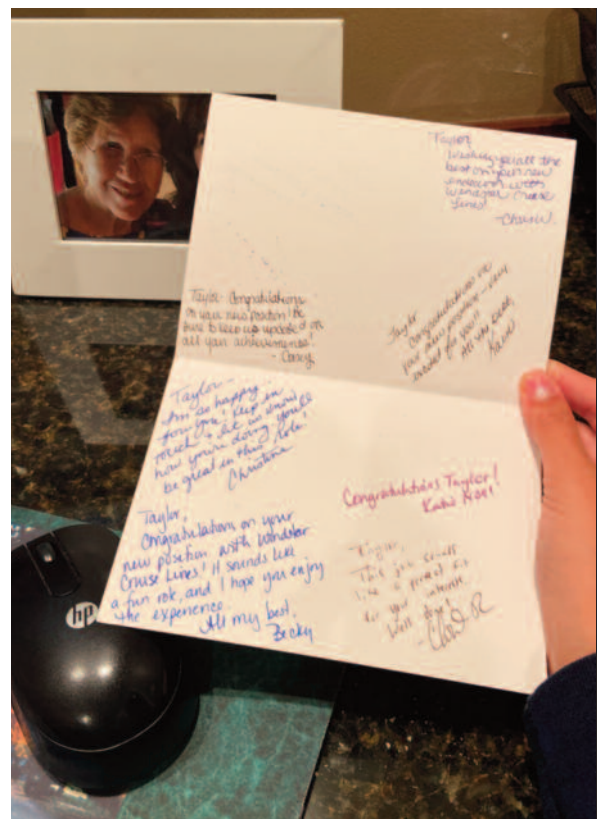
We believe that communicating empathy and support encourages a student’s desire to return to campus and to be successful going forward.

Donahue Graduate School of Business

Retention is Key to Creating a Sense of Community

At the Donahue Graduate School of Business, a key to retention is creating a sense of community. We use personalized outreach tactics to build meaningful relationships with students. Since many graduate students are working professionals, they often spend a limited time on campus – so we work hard to make them feel part of the Duquesne family.

Our students receive personalized messages celebrating birthdays, graduations, marriages, new jobs, promotions, and more. Often the entire staff writes personal notes to students, including during Graduate Student Appreciation Week. These personal efforts are a testament to our dedicated graduate office staff who maintain contact with



our students and are eager to celebrate their successes.

This personalized approach extends to times when disciplinary actions (e.g., academic probation) are levied. Our disciplinary letters now recognize the challenges students face and offer help for “getting back on track.” In short, the message we convey is that “we value you and will help you succeed.”

We also offer many networking opportunities for students, including Zoom socials, in-person events, and picnics, so they can connect outside of class and meet faculty as well as students in other graduate business programs. Moreover, we host speakers, raffle off gift cards and provide complimentary headshots. During exams, we offer “Food for Finals,” a steady stream of free snacks popular with students.

After receiving a congratulatory note from our office, a 2021 MBA-SBP graduate, Taylor Pasquarelli, had this to say:

“I just wanted to say thank you so much for this touching card! The support throughout and beyond completing this program continues to amaze me. This is just one reason, amongst so many, that I am so glad that I chose Duquesne’s MBA-SBP program.”

Rangos School of Health Sciences

Retention Strategies in Health Sciences

In the John G. Rangos, Sr. School of Health Sciences (RSHS), the student experience is at the heart of academic advising. RSHS advisors believe that “retention” starts when a student deposits, and that every interaction with a student is an opportunity to make them feel valued and supported. In addition to comprehensive advising appointments, frequent communication, and semester grade reviews, there are a few other strategies we use to ensure students remain enrolled at Duquesne. First, we try to normalize academic difficulty. We remind students who are experiencing difficulty that others have struggled and then succeeded, and that some of their classmates are struggling, too, even if their struggles are not evident to others. We tell them that experiencing difficulty does not mean they are not smart or that their major is not a good fit, but rather that they need to develop new skills to ensure their success.

Second, we rely on our department faculty, who are also deeply committed to student success. Since we

advise students by academic program, advisors develop strong relationships with the Department Chairs and faculty, allowing us to work as a team to address student concerns. Finally, we understand that some students, either by choice or by performance, will not stay in the RSHS. We work with these students to identify other opportunities at Duquesne, discuss transfer requirements, and place them in a “Special Status” if needed. Special Status allows students to remain in the RSHS for up to two semesters while they complete coursework and satisfy the academic requirements necessary to transfer to another Duquesne program. We hope and expect that students will stay in the RSHS from admission to graduation, but if they do not, we try to ensure that through our efforts, students will choose to remain at Duquesne.

Office of Classroom Technologies

Retention and Learning Space Environments

Think of your favorite restaurant. You eat there because you like the food, right? But do you also like the atmosphere? What if you didn’t like the atmosphere? Would you tolerate the environment or find another place that appeases all your senses? Eating at a restaurant is about enjoying the entire experience, not just the food. And college is the same way. If a student likes their studies, they are more than willing to spend several years at a particular institution — as long as they like the environment. If they do not, they will move onto something that better suits their vision of college. Improving the atmosphere in and around classrooms — the places where students spend a great deal of their college life — is one of the goals of the Office of Classroom Technologies. Enhancements to learning spaces have recently taken on a greater emphasis. With students coming from a variety of school districts, some of which have undergone massive building improvements, it is imperative that Duquesne looks as good as, if not better than, the high schools from which our students have graduated. Recent improvements to the campus learning spaces include mobile furniture in all of College Hall, tiered seating in Rockwell, soft seating for studying between classes in the hallway spaces of Fisher and College, and innovative classroom furniture in Fisher offering a



variety of nontraditional seating options. The OCT plans to continue classroom improvements with the goal of providing comfortable, inviting learning spaces that appeal to the current and prospective generations of university students.

School of Music

Music Keeps People Together: Student Retention in the Mary Pappert School of Music

Administrators, faculty and staff within the Mary Pappert School of Music (MPSOM) have increased retention efforts through collaboration and targeted work with students throughout their degree programs. Efforts have focused on visibility, familiarity and approachability of faculty and staff as well as continued attention to individual students' needs through tailored academic advising. Retention starts in spring and summer for incoming freshmen and their families, with frequent program-level Zoom meetings and on-campus visits. Academic Advisor Jane Cubbison leads efforts with a personal touch, answering questions about transitioning to college-level music study





and knowing names and faces of all incoming students before fall orientation begins.

Fall Convocation, attended by all undergraduate music students, includes remarks by Dean David Allen Wehr, introductions of school personnel, and performances by award winning upperclassmen. Students attend “Staff Presents,” where staff members share information about their roles, and “Faculty Presents,” allowing students to listen to live music performed by the professional musicians from whom they learn in classrooms and studios. Faculty advising remains a vital component of our retention efforts. Through the creation and distribution of the MPSOM Faculty Manual, Associate Dean Rachel Whitcomb has opened lines of communication by clarifying policies and procedures for academic advising for faculty and students. An established network of faculty advisors meets with students individually each semester to discuss academic progress, areas in need of attention, registration, course scheduling, and future career goals.

Students receive schoolwide updates through the Weekly Informational Student Email (WISE), created by Carrie McCormack, Student and Alumni Services Coordinator. WISE includes important dates and deadlines, special events and music-related job alerts.



We also have a student-to-student mentoring program for freshmen, and student ambassadors who serve a number of roles within the school. Together, the entire community is working to provide opportunities for students to survive and thrive in their music studies.

Online Learning

7 Effective Online Instructor Actions that Promote Student Retention

Below, we briefly outline seven effective actions online instructors should take to promote student retention. While these actions focus on students in online courses, they are widely applicable in any course modality.

■ Be Clear

Provide clear expectations in your syllabus that set students up for success. Include student-centered learning objectives, organize units in an intuitive manner and use rubrics for assessment.

■ Communicate Frequently

Provide announcements, email updates and other check-ins throughout the course to keep students on track. Alert students when assignment feedback has been provided and remind them of upcoming due dates.

■ Make a Connection

Hold Zoom office hours, use a Q&A Discussion Forum and conduct an early course feedback survey. Reach out to students individually to get to know them and understand their goals. Create opportunities for students to connect with one another. Be accessible and create an open line of dialog with students.

■ Provide Feedback

Give constructive individualized feedback on student assignments throughout the course.

■ Monitor Performance

Monitor student activity and use Starfish to alert academic advisors and University support staff of any concerns.

■ Show Compassion

Check-in periodically on the well-being of students. Allocate

time throughout the semester for casual conversation about what students are thinking about and provide them with a safe space to come together to learn.

■ Offer Support

Be familiar with the Duquesne support network so that you can direct students to appropriate services and resources that can help them. You are not expected to do everything on your own.

Learn More

View [Promoting Student Retention – The Online Instructor](#) for a detailed list of tactics and resources to be used before, during and after any course.

To discuss student retention strategies further, please contact online@duq.edu.

School of Nursing

School of Nursing Undergraduate Retention Strategies

The School of Nursing takes a very hands-on, proactive approach toward retention. At the undergraduate level, students receive communications at key points throughout their academic careers to not only check on their progress, but to get in front of any potential issues.

For example, registration reminders are sent each spring to ensure students register for the courses needed to progress in the program. An academic advisor contacts any student who misses the registration period to address



Academic advisors take a proactive and personalized approach with students to support their academic success.

questions and offer registration assistance. Academic advisors also provide information on academic and related support resources designed to help students achieve their highest academic potential. These nursing-specific resources include tutoring and studying services, a remediation specialist, test reviews and open labs, as well as mental health and nursing workshops. In addition, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs (ADSA) contacts Student Accounts each spring for the list of nursing students with student accounts holds. ADSA then works with Disability Services, the Office of Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion, Enrollment Management Group, Financial Aid and other sources of funding to help students decrease their balance under the registration threshold.

Center for Teaching Excellence

In it Together: Retention-Minded Teaching

CTE recognizes and appreciates the role that faculty already play in retaining students. That said, the pandemic and recent trends have impressed upon us all the need to redouble our efforts in supporting our students throughout their academic journey. The pandemic significantly impacted the way that students feel meaningfully connected to their school. While we may be back to offering full on-campus learning, that does not mean that our students are back to feeling comfortable with participating in student affairs, residence life, or other cocurricular and extracurricular activities.

Given this reality, faculty are encouraged to learn about and share ways to remind students that their presence in class and on campus matters to us. Classroom efforts that reinforce the mindset that each student matters include: acknowledging students by asking and remembering names and pronouns; utilizing group tasks that allow students to share successes, failures, and growth; shifting toward multiple smaller-scale and lower-risk assignments rather than a few high-risk projects; implementing unique and engaging check-ins (consider asking students to anonymously share their highs and lows each week); and when referring students to outside resources, give individual contact information rather than general contacts. Students are more likely to utilize the resources that might benefit them (counseling, registrar, student life, health services, etc.) if they're being directed to support from an individual rather than from a system; connect course content

to “real life” and their professional future by addressing current trends and issues or by bringing in guest speakers.

These are just a few examples of ways that faculty can continue to contribute to student retention.

Gumberg Library

Gumberg Library: Focused on Student Success

A welcoming, functional, and student-focused library not only contributes to the positive impression of prospective students and their families, but also to students' ongoing satisfaction with their college experience. Gumberg's efforts to support student success center on three pillars: highly relevant, easily accessible collections; expert research assistance with 24/7 access; and comfortable spaces that support multiple learning styles. Gumberg's textbook affordability initiatives and a move toward online collections have more holistically supported student information needs while also creating more study and program spaces. The recent fifth floor renovation, for example, brought long-requested improvements including group study rooms, comfortable furniture, white boards, a microwave and bistro seating. Gumberg partners with the Student Government Association and the bookstore on projects to make textbooks more affordable. Working with Barnes & Noble, the library purchases required textbooks for Bridges courses as eBooks whenever possible. The textbook platform is updated to indicate Gumberg's acquisitions, and emails are sent to faculty explaining how to embed eBook links into Blackboard courses.

Another notable textbook cost-savings project resulted in purchasing the Access Medicine and Access Pharmacy databases, which together provide online access to over 200 textbooks along with licensing exam preparation tools at no personal cost to students.

Comments from Gumberg Library's recent LibQUAL+ survey attest to ways the library remains student focused. Student responses frequently mentioned satisfaction with study spaces; the library's highly specialized services, including services that provide materials not already available at Gumberg; and the helpful library faculty and staff. One student's comment summed up the results this way: “I have always been impressed with the level of service achieved by our library! From staff who are friendly and knowledgeable, to a site that is friendly and



easy to use, I'm quite pleased with the service provided by our library system and staff!"

Center for Global Engagement

International Students Return to Duquesne

After almost two years of various logistical challenges and a virtual standstill during COVID, we are happy to announce that regular activities in international education are beginning to return to pre-COVID levels! The Center for Global Engagement worked closely with many of our schools, overseas representatives, and university partners to ensure that new and continuing international students would have the opportunity to attend Duquesne as soon as global conditions made it possible. Many international students who were unable to travel to the States or obtain student visas since 2019 were able to begin their degrees or simply return to Duquesne for the fall. This semester, we welcomed 168 international students to campus. Other students who were not able to arrive for the fall semester due to some continued obstacles have committed to join Duquesne for the spring 2022 semester.

Students have quickly adapted to new regulations during COVID and are taking part in various cultural activities organized by the Center for Global Engagement, the DU Cultural Ambassadors, and the International Student Organization.

Study Abroad is Back

We continue to prepare for our spring 2022 and summer 2022 programming abroad with faculty members this semester. There are five Spring Break Away Programs on deck this year, including Psychology in Austria and Poland, Global Health in Switzerland and Germany, English Literature in Peru, Music in Ireland, and Art History in Italy. Planning is underway for our Maymesters to Ghana, Finland, Belize and Italy, as well as several other short-term faculty-led programs to Greece, the UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain, France and many others. Please be sure to spread the word to your students about these amazing opportunities.

After almost two years of closures due to COVID, the Duquesne in Rome

program reopened and welcomed 13 students for the fall 2021 semester. We are also pleased to welcome students from the School of Education for the first time in more than 13 years. Thanks to access to communication technology and the design of "hybrid" courses, we are offering two courses, Educational Psychology and Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners, that will include special activities such as attending an international Montessori conference in Rome and the opportunity to observe and work with students in Italian elementary and high schools. We also are pleased to announce that we began a special international internship program with the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery in Anzio in collaboration with the American Battle Monuments Commission.

This fall we welcomed six students to our campus of St. Michael's House in Dublin, Ireland. The students are currently attending University College Dublin (UCD) and taking courses in various fields, including Business, Liberal Arts, Pharmacy, Biomedical Engineering and Music. Students are also required to take a special Irish History course called Uncovering Ireland with Professor Mike Cronin from Boston College.