

Question3. Strategies for Improving Graduation Rates

Of the strategies listed in the survey, faculty responded that the following would be “very effective” for improving USA’s graduation rates:

- Advising interventions with high-risk students (63%)
- Raising admission standards for first-time freshmen (61%)
- Requiring developmental studies for high-risk students (57%)
- Implementing an early warning system (56%)
- Strengthening the class attendance policy for freshmen (55%)
- Placing greater emphasis on the importance of teaching excellence (53%)
- Improving the effectiveness of supplemental instruction (51%)
- Establishing an Academic Advising Center (50%)

Comments to Open-Ended Questions

The open-ended comments in the survey help to clarify and extend the above findings. Comments for all three open-ended questions about ways of increasing student success were coded, with minor editing, into the following categories²:

- I. Specific Program Recommendations

- II. General Approaches for Improving Student Success
 - a. Raising Admission Standards
 - b. Raising Expectations about Academic Performance and Students’ Responsibilities
 - c. Ensuring that students have needed skills for Academic Success
 - d. Support for Freshmen Transitioning to College
 - e. Advising, Mentoring, and Tutoring for Students
 - f. Social Integration of Students to Campus Life
 - g. Faculty, Teaching, & Classroom Improvements
 - h. Other Student Issues
 - i. Other Issues

III. Discussion:

After careful review of the comments and the above survey results, several themes and underlying issues emerged. First, and most fundamentally, from faculty responses (Q.2.) and comments, it is clear that quality teaching, extensive faculty-student contact, and student engagement in classrooms are seen as key areas to consider when developing strategies to enhance graduation and retention rates. Further, the survey comments suggest that it is through improvement of the educational environment

remediating students who are not academically prepared for college work. The following approaches were offered to improve the academic preparation levels of USA students:

Raising admission standards

Expanding remediation efforts in basic skills, particularly for freshmen

Expanding use of course prerequisites and placement tests to ensure that students have the needed skills and knowledge for successful course completion

Working with high schools to improve preparation for college

Closely related to this, was concern with students' readiness and willingness to put forth the needed effort to succeed in college. Below are some illustrative sample comments.

The biggest challenge right now is overcoming poor attitudes about learning by students, especially when faced with simple mathematics (general math and basic algebra) and science courses.

A lot of our problems stem from students expecting to be spoon-fed and a feeling that only minimal effort should be required to get an A. These attitudes were instilled in many of these students LONG before they got here (i.e. grade school)...

1. We can not learn for them 2. We can not teach them if they don'

Although the majority of comments focused on students' academic preparation and performance, some respondents mentioned that social networks among student, graduate students, and faculty offered valuable support for students. They suggested that the availability of casual meeting areas would support the development of more social interaction.

Lastly, faculty identified a number of specific programs which should be considered in the development of USA's plans to improve retention and graduation rates.

USA Programs/Practices that appear to be working:

- Essence
- USA Honors Program
- Study Skills seminars in History Department