



Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)

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To see the slides from the Fourm or other retention information, go to our web site at castle.eiu.edu/~core

Want to contact us? Send us an email at core@eiu.edu

The Role of Financial Aid in Retention

Hello, my name is Jerry Donna and I serve as Director of Financial Aid at Eastern Illinois University.

I recently read that students choose where they want to attend college by two main criteria. First, they must like the way a school looks and feels, and second, they must be happy with the financial aid package. I believe that these same criteria are also important to retention.

In order to help students achieve the very best financial package possible for them, we need to encourage students to file the FAFSA by March 1st of each year. For each new academic year the FAFSA

is available on January 1st. Students and families are encouraged to file the FAFSA as quickly as possible after January 1st. We can all play an active role in getting this word out to the students: APPLY EARLY.

For returning students who have completed a FAFSA for the current year, the federal government sends an email reminder to file a new FAFSA for the upcoming year. The Eastern Illinois University Office of Financial Aid also sends out an email blast to returning students, so it is extremely important that students read their EIU

email.

Our student population has gotten progressively needy as the economy has taken a downturn. This is reflected in the number of students who have an expected family contribution (EFC) of zero from the FAFSA. Listed below are the statistics from the last four academic years:

Currently, for AY 11-12, an Illinois resident student with an EFC=0 receives a Federal Pell Grant of \$5,550 and a state MAP Grant of \$4,720. This amounts to \$10,270 towards direct costs of \$19,075 (tuition, fees,

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| AY | Students with EFC=0 | Total Student with FA | Percentage with EFC=0 |
|-------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 07-08 | 1462 | 7993 | 18% |
| 08-09 | 1594 | 8377 | 19% |
| 09-10 | 2253 | 8862 | 25% |
| 10-11 | 2422 | 8878 | 27% |

CORE Corner

CORE has been busy the past few months working with colleagues in ITS on the Early Alert System (EAS). The new EAS makes it easy for faculty to refer students who have had attendance problems or issues related to assignments.

Alerts come to CORE members. Students who have attendance problems and who live on campus receive a visit from their RA. The RA will remind the student of the importance of class attendance. Students who live off-campus are

contacted by a graduate intern from New Student Programs.

Alerts related to coursework are sent to the Student Success Center and CASA. Graduate students are contacting students via phone and

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Spotlight On . . . New Student Programs

First-year freshmen who live at home and commute to campus face a unique set of challenges. In an effort to provide additional support to this population, the New Student Programs' office has piloted a Commuter Mentor program.

The program's focus is to assist this population in making a successful transition to campus by connecting and engaging

them in the campus life, both academically and socially.

The program provides each freshman with a mentor, who is an orientation leader, and teams the student up with a group of other commuters.

Mentor responsibilities include answering questions, providing opportunities to hang out and meet other commuters, and

holding special events during the semester. The mentors keep connected with their commuters through Facebook groups, blogs, email and one-on-one or group meetings.

The program kicked-off with a Commuter 101 session during Prowl and has included informational sessions on class scheduling, building a resume, connecting to student recognized organizations and social

CORE Corner cont.

email to discuss study skills, time management, and other issues related to completing work.

Over 700 alerts had been received by midterm; 51% of the students who had received an alert also received a midterm grade report.

CORE will continue to monitor the EAS, and we encourage faculty to submit alerts on students who are not attending or who are in danger of failing due to assignments.

In addition to the EAS, CORE has continued its registration reminders and non-registered surveys. Lists of students who have not registered within two weeks of the beginning of their registration period are also sent to departments for follow-up.

The non-registered student surveys uncovered issues with holds preventing students from registering. Many of these holds are related to financial problems. The University is no longer placing registration holds for bills under \$200 in an effort to facilitate on-time registration.

However, because so many students who had not yet registered for the following semester at the close of a term had financial holds, CORE developed a special survey related to financial concerns to try to glean what could be done for these students.

This survey indicated that students are delaying registration because of an inability

to pay. The survey also indicated that students would like one-on-one consultations concerning their financial issues related to paying for college. CORE will work with the Office of Financial Aid and other interested units on finding solutions to these issues.

CORE, along with many members of the faculty, staff, and student body, will be participating in focus groups with David Trites, the retention consultant with Noel-Levitz. David Trites will be on-campus Nov. 30-Dec. 1 to hold a variety of focus groups to learn more about EIU.

Trites and the rest of the Noel-Levitz team have been studying retention, recruitment, and financial data supplied by the University in preparation for this visit.

Did you know about the new Scholarship Page?

Christine Edwards, the new Scholarship Coordinator in Financial Aid, has created a searchable database of EIU scholarships available at <http://www.eiu.edu/~scholars/>.

Spotlight On cont . . .

opportunities such as tailgating at the first home football game.

Currently, there are 5 commuter mentors with 8-10 mentees. Lacy Smith, a mentor, reports that the commuters enjoy the interaction and appreciate the consistent communication the mentors provide.

The mentees have indicated that the information and events are helping them connect to campus and make a successful transition.

The program is preparing to collect feedback from the participants in order to determine what steps to take next. New Student Programs is encouraged by the participation and

initial feedback and anticipates continuing this program in the future.

Quick Facts:

- Only freshmen who reside with a parent/guardian, live within 50 miles of campus, are at least 21 years old or married can live off campus.
- **On average 50-70 new freshmen commute to EIU annually.**

Did you know?

In AY10, Eastern's freshmen and seniors participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Ninety-seven percent of seniors believe EIU provides support for student success, and 86% of seniors reported that faculty are available, helpful, or sympathetic.

Retention Tools: EIU4 Puts Four-Year Degree Plans On-line

Last year Provost Lord charged all units in Academic Affairs to undertake at least one new initiative to increase retention at the University. Based on the research presented by the University Leadership Council on the importance of a centralized place for four-year degree plans, EIU4 has updated and greatly expanded this resource on campus.

Four-year plans are not only a resource to improve time to graduation but also can improve retention as those students who fall behind are susceptible to frustration and attrition if they do not perceive a clear path to graduation.

Now, all majors whose students are eligible for Eastern's four-year graduation guarantee have an accurate four-year plan available online in a centralized location on the EIU4 website: www.eiu.edu/eiufour/checklist.php

With new links on other popular student pages and additional

publicizing of its existence, the resource has become a popular and valuable addition to eiu.edu with over 150 student and advisors accessing the page per month to viewing a four-year plan. This is in addition to the numerous departments that also maintain four-year plans on their own websites.

Below are a few tips faculty and advisors can share with students or advisees to help keep students on track for graduation.

- **Pick your major with care.** Changing majors can increase your time to degree, so choose wisely. If you need assistance, talk to your academic advisor and the staff in Career Services.
- **Know what your degree program requirements are.** Your EIU degree comprises both university and major-

specific requirements. These are detailed in our online catalog (<http://catalog.eiu.edu/>) and in your [degree audit](#), which you can access via PAWS.

- **Complete at least 15 hours every semester.** At a minimum, you should complete 30 hours by the end of your freshman year; 60 hours by the end of your sophomore year; and 90 hours at the end of your junior year. You must earn a minimum of 120 hours to graduate from EIU. However, some programs require additional hours.
- **Think carefully before you make decisions that will affect your time-to-degree.** Significant decisions such as changing your major can delay your graduation, but so can seemingly "little" things. Dropping a class because

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you're earning "only" a C may seem like a good idea at midterm, for example, but in the long run, it may cost you. Similarly, not turning in a textbook or library book and ignoring the resulting fine can prevent you from registering for future courses. And taking a prerequisite course out of sequence may result in not receiving credit for it at all

- **Know and meet deadlines.** EIU establishes deadlines for paying bills, registering for classes, dropping classes, securing internships, applying for graduation, and so on. (See the academic calendar on the EIU home page.) Missing deadlines

can delay graduation

- **Meet with your academic advisor at least once a semester.** Your advisors in the Academic Advising Center and in your major department not only will help you select your coursework but also will offer guidance in addressing your personal, educational, and career goals and serve as a resource to the many support services and activities on campus.
- **Monitor your own academic progress.** While you will be assisted by a well trained academic advisor, you are responsible for your own

academic progress. Via PAWS, you can run a degree audit that will show you which requirements you have met and which you still need to meet. Be sure to review your degree audit before you register each semester so that you can avoid last minute "surprises" that may delay your graduation.

- **Take summer courses if you need to.** If your program requires more than 120 hours or you fall behind in hours, consider taking summer school at EIU, at your local community college, or even online. Be sure to select courses that will apply to your EIU degree and talk to your advisor.

What Alums are Saying about EIU from the 2011 Alumni Survey (2006 graduates) . . .

"The personal connection with professors and educators in the community allowed for extensive experience 'in the field,' not just a classroom ." Elementary Ed major

"So many of my co-workers and friends are EIU graduates. Seeing their successful careers and lives gave me a lot of encouragement." General Studies major

"University people and culture, [it was a] very friendly and safe environment to learn." Computer Information Systems major

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room, and board). The balance needed of \$8,805 usually comes from work-study, institutional grants/scholarship, federal loans, and/or family savings.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Americans now owe more in student loans than on credit cards. The College Board also reported that students are borrowing twice what they did a decade ago after adjusting for inflation.

The latest statistics for students borrowing at Eastern were reported recently on the 2011-2012 Common Data Set Report. The report shows that 69% of the 2011 undergraduate graduating class had an average

cumulative principal borrowed of \$21,049 for Federal loans and \$26,500 when private educational loans are included.

Eastern's Federal Cohort Default Rate remains very low. The latest information from the USDOE reflects that 81 students of 2,409 that went into repayment after graduating or leaving Eastern actually defaulted. This is a rate of 3.3%. This is very good, especially when compared to the national average of 5.2% for all four-year public institutions.

With the increase in the percentage of students with an EFC

of zero and decreases in available student financial aid at the federal and state level, financial aid and funding are critical to recruitment and retention of students on Eastern's campus. The Financial Aid Office seeks to educate our students on these important matters.

If you identify students with questions or concerns about financial aid, please make a referral. We are located in the Student Services Building and you can reach us at 581-6405, 581-5249, or via email at finaid@eiu.edu. Thank you!