

Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE)
Meeting Minutes
January 15th, 2026

I. Call to Order

The Committee on Retention Efforts (CORE) was called to order on January 15, 2026, at 9 am. in the Witter's Conference Room in the Booth Library.

Attendees: Dr. Tanya Willard, Jody Stone, Dr. Wade Smith, Dr. Ed Treadwell, Amy Odwarka, Dr. John Blue, Bobbi Kingery, Jessie Shuemaker, Danny Gourley Fischer, Justin Tierney, Josh Norman, Dr. Angela Jacobs, Jeremy Alexander, Dr. Michael Cornebise, Vicki Phillips, Dr. Cassondra Strawser, Crystal Brown, Dr. Julie Dietz

II. Sub Group Updates

• **Panthers Persist**

- Focus on informal student conversations to assess belonging and student needs.
- Members will speak with a minimum of three students using agreed-upon guiding questions.
- Conversations will be conducted in low-pressure settings (e.g., coffee, lunch).
- Use of Ecological Validation Theory as the framework guiding questions and analysis.
- Group's goal is to have task completed by spring break.

• **Advising Models for Retention**

- Dr. Julie Dietz and Danny Gourley Fischer have deferred to the Presidents Spring update where he will announce the advising taskforce information.

• **Survey of EIU Retention Practice**

- Survey was developed with assistance from Dr. Catherine Polydore.
- 12 responded.
 - 9 departments reported no retention plan.
 - 3 reported plans in development, all informal.
- Common barriers included:
 - Lack of student engagement.
 - Faculty workload and limited capacity.
 - No designated retention personnel.

- o Noted practices included an introductory course where they teach transferable skills from the major with career readiness and internal academic alert system.
- o Departments expressed a strong need for institutional support and coordination.
- **Veterans Connection**
 - o Official site has been launched.
 - o First meeting had a good turnout.
 - o Meeting with Student Government for formal approval to become an RSO.
 - o Three mentors identified for Veteran Connection.
 - o Military Tuition Assistance program is active.
 - o Meeting held with Scott Air Force Base education leadership:
 - 4,000 active-duty students currently enrolled in higher education.
 - Identified enrollment opportunities, particularly in Business Administration.

III. Fall 2025 PACK Outcomes

- Data visualizations shared showing:
 - o Strong correlation between PACK meeting attendance and GPA.
 - o Students attending 5+ meetings demonstrated significantly higher GPAs and retention.
- Appeal process review:
 - o 33 dismissals reviewed; 10 appeals but only 4 appeals granted.
 - o Interview process may be considered to better assess student circumstances.
- Outcomes highlighted:
 - o 49 PACK students earned higher GPAs than in high school.
 - o Overall, cohort performance exceeded the previous year.
 - o Retention increased 6.8% year-over-year for the PACK cohort.
- Program success attributed to dedicated advising model.

IV. Panther's PAVE Program

- Introduced Panther's PAVE (Promoting Accessibility through Visibility and Education) the Way program.
- Training program for faculty/staff campus wide to improve accessibility awareness.
 - o includes historical context and practical strategies for inclusive environments.
- Trial run completed; program is ready for campus rollout this spring semester.

V. Person of Trust

- Introduced the "Person of Trust" concept from enrollment leadership literature.

- Emphasis on:
 - Early, personal connections with students.
 - Staff, faculty, advisors, and peers serving as trusted contacts.
- Discussion highlights:
 - Technology (e.g., Navigate360) should support, not replace, personal care.
 - Advisors are often the first and most consistent contact for students.
 - Faculty play a critical mentoring role but need better awareness of support services.
 - Institutional culture should prioritize walking students to help, not just directing them.

VI. Housing Collaboration

- 79 students were identified with housing contracts but were not registered for classes
- Collaborative efforts underway to:
 - Prevent students from incurring additional debt
 - Reduce homelessness risk
 - Improve interdepartmental data sharing
- Collaboration across departments to resolve issues; Navigate 360 is expected to improve communication and tracking.

VII. Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, February 12th at 9 am in the Witter's Conference Room in the Booth Library.

~Minutes submitted by Brandy Verdin, Recording Secretary