



WHITEPAPER

Four Steps to Impact Student Success in Higher Education

About Hobsons

Hobsons is a leading education technology company that supports K-12 schools, systems, and higher education institutions to ensure that students finish what they start. Hobsons' solutions promote self-discovery and interest exploration; academic and career planning; college preparation, best-fit admissions and enrollment; predictive analytics, advising and holistic student support. To learn more about Hobsons, visit its website at www.hobsons.com.



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Setting the Stage	5
Building a Student Success Strategy based on the SAIL Framework	7
Step One: Align Mission, Vision, and Measurable Student Success Goals	8
Step Two: Attach Specific Goals to Student Success Initiatives	10
Step Three: Develop Workflows to Support the Projects	12
Step Four: Build and Measure Campus-Wide Programs	13
Conclusion: The Student Success Planning Process	15



Activate Student Success Goals

As an institution sets out to improve its retention and graduation rates, developing and articulating an achievable plan for increased student success on campus is imperative. Institutions should make a coordinated, dedicated effort to include student success within their strategic and tactical plans as well as gain buy-in from campus leadership, staff, and faculty alike.

The Strategic Alignment for Institutional Leadership (SAIL) plan helps to ensure an organization's efforts are aligned, measurable, focused, and connected back to specific campus-wide student success goals. By implementing a SAIL plan, institutions adopt a deliberate approach to increasing student success, which in turn impacts retention and graduation rates.



Executive Summary

The SAIL plan follows four main tenets:

- 1 Align mission, vision, and measurable student success goals
- 2 Attach specific goals to student success initiatives
- 3 Develop workflows to support the projects
- 4 Build and measure campus-wide programs

By leveraging the SAIL approach, organizations can connect institution-wide student success goals with actionable and measurable initiatives.



Setting the Stage



Prepping for an Institution-wide Student Success Plan

Before diving into the principles outlined in the Starfish SAIL plan, institutional leadership must agree to general guiding principles about student success on campus. Tried and true approaches to building these principles require:

Elevating the Student Success Conversation

.....
Delineating student success responsibility across the institution

.....
Leveraging tools and technology to connect stakeholders and enable measurement.

Elevating the Student Success Conversation

An institution requires a strong, visible, and persistent leader who can help to create buy-in across disparate campus groups to spread the ideas, initiatives, and goals of student success. Each individual in a cross-campus group must buy in to the value of integrated planning for student success in order to execute against their plan in a coordinated way.

Simply put, the best way to effectively elevate student success within an institution is by going higher up the chain of command. The owner should report directly to institutional senior leadership responsible for overseeing student success such as the President, Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs, or Vice President of Student Affairs.



Delineating student success responsibility across the institution

Leadership must also agree that **student success is a shared responsibility, institution-wide**. Student success is no longer an activity that can reside exclusively in the advisor's office. Offices of student affairs, academic affairs, and enrollment management all need to work together to overcome what can often be competing priorities. It might seem impossible, but it's critical that institutions align these disparate groups on campus and get them focused on the activities that are to make a difference for students, scaling activities by connecting

stakeholders across campus with a shared framework and shared goals. If an institution is serious about improving retention and graduation rates for adult learners, for example, leadership should marshal cooperation across financial aid, student services, IT, the library, and even local and state governments. Together these stakeholders can develop a plan and set goals. Each team member contributing to this plan should know the part they play and how their efforts contribute to the achieving the end goals.



Leveraging Tools and Technology to Connect Stakeholders and Enable Measurement

By using technology, institutions can scale advising activities and build connections among all student success stakeholders.

Institutions are best served by a solution that offers a holistic view of student success. Such a view would range from the details of an individual student, as they progress through their academic lifecycle along with tools to inform institutional actions, like identifying student success risk-factors,

and predictive analytics that identify patterns and trends of risk factors over time. A robust solution will provide mechanisms to communicate directly with students and pro-actively refer them to offices and supports to address their needs, as well as empower students to seek out other services and ask for help if they need it. Along the way, the system enables stakeholders in that student's success to be informed about their progress.



Building a Student Success Strategy based on the SAIL Framework



Working through the SAIL plan framework, an institution will be able to identify its student success leadership team; capture its mission and vision; derive student success goals from the strategic plan and key initiatives in place; develop workflows and processes needed to support initiatives and achieve goals; and evaluate those programs.

Short-term examples for institutional retention goals could include:

- Raise first to second year retention rates among nursing students by 3% per year
- Increase persistence term over term by 1% for students receiving Pell grants
- Increase three-year graduation and / or transfer rates by 4% per year
- Increase active participation from students, faculty, staff, and community in college governance and leadership.

1 Step One

Align Mission, Vision and Measurable Student Success Goals

Most institutions have an overarching strategic plan that defines its three- to five-year goals. Often, these documents include student success goals such as increasing retention or graduation rates. In addition, the institution's strategic plan will state (or at least clarify) its mission, identify student success goals and outcomes, and perhaps even outline high-level initiatives and define targets with hidden ties to student success. **The first step to align and focus student success goals is to incorporate institution-wide goals into the student success plan.**

When defining a student success vision and mission as well as setting clear goals, the strategic plan isn't the only initiative to align to. Institutions should also:

- Note and tie to any additional initiatives discussed on campus. All too often initiatives will have hidden ties to student success.
- Gather data to help define (benchmark) the current state of those initiatives as well as their short- and long-term objectives.
- Use this as a foundation for more specific student success goals and aspirations.

When building their plan, institutions should consider student populations who have historically faced obstacles in reaching their educational goals. A few population examples to consider are transfer, first-generation, and minority students. Goals to consider including in the plan are increasing persistence from first to second of year study as well as boosting retention and graduation rates.

Once the SAIL plan has been created, institutional leadership can build on existing student success strategies, flesh out short and long-term objectives, and refine student success goals and aspirations (see sidebar).

Long-term examples for institutional retention goals could include:

Long Term:

- Raise retention rate by 10% in ten years.
- Increase graduation rate for first-time, full-time students for the current incoming class by 4% in six years.
- Close the student attainment gap among full time students while without any change to the diversity of admitted students.

To make outcomes even more measurable, institutions can make top-level goals more granular. By breaking down high-level goals, the team can make them more understandable and achievable. Using analytics data to review retention and completion rates, institutions can identify achievement gaps across a variety of student populations. For example, if the institution wants to increase first-year student retention rate from 62% to 68%, which specific groups of students within the first-year student population represent the greatest opportunity? What factors do those students share, and to which interventions can they be matched? Addressing the needs of those discrete groups will help determine which specific initiatives to create or expand.



2 Step Two

Attach Specific Goals to Student Success Initiatives

Once the student success team has built a set of strategic goals, **the next step is to use data and best practices to identify specific initiatives and focus institution-wide efforts to identify which students to support.**

Named one of the Top 10 Strategic Technologies for Higher Education by Gartner in 2019, predictive analytics can support institutions through the process of identifying which populations are most at-risk on campus. Predictive analytics encompass data around retention, graduation rates, and the progress of a student through the institution. That data can then be sorted by student characteristics, for example major, gender, transfer status, and age. With that data in hand, institutions can identify not only the population, and majors, where it sees the greatest retention and graduation issues; but also build programs designed to affect change in outcomes within those populations.

Leaders can define specific tasks with associated success criteria and assign them to key individuals or roles at the institution. However, execution against those goals is not only the responsibility of institutional leadership, it also falls to the implementation team. **The individuals assigned those tasks will**

benefit from having their success criteria defined and aligned so it is clear to them how their efforts are in support of the institution's strategic plan. This level of granularity also aids in analyzing the effectiveness of various efforts – whether the effort is a campaign to text students about course registration deadlines or that of programs to increase the year-over-year retention of incoming transfer students.

It's also essential to identify the big obstacles in place at the institution that directly affect student outcomes. By examining elements like program and curriculum barriers to success, an institution can identify course pathways and gateway courses that may be potential roadblocks for students.

Starfish Predictive Analytics uses historical institutional data to identify students most likely to face challenges with retention, progression and graduation. Institutions can easily identify the factors that may impact a student's likelihood of persistence to the next term, enabling staff to prioritize and manage activities based on various cohort risk factors, allowing for more targeted student interventions.

Tip

As the team considers its top-line goals consider a few of the following examples:



Streamlining Student Onboarding

The student success team may discover through Starfish Analytics that the institution is losing students who said they didn't feel like they belonged at the institution in their first-year surveys. This can identify opportunities to streamline the student onboarding process or, more broadly, to improve the first-year experience.

Student Momentum Year - 15 to Finish

Complete College America (CCA), through their "15 to Finish" initiative, aims to boost the number of students on track for on-time graduation by encouraging enrollment in 15 credits each semester. Financial aid dollars, as well as institutional processes, should support that standard. Are there opportunities at your institution to investigate current patterns and close any gaps between current practices and "15 to Finish."

Starfish Intervention Inventory

Another resource to tap is the Starfish Intervention Inventory which enables exploration of student success through the lens of real-world programs for students at risk. Leaders can browse the Starfish online catalogue for inspiration and innovation, benchmark institutional data, and use actionable intelligence to keep students engaged. Leaders don't have to guess which interventions may work; they can access over 200 research-validated interventions to help.

3 Step Three

Develop Workflows to Support the Projects

Once an institution has identified initiatives, the student success team must **develop workflows in service of those initiatives that use both strategic and operational measures.**

To achieve their student success goals set forth in their strategic plan, an institution must coordinate interactions between and among people, technology, and data. This works best when there are developed and documented workflows and processes.

Creating workflows help stakeholders to understand each step in the process, in which order they should happen, who is responsible for each step, the inputs

and outputs of each step, and actions to take if something goes wrong along the way. Documenting the workflow helps pinpoint where taking measurements can help identify resource constraints and effectiveness of the program supported by it.

With this information, leaders can plan for the capacity they need, the space and staff needed to execute the work, the communications channels to employ, and identify their reporting capabilities. Leaders and their teams can analyze the root causes behind non-attendance and develop strategies to minimize the hurdles that prevent students from attending class.

A well-defined workflow in Starfish ensures that when a flag is raised on a student for non-attendance, there is follow-through to determine whether they returned to class. The workflow includes measurement points which enable leaders to collect operational data about how many students were flagged, in which courses or programs, and the types of students most flagged for non-attendance. This operational data can allow leaders to link this behavior to strategic measures such as the academic and retention outcomes for students who received attendance flags.

4 Step Four

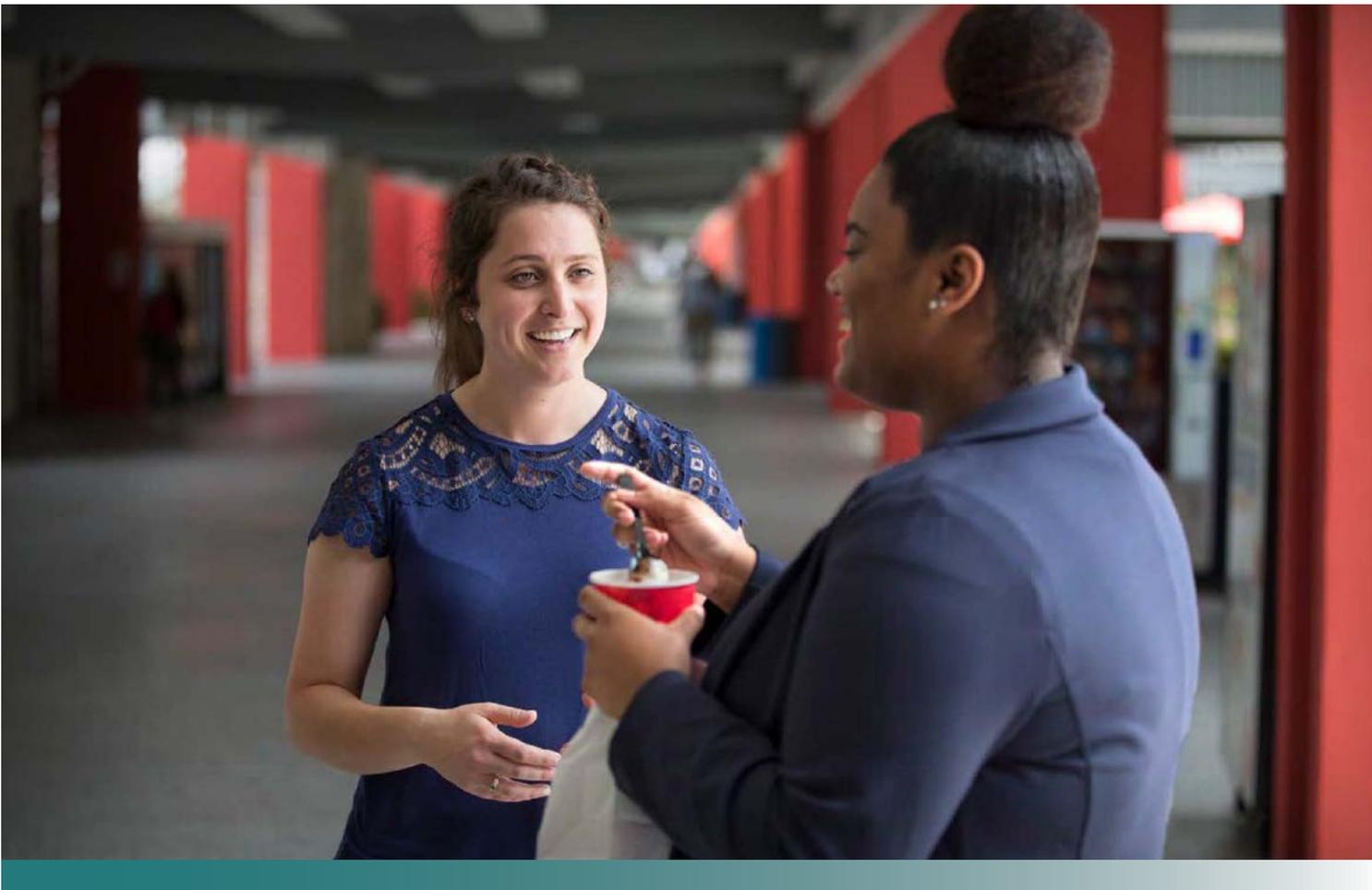
Build and Measure Campus-Wide Programs

The final step in executing strategic alignment in support of student success across campus is to **thoroughly inventory campus-wide interventions and measure them to determine their effectiveness.**

An intervention is an activity conducted with institutional resources leading to student persistence and retention. More simply said, interventions are activities

conducted on campus to improve student outcomes.

Being intentional about interventions means vigilantly tracking if those programs are actually doing what they're designed to do. On most campuses, though, interventions often operate on autopilot. Institutions should aim to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the intervention and regularly



evaluate whether they are effective enough to warrant ongoing investment.

Well-documented interventions contain the details about why the intervention is in place, who it is designed to serve, and when the students participate in the intervention. Key information also includes the resources required to deliver the experience to students and how the intervention effectiveness is measured. Interventions that are well-documented have strong narratives that improve communications among stakeholders, identify predictors of risk and student success, have clear measures of success, and are more likely to be effective moving the needle on student outcomes.

Thinking ahead about measurement allows the capture of baseline data before executing against an intervention. Being able to compare measures is important – whether that means looking at data collected from the same intervention or students over time, between different types of students, to see if one type of student fares better than others in different circumstances.

Measuring interventions demonstrates whether student outcomes are improving as a result of investments of money and time.

Using a technology solution like the Starfish Intervention Inventory, institutions can categorize and consolidate interventions used across the institution to understand and quantify the value of student success programs. The Inventory allows the alignment of campus-wide interventions to specific predictive factors of student success and institutional strategic outcomes. It also provides interactive reports that highlight students, courses, and programs that present challenges to student success. Additionally, users can search and review hundreds of Interventions categorized by peer institutions as well as research-based best practices.

With this full picture of institution-wide interventions, where they occur in the student lifecycle, and which challenges are being addressed by each intervention, an institution can identify and focus on the students most in need, and specific courses that might be problematic.



Conclusion: The Student Success Planning Process



Building a campus-wide strategic student success plan requires alignment across the organization. It starts with executive buy-in to a clearly defined mission and vision and associated goals. The student success leader then builds institutional support of individuals dedicated to integrating planning with tactical resources, including advising, intervention inventories, and analytics. From here, workflows and processes are built out with an intentional focus on collecting metrics and evaluating the program often.

By leveraging the Strategic Alignment for Institutional Leadership (SAIL) approach,

organizations can connect institution-wide student success goals with actionable and measurable initiatives.

Helping all students achieve their goals requires active leadership working to build a coalition across campus and communicating effectively with stakeholders. Leaders and all involved need to think about approaches that work at scale to gain efficiencies and make the biggest overall impact. Alignment of student success activities across and throughout the institution ensure that all stakeholders feel connected to the goals and understand their role in achieving them.



© 2019 Hobsons.
All rights reserved worldwide. 191011

www.hobsons.com



STARFISH
BY HOBSONS