



3-23-2017

Letter - Leadership for Undergraduate Student Success

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Recommended Citation

Eibeck, Pamela, "Letter - Leadership for Undergraduate Student Success" (2017). *Presidential Communications*. 23.

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Leadership for Undergraduate Student Success

March 23, 2017

To the university community:

At University of the Pacific, we are deeply committed to providing our students with an exceptional learning experience, one that brings superior intellectual learning and growth coupled with social, spiritual and physical development. Simply put, we are committed to developing the whole student.

We want every new student to fall in love with Pacific and feel personally valued and supported. Regrettably, too many undergraduates are not staying at UOP to complete their degrees. For example, we have set goals for undergraduate student success metrics (first-to-second-year persistence of 90% and six-year graduation rates of 75%) to reflect Pacific's commitment to being a high-quality comprehensive private university. For AY15-16, the actual rates for first-to-second-year persistence and six-year graduation were only 85.4% and 68.3% respectively.

We have been seeking to understand the reasons why some students leave Pacific, especially given the deep commitment our faculty and staff have to student success and the many services we provide to enhance undergraduate student success: a strong freshman orientation, an Early Alert system, robust residential and housing experiences, dedicated faculty advisors and mentors, student advisors, cohort experiences, financial aid counseling, tutoring, supplemental instruction and tremendous assistance provided by Student Success Coaches. The services are provided by faculty and staff throughout the Academic Division, Student Life, Enrollment Management and the Provost's Office.

The Student Success Committee and our most recent review by CREDO have shed some light on why we continue to lose students even with the many important support services we offer. Students fall through the gaps in our services - our efforts need to be more strategically and intentionally integrated to connect the multi-faceted aspects of the student experience, especially during the first 18 months. While it is everyone's job to support student success and retention, we lack a designated champion to clarify and lead the implementation of the best strategies to integrate our undergraduates' experiences. And most importantly, we all must be willing to partner across units so that our students' needs are put first.

I have asked the Provost to extend and reframe the current Assistant Provost for Student Academic Achievement position into the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, a full-time leader who is committed to the success of our undergraduates' educational experience. This person will provide leadership across the institution to ensure Pacific provides outstanding student support services. In addition, this person will be responsible for a robust General Education program that integrates academic and co-curricular experiences. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will provide direction and lead collaborative partnerships of faculty, staff and administrators across the university to strategically design and implement a transformational liberal arts experience coupled with a strong support network so that each undergraduate student can thrive.

The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will work in close partnership with faculty and staff in the Academic Division, Student Life and Enrollment Management. He or she will have direct oversight of student success efforts including retention strategy, academic support services, academic advising, Early Alert, and the Student Success Committee. In addition, the Vice Provost will be responsible for coordination and support of the First Year Experience of our freshman and transfer students. He or she will play a leadership role to integrate experiential learning, co-curricular engagement and General Education to provide deep and transformative learning for all undergraduates. The Vice Provost will assume a central role in developing the university's retention strategy, working hand-in-hand with Institutional Research to develop a research agenda and retention metrics across all student populations.

This champion is not, and cannot be, a one-person show. Our students' success is a team effort. We can only be successful if each faculty and staff member at our university is willing to partner across units and put our students' needs at the center of their decisions and actions. It is our collective commitment to each student that will allow him or her to have a transformative education and become a dedicated Tiger for life.

Thank you for all you do for our students' success.

Sincerely,

Pam Eibeck