

Strengthening Student Success at Northeastern University and Massasoit Community College

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Introduction

The modern world of higher education has forced institutions to keep innovating themselves to correspond to the changing demands of students in accordance with strategic planning and global trends. This budget proposal is for introducing a Student Success and Retention Initiative at Northeastern University and Massasoit Community College. The budget proposal will enhance the current support of academic advising, help provide necessary mental health support services, and increase the number of career readiness programs to help students remain engaged, persist, and graduate. Such elements are essential in solving issues like increased attrition rates and the increased request for comprehensive student support. Through investing in this initiative, many of the missions received by both institutions are well understood as being academically excellent and student-centered learning. Through the national focus of the initiative, the institutions are aligned with the national priorities of equity in education and workforce preparedness. This proposal describes the scope, rationale, cost-benefit analysis, and alignment of strategic objectives and provides a detailed proposal for increasing the student outcomes and effectiveness of this institution.

Institutional Context

Northeastern University (NU)

Northeastern University is a big, non-profit research institution in Boston, MA, which has an undergraduate school enrollment of around 20,000 and graduate and professional student enrollment of 10,000. NU reports under the two Residential and Professional Programs categories through IPEDS and is, therefore, considered a Research 1 (R1) institution. NU is strong in experiential learning, particularly its well-known cooperative (CO-OP) program, and it has excellent graduation and retention rates: the six-year graduation rate is about 89 percent, and the first-year retention rate is more than 93 percent. Financially, NU receives a lot of revenue through tuition, research grants, and corporate collaboration. Its

IPEDS Data Feedback Report indicates that it is diversified in its core revenues (mainly: tuition and federal/state support), and its instructional expenses per FTE are at a peer level. It has been strong in its scholarly business in terms of interdisciplinary research, worldwide campuses, and technology transfer activities that help drive growth within institutions.

Massasoit Community College (MCC)

Massasoit Community College is a publicly funded two-year community college located in Massachusetts with approximately 5,000 students and 1,700 full-time and 3,300 part-time students enrolled in 2023. Massasoit is a public community college that embraces affordability by providing associate degrees, certificate programs, and community education, with an average undergraduate tuition of \$576 /year, which is way below the national average. Academic Success indicators can be expanded: First to second year retention is approximately 5760 percent, well below peer averages (264 percent), and pumpkin harvest, graduation of 2011 and 2016 cohorts is approximately 24 percent with significantly more students transferring than receiving degrees The student faculty ratio has recently increased to 121 and the institution prides itself on equity and data driven targets, through the PMRS system.

Proposed Division and Departmental Context

Student Success and Retention Initiative will be located within an existing student affairs unit within each college: at NU, the student affairs counterpart will be at the Center for Student Involvement & Success (or equivalent), and at Massasoit, in Enrollment Management and the Office of Institutional Research. At NU, the proposed unit is given to the Vice Provost for Student Success, assisted by a director and assistant directors, academic advisors, mental-health professionals, and career-coaching personnel. This structure reflects the administrative structure of NU, which is decentralized and student-centered. The Office of Enrollment Management at Massasoit is in charge of retention and advising and

is assisted by the institutional research office. This office is made up of a director directing over academic advisors, a program coordinator, a data analyst, and a grant specialist. Massasoit can conduct the initiative within the scope of its strategic plan objectives of Equitable Enrollment and Student Support, which is defined as the elimination of obstacles and the definition of the retention milestones across demographic categories.

Mission & Goals

The mission of NU focuses on making an international impact as far as innovative education and research are concerned. The suggested intervention aids this vision in increasing the retention and graduation rates, containing already high degrees of persistence, academic improvement, and a number of students crystallized into the pipes of the environments of experience. The mission of Massasoit places particular emphasis on access, affordability, and student success in its area of operation. The effort would support the objectives of Massasoit by enhancing and integrating student tracking, student learning support, career counseling, and ensuring smooth transfer patterns- essentially benefiting varied and non-conventional learners and enhancing IPEDS and PMRS measures.

IPEDS Financial Context

At NU, support for advising and co-op is heavily invested, along with the high cost of instruction per FTE, and is informed by high retention and graduation rates. At Massasoit, low-level tuition income and state funding require the effective, high-impact use of interventions; the design of the offered initiative aims at re-enrollment incentives, an increased level of advising, and mental-health outreach as supplements to persistence and degree or transfer completion.

Proposal

In this proposal, it is suggested that a general Student Success and Retention Initiative should be introduced both at Northeastern University (NU) and at Massasoit Community College (MCC). The program aims to eliminate academic attrition and mental health issues, as well as insufficient career readiness, improve advising systems, increase wellness resources available to students, and connect career development services to the student lifecycle. The initiative will consist of three components. First, a transformed academic advising model shall be introduced. This will not only supplement advising at NU based on the number of professional advisors but will also introduce predictive analytics models to learn how to identify at-risk students proactively. At MCC, advising based on a reactive model will change to a proactive model through hiring more full-time advisors and implementing a case-management application that will support students throughout enrollment until they transfer to graduation.

Secondly, the two institutions will improve their health and mental wellness resources. A change will be the addition of counseling personnel and integration of wellness coordinators, who will be lodged in residence facilities and student centers, and focused on preventative mental health education. To improve the lived experiences of faculty and staff at MCC, it will increase its mental health counseling center staff, provide virtual counseling services, and include trauma-informed training to help its high-need and diverse student body. Thirdly, early adoption of career development services within the academic course of students will be adopted. At NU, the program will expand co-op preparation workshops for first-year students and merge career coaching with academic departments. Career services will be improved at MCC through internship placement support, job readiness courses, and more collaborations with local businesses through the establishment of employment and transfer pipelines.

Rationale

In the highly dynamic and challenging higher education world today, universities and colleges have the responsibility of ensuring that innovative and supportive frameworks are implemented to ensure that students have higher chances of persisting academically, retention, and success after graduation. The proposed Student Success and Retention Initiative is timely and needed, particularly for institutions such as Northeastern University (NU) and Massasoit Community College (MCC) that cater to different, but in some aspects, overlapping student bodies. This effort supports three interdependent domains of health: academic advising, mental health support, and career readiness to establish a more resilient, equitable, and outcomes-driven learning environment.

Importance to Students and Institutional Objectives

Initiative is needed since it will retain students in colleges on the basis of the main problems that lead to them opting out of colleges: poor academic guidance, mental health issues, and not having a future career path. It is also a proactive form of support to the students since the network strengthens their educational process and their lives. At NU, where both retention and graduation rates are high already, the initiative is aimed at enhancing the quality and depth of student engagement, eliminating support gaps in marginalized groups (first-generation students, international students, and students of color), and building on the co-op experience with early career preparation.

The additional role at MCC is also decisive. Since its inception as a community college that attends to economically disadvantaged and part-time students, the majority of whom are first-generation, MCC has experienced incessant retention and degree completion challenges. Through the refined academic council, MCC can assist students in making better decisions concerning their coursework, degree planning, and transfer choices. The expanded availability of mental health care will serve a currently diverse set of student needs and are confronted by trauma, housing issues, and financial anxiety, circumstances that immediately affect teaching. Finally, the incorporation of career

services early in a student's experience will offer clear and achievable objectives that enable the students to persevere during the roughest times in life and have a lasting mindset on what their futures hold.

Alignment with Departmental and Divisional Goals

At Northeastern University, the division of Student Affairs underlines holistic student development, learning by doing, and belonging. These objectives are given as a supplement to the proposed initiative that will provide academic, emotional, and professional support in every phase of the student lifecycle. The initiative also strengthens the departmental beliefs of inclusive excellence that creates a climate in which college students, regardless of their backgrounds, are able to grow and fully participate in the extensive co-op and international programs offered by the university. At MCC, the project is in line with the department operations of enrollment management and institutional research, and both units have already presented the prioritization of retention and student engagement as the priorities of the entire institution. Data-driven student tracking, wraparound advising services, and increased access to mental health have been identified as essential to achievement gap closure in these departments. The initiative will facilitate these objectives through the development of a cross-functional plan that integrates the enrollment, advising, wellness, and workforce into a unified program.

Connection to Strategic Plans

The Experience Unleashed strategic plan of Northeastern University aims to provide empowerment to learners in terms of the learning experience, future-forward education, and inclusive excellence. The initiative builds up this vision by expanding co-op preparation to encompass first-year learners and offering regular learning, in addition to accommodating the wellness requirements that may impede taking part in international and vocational opportunities. Academic advising, combined with mental health support, ensures that students will be able to derive maximum value from the vast array

of experiential opportunities provided by the university. The Strategic priorities developed in Massasoit Community College's (MCC) strategic plan and Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS) focus on promoting equity, student success, and workforce development. This suggestion supports these goals by enhancing student retention services to historically underserved students, introducing career-readiness pathways to prepare students to work as soon as they leave or move to new colleges or universities, and enhancing the overall institutional capacity to serve the holistic needs of students.

National Trends in Higher Education

Colleges and universities confront issues pertaining to the increase in student mental health, waning retention, and the perceived value of a degree. The National Student Clearing Center Research Center data show that undergraduate enrollment is still on a decline, especially in the two-year institutions. At the same time, American Council on Education and Healthy Minds Study surveys reveal that more than 70 percent of college students report having moderate to severe mental health-related problems, which directly affect academic progress and retention. As a reaction to this, a surprising number of institutions are implementing holistic models of student success that combine advising, wellness, and career services as a way to increase retention and graduation. These best practices have been incorporated into the proposed initiative as the initiative will be based on research-supported strategies and scalable models. The program also aligns with the objectives of the U.S. Department of Education grants program on Postsecondary Student Success, which is aimed at promoting institutions to embrace evidence-based procedures that help in increasing retention and decreasing equity gaps. Mental health and career support should be a part of academic advising, which will enable NU and MCC to stay in line with this shifting national agenda.

Regional and State Influence

The physical location of the two institutions compounds the influence of this initiative. Located in Boston, Northeastern University is based in one of the most vibrant and increasingly connected education (and innovation) ecosystems in the nation. Empowering students to become more career and wellness ready not only helps the existing student population but also develops more resilient, mentally healthy, and career-ready graduates, thus making them more capable of helping to power the workforce in the city of Boston. Also, NU has connections with leading employers and the co-op system, which provides access to industries, including healthcare, technology, and public service. These relationships will increase retention and preparation in students, improving on the same and adding to the economic development of the region. The project may be twice as revolutionary at Massasoit Community College, serving southeastern Massachusetts. MCC has attracted students who come from historically underserved communities, such as Brockton, where poverty rates and the rate of unemployment are pessimistic in proportion to the state average. A stronger advising and wellness structure will assist students to stay and achieve credentials that raise their earnings and stability. The employment aspect of the project, mainly through collaboration with the local industry, can be used to alleviate the shortage of workers in healthcare, the trade, and early childhood education positions in the region. Therefore, the project not only benefits the students in their achievement but also helps them revive the surrounding communities.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

Student Success and Retention Initiative is a strategic investment in the overall student success, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability. The new wage lines, enhancement of infrastructure, modernization of technology, and costs of operation are brought into the proposed program. Although this process demands certain financial investment, the potential number of students retained, the number of students successfully graduated, and enhanced institutional reputation are of great interest to Northeastern University (NU) and the Massasoit Community College (MCC). At Northeastern

University, expected expenditures are about 1.2 million every year. This incorporates wages of five more full-time academic counselors (\$75,000 each), two mental health specialists (\$90,000 each), one specialist in career development (\$85,000), and a related fringe benefit. The lab charges are associated with the growth of predictive analytics and case-management systems, which cost an estimated \$150,000, and wellness programming, materials, and training that cost an estimated \$100,000. The use of the facilities will be incorporated in the already existing student centers, which will reduce capital expenditures.

The total amount in one year is estimated at Massasoit as being 550,000. These consist of the hiring of four full-time academic advisors at \$65,000 apiece, one licensed mental health counselor at \$80,000, and one career services coordinator at \$70,000. The other expenses are faculty training regarding trauma-informed advising strategies (\$25,000), student wellness programming (\$30,000), and improved virtual counseling services (\$50,000). Massasoit can also seek to receive state and federal grants, including the Title III Strengthening Institutions Program or the MA Success Fund, that can subsidize these expenses. The investment is far less than the estimated profits. Much of this can be applied to all universities, including NU; a small 1% gain in retention would mean a potential of generating an extra 3 million dollars in tuition revenue every year, allowing about 20,000 undergrads and an average net tuition of 15000 dollars.

Improved office services also have the effect of increasing student satisfaction, alumni donations, and employer collaboration, which help in the improvement of national rankings and the status of the institution. Even a small increment in the retention rate by 5 percent at MCC may lead to the graduation of 250 students annually, which translates to about 1 million dollars in tuition and state finances. Building up career services and supporting mental health are likely to raise graduation and transfer rates, and because these are national performance-based funding metrics, MCC will be able to compete more effectively with other schools on state performance-based funding levels. Moreover, the

effort aids in retaining the employees, as there is less caseload among the advisors, and greater training and job satisfaction among the staff.

Conclusion

In this proposal, a multifaceted Student Success and Retention Initiative has been proposed that would improve academic advising and mental health services as well as career development opportunities available to students at Northeastern University and Massasoit Community College. The program serves institutional missions, is strategically student-focused, is directly responsive to national and regional trends in higher education, and has departmental/divisional objectives. This program is an action-based solution that could offer retention, graduation, and post-graduation success since the three major concerns that college students have include academic uncertainty, mental health issues, and poor direction in their careers. The cost-benefit review shows that investment in the personnel as well as infrastructure and other support services is not only good but also financially sound in the long term, with the effect that it will result in more tuition revenue, reputation of the institution, and student outcomes. This is especially effective in underserved populations and can be tied into larger interventions of equity, access, and workforce development.