

**The 25th Annual
Conference on the
First-Year Experience**

Atlanta, Georgia
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The background features a grayscale, stippled illustration of a university building tower with a clock face, set against a light gray gradient. A dark blue horizontal band is overlaid on the image, containing the main title text. A thin gray circle is partially visible on the left side of the slide.

Transformational U: *Everyone Counts in Recruitment and Retention*

Presented by:
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Utah State University

Utah State University

Institutional Description

- The mission of Utah State University is to be one of the nation's premier student-centered, land-grant and space-grant universities
- Fostering the principle that academics come first
- Cultivating diversity of thought and culture
- Serving the public through learning, discovery, and engagement
- Carnegie Doctoral/Research Extensive University
- Located in Logan, Utah *“A traditional college town of about 100,000 in the broader community.”*
- Total student enrollment nearly 24,000



UtahState
UNIVERSITY

Utah State University

Situational Analysis Prior to Fall 2002

- Enrolled traditional-age students, homogeneous population, mostly from Utah and Southern Idaho
- Selectivity 2001 at 98%
- According to the Board of Regents policy a maximum of 5% can be admitted as serving needs of local community, and talent to the university. 11% of entering freshman were marked as “General Registration.”
- Average ACT 22.8 and not seen as a “First Choice”
- Losing fully 1/3 of freshman class & 20% high ability
- Five year graduation rate 32% and six year 44%
- ❖ 85% of students note membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which indicates high percentage will take two-year leaves for missions, marry earlier (50% by graduation) and have children earlier than national norms.

State of the University Address 9/12/02

Enrollment Goals Outlined

- Enrollment should increase from 23,000 to 25,000 over next five years
- Selectivity should decrease to 85%—peers at 73%
- Average ACT increase to 24 by 2004 and 25 by 2007—peers 24.2
- First Year Retention Rate increase to 70-75%—peers retain 85%
- Six Year Graduation Rate increase to 52% —peers graduate 64%
- Utah State will operate on the principle of recruiting *very good* students not necessarily the *very best*

Transformational U: *Enrollment Management's Role*

- Administrative reorganization of EM units to Provost Office--Support from central administration
- Building partnerships between academic affairs and student services
- Raised expectations and standards of excellence in all units
- Historic ethic of care and personalized practices
- Enrollment Management has served as an institutional **CHANGE AGENT** in helping our campus understand their role and contribution

“Everyone counts in recruitment and retention”

Transformational U: *Admissions and Recruitment*

- Raised the admissions standards
- Developed reports to track applicant, enrollment, and yield data <http://www.usu.edu/admissions/>
- Intentional active student recruitment underlies our retention efforts

“Retention Begins with Recruitment”

- Emphasize “fit” between student and our degree seeking programs
- TM outreach, campus wide programming and yield activities, integrated marketing and communication flow
- Seek *best prepared students*—we care about **admitting**, **enrolling** and **GRADUATING** our students

Transformational U: *Student Success and Retention*

■ Creation of Retention Specialist Position

■ Identification of Leavers

■ Proactive Tracking and Advising

- Cleaning up the data and marking the cohort
- Development of Leave of Absence and Withdrawal Process <http://www.usu.edu/leave>
- Creation of Matriculation Advisor position

■ Follow-up Practices

- E-mail reminders www.usu.edu/usucares
- Exit interviews
- Focus groups
- Retention Scholarship

Student Success and Retention:

Leave of Absence

- **Goals of tracking USU students through Leave of Absence (LOA)**
- **Process**
 - Students must complete a Leave of Absence form
 - Student must meet with the Matriculation Advisor prior to departing
 - Goal is to give each student a meaningful exit interview to facilitate his/her return (see attachment)
 - Also to retain students who are considering completely withdrawing from USU
- **Tracking**
 - Reason for leave
 - Important to note as well as learn of problems, and work to solve them (e.g.—find retention money for deserving students)

Student Success and Retention:

Leave of Absence Continued

■ Tracking

➤ Semester of Return

- Important to note so that students can be recruited back at the right time.

➤ Place a hold on the registration

- Make sure we are their first point of re-entry

■ Additional Information

- Students cannot drop their last class online
- Advertise the service, and create an incentive for filing (students don't have to pay a readmission fee, can keep their USU e-mail account, etc.)
- A report is run to find students who 'walked away,' and those students are personally contacted

Student Success and Retention:

Recruiting Back LOA Students

- **Prior to registration for the return semester, each student will receive at least one letter and an e-mail, welcoming the student back**
 - Certain populations (Honors, athletes) will receive another targeted recruiting effort
- **Post- registration, un-registered students will be contacted again**
- **LOA Communication Flow Chart**
- **Student indicates return**
 - Hold is cleared
 - Student is directed to an academic advisor, financial aid, and on-campus housing

Student Success and Retention:

Benefits of LOA Tracking

■ Better understand *Departure Behavior*

- USU large populations of students who take time away from their education path for Humanitarian Service and/or to take care of family responsibilities
 - Military service, financial and medical reasons and academic difficulties

■ Tracking these populations has allowed USU to become more student centered in our programs and policies

■ Make students aware of *Time to Degree*

- LOA process can help modify the behavior of the students; they can't simply 'walk away' from the institution
- Helps the student be conscious of his/her decision to leave, and make a plan for return, thereby retaining more students

■ Documentation for IPEDS reporting exclusions

■ Track trends and make adjustments

Transformational U: *Enrollment Management, Student and Academic Affairs Partnerships*

- Created a central Advising Center and added six professional advisor positions
<http://www.usu.edu/advising/>
- Redesigned our Freshman Seminar, and added peer mentors to each section
- ❖ Students received a weekly “What’s up on campus” e-mail <http://www.usu.edu/connections/>
- Created course clusters and priority registration for first-year students who deposit by May 1
[www.usu.edu/soar/clusters/fall /](http://www.usu.edu/soar/clusters/fall/)

Transformational U: *Enrollment Management, Student and Academic Affairs Partnerships Continued*

- Instituted a new Graduation Guarantee Program that ensures student graduation in 8 semesters —or the University pays the tuition
<http://www.usu.edu/graduate/>
- Partnered with Athletics on student success initiatives
- Instituted a campus wide FYE Committee to discuss and coordinate appropriate initiatives
<http://www.usu.edu/fyi/> and
<http://www.usu.edu/arc/fyeprof>
- Retention is always a part of the discussion

Transformational U: *Partnership with the Honors Program*

■ Re-thinking the High Ability Student Experience

- New Honors Pathway—introduced gateway course, Scholars Forum, sample honors “risk free”
www.usu.edu/honors
- Centralized scholarships — moved to 4-year awards and renewal at 3.5 GPA
- ❖ Created the “Research Fellowship” the most prestigious incoming student award
- ❖ Pairs students with faculty mentors
<http://www.usu.edu/vpr/students/fellows.asp>
- FYE Connections course and Honors Fellows

Transformational U: *Collaborative Partnerships*

- 2004-2005 Review of Academic Warning and Probation practices by CAD
- Revamped Readmission Process and Academic Appeals Committee
 - Personal Statement, Academic Inquiry Form and Interview
 - Broad mix of representation
 - Contracts

Transformational U: *Collaborative Partnerships Continued*

- AAA to track exclusions
- Network and Computing Services
- E-mail open at admissions and left open while students are on leave
- Intentional and Proactive Advising Initiatives
- Retention Specialist and Matriculation Advisor

Results and Outcomes

- First Year retention rates moved from 66% in 2001 to **75%** in a three-year timeframe
- Retention of high-ability students moved from 80% to **90%** in a three-year timeframe
- Retention of student athletes increased significantly, and time to graduation for student athletes is in the **top 10 most improved in the nation**
- LOA tracking of exclusions—**2002/170, 2003/338, 2004/380**
- Suspensions decreased from **174 in 2002 to 74 in 2005**
- **80%** of Re-admitted Students **met their contract agreements**

Results and Outcomes Continued

- Fall 2004 met the average ACT 24.1 and for 2006 currently holding at 25.3
- USU is lead author of *Retention and Time to Graduation: A State and Institutional Imperative* --Board of Regents presentation in April 2005, and Fall 2005 action plan—March 2nd System Symposium
- Received the 2005 Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award

Potential Program Adaptation

No simple answers

- Self-study both of what is working, as well as recommend changes and actions to improve what is not working.
- Senior administrative leaders must provide a strong commitment and resources to focus on Enrollment Management initiatives not only on the recruitment and admission of qualified students but on those that will promote student success.
- Intentional recruitment, leave/withdrawal processes, exit interviewing, proactive tracking, re-admit contracts, intrusive advising, high ability student initiatives, FYE seminar course, --to name a few.
- Goals, action plan, progress report, and assessment.

Transformational U: *Requires an Institutional Commitment to College Choice and Student Success Initiatives*

- ***Intentional*** student recruitment

Intentional retention and student success initiatives

Intentional follow-up and recruitment of leavers

- According to Tinto (1987), “***institutional commitment is the part of each and every member of the institution.***” One person can make a difference. Faculty and staff are not only crucial in the college choice process but play an essential role in a student’s decision to persist.

Questions?

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