



TO: Committee Member
FROM: William V. Flores, President
DATE: September 4, 2015
SUBJECT: Retention Taskforce Committee Appointment

The successful retention and graduation of students who enroll at the University of Houston-Downtown is paramount to the reputation and operation of this institution. The U.S. Department of Education and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) evaluates our institution based on the retention and 4- to 6-year graduation rates of full-time First-time-in-College (FTIC) students.

The university's Mission Statement reflects our commitment to "providing strong academic and career preparation as well as life-long learning opportunities", and that we are "dedicated to integrating teaching, service and scholarly research to develop students' talents and prepare them for success in a dynamic global society."

In keeping with our Mission and Vision Statements, raising the FTIC retention and graduation numbers is part of the first Goal of our Strategic Plan: Student Success. We need a highly structured plan to address the needs of our students so we can meet this goal.

Here are some factors for the taskforce to consider and address:

- Take an immediate inventory of current retention programs, practices, efforts and strategies. This should include those both in and out of the classroom (curricular and co-curricular), student support services, financial aid, early alert, tutoring, supplemental instruction, intrusive advising, student life, career services, study abroad, and other high impact opportunities.
 - Evaluate which services are proving most effective, and how consistently they are applied; identify those areas that need improvement, and suggest recommendations.
 - Determine if we are collecting and using the data we need to evaluate an intervention's effectiveness.
 - Determine whether or not we have the right software, technology, and support to track our students so we can effectively analyze retention and graduation rates.
 - Consider how we can better support students, particularly those admitted conditionally; improve probation and suspension policies and practices; create joint admissions policies with community colleges; and other ways we can support student success.

- Solicit recommendations from each division, including academic departments and colleges to determine which initiatives could be expanded campus-wide.
- Bring in experts to help evaluate how UHD can improve its work in the area of retention and graduation, as well as better implement initiatives proposed by the Retention Taskforce.
- Review best practices at other institutions with high populations of low-income, minority, and underserved students who have increased their FTIC retention and graduation rates, including peer institutions.
- Examine how communication flows from one area to another and recommend improvements needed for retention practices, such as Early Alert. UHD is engaged in multiple activities to improve retention. Some of these include support for classroom teaching and learning, co-curricular support, mentoring and advising, enrollment, and orientation. What are the critical links between these programs and how can the links be strengthened?

Please present your initial findings to me by December 15. Please include budget recommendations to present to the UHD Budget and Planning Committee. In January, 2016, we will schedule a town hall meeting to present the recommendations to and receive feedback from the UHD community.

Thank you for your willingness to serve on this important task force and helping us improve UHD retention and graduation rates.