Improving student retention is critical to growth at Radford University.
Students learn more and are more connected when they are involved in the academic and social aspect of the college experience.

— Dr. Alexander W. Astin
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We believe that all students admitted to Radford University have the ability to be successful and graduate. We are committed to giving all students opportunities to develop, grow and thrive. Not everyone’s path is straight. Their journeys are not easy. However, we are committed to supporting and guiding students to become successful graduates of Radford University who contribute to our diverse society.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Over the years, retention and graduation rates of Radford University students have slipped slightly or remained flat. In the past, new freshman fall-to-spring retention rates hovered around 90 percent. However, return rates for new freshmen in fall of 2015 to spring 2016 declined to 86.1 percent. Fall-to-fall retention rates remain below 80 percent. Of the fall 2015 new freshmen, only 74.3 percent returned in fall 2016. Graduation rates have remained under 60 percent. Of the fall 2010 freshman cohort, only 58.3 percent graduated in 6 years. (See Figure 1.)

When comparing Radford University nationally with institutions classified as Public Master’s Large from the Basic Carnegie Classification (awarded at least 200 master’s degrees but fewer than 20 research doctorates) or from Traditional Selectivity Public Master’s Institutions (admitted a majority from the top 50 percent of the high school class), Radford University has comparable or slightly better retention and graduation rates. (See Figure 2.) However, Radford University falls near the bottom when comparing the current retention and graduation rates among other public four-year institutions in Virginia. Figure 4, on page 4, includes the current retention and graduation rates for the public four-year institutions in Virginia.
Figure 1: Radford University New Freshman Retention and Graduation Rates

Figure 2: Comparing Retention and Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-Year Retention</th>
<th>6-Year Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia 4-Year Public Universities</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radford University</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Comparison: Public Master’s Large (IPEDS)</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Comparison: Traditional Selectivity Public Master’s (ACT)</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We believe that each and every one of you is capable of successfully completing a degree right here on the campus of Radford University. At Radford, we embrace the sense of community, while also staying attuned to the individuality of each of our members.

— President Brian O. Hemphill addressing Radford University students on Jan. 21, 2017
Figure 3: Retention and Graduation Rates

![Bar chart showing retention and graduation rates for Virginia 4-Year Public Universities and Radford University.]

Figure 4: Virginia Public Four-Year Institutions First-Year Retention and Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VA Public 4-year Institutions</th>
<th>1-Year Retention</th>
<th>4-Year Grad Rate</th>
<th>5-Year Grad Rate</th>
<th>6-Year Grad Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of William and Mary</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td>88.1%</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Tech</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Madison University</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mason University</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Commonwealth University</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Newport University</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Military Institute</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>72.3%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Mary Washington</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwood University</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Dominion University</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk State University</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radford University</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia State University</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia’s College at Wise</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: SCHEV RT01, GRS10

4 Student Success and Retention Action Plan 2017
NEW GOALS FOR RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Our goal is for all students to be successful, whether they study at the main campus in Radford, at one of our satellite campuses or online. We believe that a degree from Radford University is the best assurance of that success.

Our goal is to increase the retention rate of the incoming class by 1 percentage point each year and increase the six-year graduation rate of the corresponding class by 0.5 percentage point each year. Figure 5 maps out this plan. Our goal for the first-year retention rate for the incoming freshman class of 2022 is 85 percent. During that same academic year, we expect at least 62 percent of the students who entered the University in 2017 to have graduated.

Figure 5: Radford University Projected Retention and Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Retention</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-19</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-22</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022-23</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Retention and Graduation Rates with Targets

Our goal is for all students to be successful, whether they study at the main campus in Radford, at one of our satellite campuses or online. We believe that a degree from Radford University is the best assurance of that success.

Our goal is to increase the retention rate of the incoming class by 1 percentage point each year and increase the six-year graduation rate of the corresponding class by 0.5 percentage point each year. Figure 5 maps out this plan. Our goal for the first-year retention rate for the incoming freshman class of 2022 is 85 percent. During that same academic year, we expect at least 62 percent of the students who entered the University in 2017 to have graduated.
Soon after his arrival on campus in July 2016, President Hemphill moved the Radford University Retention Office from Academic Affairs to Student Affairs. Dr. Clark proposed the formation of the Radford University Council on Student Engagement and Success (CSES) to advise campus leaders in the design, implementation and assessment of strategies and programs that improve student academic success, retention and graduation. The membership of this Council comprises representatives from each academic college, McConnell Library, Enrollment Management, Student Affairs, Information Technology, University Relations, University Advancement, Academic Programs, Athletics, Student Government Association, Institutional Research, Advising, Budgets, New Student Programs, Career Center, Graduate Education, University Services and Starfish administrators.

The Council was divided into 12 action teams focused on the following areas: Best Practices to Improve Retention; Data Collection and Utilization; Mapping and Tracking; Policies, Processes and Procedures; Pedagogies for Student Success; Advising; Outreach Campaigns; Starfish; Freshman Year Experience; Sophomore Year Experience; Junior Year Experience; and Senior Year Experience. Each team generated and presented a Student Engagement and Success Action Plan that focused on one of these areas. These plans identified different short, midterm and/or long-range initiatives which focused on taking specific actions to empower students to be engaged and successful.

An impressive amount of data was collected and shared concerning student retention, graduation and success from these 12 action teams. Various data sources were examined and methods employed. The electronic factbook on the Radford University Institutional Research website displays much of this data. https://www.radford.edu/content/institutional-research/home.html. In addition, the Council identified campus data available in Banner, Orgsync, Cbord, event tickets, TutorTrac, Degree Audit, D21, NetTutor, Starfish, NelNet, Parchment, Simplicity, T2 and survey data (NSSE, CSS). They also described how the new IBM Watson Analytics is being engaged. In addition, current literature in best practices on student retention was studied. An inventory of current retention efforts was generated. This comprehensive list comprises the titles of the currently implemented Radford University retention initiatives with the corresponding objectives, office responsible, target audience and implementation term of each. In addition, numerous interviews, focus groups and meetings were conducted with various stakeholders.
PROPOSED RETENTION STRATEGIES

FROM THIS WORK EMERGED FIVE THEMES:

- Removing barriers
- Supporting the classroom experience
- Ensuring effective, efficient advising
- Engaging in clear, unified communication
- Addressing the unique needs of each group of students

The membership was divided into groups to address each of these five themes. The following recommendations, categorized by theme, will remain the focus of our ongoing retention efforts through the spring 2017 semester. In the following pages, these themes are introduced and directions for each retention strategy are identified.
As with any college or university, there exist a number of university policies, processes and procedures, some of which have become an unnecessary burden for students. The Council considered the Radford University policies, processes and procedures that seemed to hinder student success. In addition to outlining recommendations for change, the Council purposed a mechanism to obtain further recommendations from other campus constituents for continuous revision of existing policies, processes and procedures to ensure student success. This mechanism includes a web page form and email address to allow a subcommittee of the Council to collect and address relevant suggestions from campus stakeholders to suggest and execute future changes.

Any time your students have to walk across campus unnecessarily from one office to another in trying to resolve an issue is an opportunity for them to walk to their car and leave.

— Kevin Pollock, president, Montgomery County Community College
## SWOT Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
<th>Ensure University policies, procedures and processes promote student success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
<td>Cumbersome processes, some current policies are unclear to faculty and staff as well as students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Opportunities
- Engage all stakeholders
- Review and edit existing University policies, procedures and processes to ensure that they are consistent, clear, fair streamlined and in the best interest of student success

### Threats
- Declining retention and persistence

### Key Collaborators
- Campus policy makers, leaders, faculty, students and administrators

### What’s New
During the summer and holiday break of 2016, registration was open for longer periods, allowing continuing students to register for classes well in advance of the start of the semester. This flexibility in practice encourages persistence and acknowledges that students engage in the process at different times for different reasons. As analysis of policies and processes continues, we know that we can impact student behavior. Beginning spring 2017, the work group will propose changes to policies, processes and procedures that have been identified as barriers. In addition, this group will develop and implement a vehicle (website and email address) to allow the community to suggest further changes in policies, procedures and/or processes.

### Critical Activities
- Identifying policies, procedures and processes that need to be changed
- Identifying stakeholders who can execute and enforce the change

## Operational Values
- Clearly defined University policies, procedures and processes

## Key Performance Indicators
- Streamlined University policies, procedures and processes
Faculty members at Radford University are committed to creating a classroom learning environment that promotes student success. The continued support to implement High Impact Practices (HIPs) is testimony to Radford University faculty’s commitment to creating a quality learning environment for our students. HIPs are defined as student-centered, engaged pedagogies such as learning communities, undergraduate research, international education, community engagement, internships and the Honors Academy. As evidenced by research from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), HIPs have a positive effect on student retention and graduation rates, particularly with underrepresented populations and first-generation students. In addition to implementing additional HIPs in the classroom, members of the Council developed a strategic set of recommendations to improve the learning environment. In addition, the Council argues that faculty members who are devoted to student success must be adequately supported and celebrated for their efforts.

“Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives.”

**Supporting the Classroom Experience**

### SWOT Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of HIPs</td>
<td>Competing demands for faculty time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged faculty using HIPs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring of new faculty members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted mentoring of students by faculty members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty professional development activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threats</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and implementing new technologies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undervaluing HIPs in the retention of students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Key Collaborators

Faculty, Office of Academic Programs, Campus Leadership, Office of Student Success and Retention and students

### What's New

- Explore a new innovative-teaching award
- Collaborate with faculty and LARC to offer Supplemental Instruction (SI) and other activities to support the classroom experience

### Critical Activities

- Align faculty, academic and student support services
- Explore the redevelopment of UNIV 100 into a first year experience program
- Identify ideal class guidelines/best practices
- Increase FT faculty-student contact within and beyond the classroom
- Develop a first-semester schedule built toward student success
- Reward faculty for HIPs and innovative teaching practices

### Key Performance Indicators

Student success in the classroom
Recognition for and development of innovative pedagogical strategies

### Operational Values

Improve student learning environment
ENSURING EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT ADVISING

Academic advisors at Radford University champion student success. In addition to assisting students in becoming successful graduates of Radford University, advisors coach students toward achieving life goals and aspirations. The Council, in close consultation with the professional advisors, has worked to carefully plan initiatives, based on best academic advising practice, to help ensure student success. The Council believes faculty and advisors who are devoted to student success through academic advisement must be adequately supported and celebrated for their efforts.

“...It is the people who come face-to-face with students on a regular basis who provide the positive growth experiences for students that enable them to identify their goals and talents and learn how to put them to use. The caring attitude of college personnel is viewed as the most potent retention force on campus.”

— Lee Noel, Co-Founder Ruffalo Noel Levitz, leading expert in student retention
SWOT Analysis

Strengths
- Dedication and commitment of the professional advisors
- Collaboration of all campus advisors
- Academic Advising Committee

Weaknesses
- High advisor-to-advisee loads
- Variable advising experience for students

Opportunities
- Professional development for professional and faculty advisors
- Evaluation/assessment of advisors and advising systems
- Greater visibility for the recognition of excellence in faculty advising

Threats
- Students feeling underserved and considering leaving

Key Collaborators
- Professional and faculty advisors, Office of Academic Programs, Office of Student Success and Retention and students

What's New
- Incentivizing faculty advising
- Develop Student Ambassadors peer-mentoring program to assist advisors during drop/add periods (Collaborate with MASH)

Critical Activities
- Hire additional professional advisors
- Design and implement consistent advising protocols

Operational Values
Systemized academic advising program to serve all students

Key Performance Indicators
- Strategic advising plan
- Development of online advising protocols and handbooks
ENGAGING IN CLEAR, UNIFIED, TARGETED COMMUNICATION

The Council unanimously recognized the need for clear communication. As a result, it compiled a list of strategic, targeted communication efforts to ensure students are informed of all relevant deadlines, options, opportunities and events. Effectively implementing Starfish as a communication and information tool for campus is an imperative part of this plan.

“Never underestimate the power the personal touch of faculty and staff has on engaging students. Our communications with students must recognize where they live as well as how they receive and consume information.”

— #RadfordFamily — Senior Year Experience Action Team
Engaging in Clear, Unified, Targeted Communication

**SWOT Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Low cost</td>
<td>- Staying current with ongoing development of new technologies and social media as methods of communication evolve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High touch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Opportunities**

Improvements in communication can only lead to greater collaborations to explore new initiatives.

**Threats**

Miscommunication and/or misinformation.

**Key Collaborators**

Campus community and stakeholders.

**What's New**

Purposeful, strategic coordination of communication and monitoring of associated metrics.

**Critical Activities**

- Full implementation of Starfish, including the Early Alert System
- Train all stakeholders on proper use of Starfish
- Create and employ specific procedures for collecting and responding to information in Starfish
- Create and employ specific targeted procedures for communication with students using social media
- Develop and implement withdrawal/exit interview processes and procedures
- Revise Radford University website to be more intuitive

**Operational Values**

Systems of communication in place to ensure all campus stakeholders are aware of resources and activities.

**Key Performance Indicators**

Effective utilization of Starfish

Number of contacts, response rate and intended outcomes using a variety of communication methods.
ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF EACH GROUP OF STUDENTS

Cohorts of students classified as freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors have unique experiences and different needs as they progress through the educational process. The Council suggests tailored activities and programs to address students’ needs while attending Radford University.

“NSSE founding director George Kuh recommends that all students participate in at least two HIPs over the course of their undergraduate experience — one during the first year and one in the context of their major.

— 2016 NSSE Annual Report”
SWOT Analysis

**Strengths**
Faculty and staff committed to student success

**Weaknesses**
Declining retention and persistence

**Opportunities**
- Better coordinate and develop existing programs and services
- Keep students on task to timely degree completion
- Celebrate the success of students from first year through graduation

**Threats**
Students lead complex lives with unique circumstances that prevent them from being successful, including finances, family, intolerance and mental and physical health issues

Key Collaborators
Entire campus community

What’s New
- Develop and implement summer bridge program for at-risk first year students
- Explore a common free period, no classes one hour per week
- Create a transfer path for all incoming transfer students
- UNIV course expansion to be taught to each student cohort:
  1. **Sophomores**: UNIV 200 career exploration
  2. **Junior**: UNIV 300 experiential learning
  3. **Senior**: UNIV 400 capstone course: transition from college to professional life or graduate school

Critical Activities
- Evaluate, redesign, redevelop, expand and/or focus current programs to address the unique needs of students at each level: freshman, sophomore, junior and senior
- Facilitate the graduation process through electronic graduation application and timely commencement

Operational Values
Greater value to Radford University learning experience

Key Performance Indicators
More deeply engaged students participating in on-campus activities and student organizations
CONCLUSION

Encouraging conversations about student success have occurred during Council meetings. Many innovative ideas have been explored. The next step is to implement the proposed changes. A search has been launched to hire a new Director of Student Success and Retention who will be charged with working with the Council in leading these changes. In addition, some members of the Council will be named to a smaller steering committee that will assist the director in communication and collaboration with the greater campus community in making the suggested changes. The membership of the steering committee will include the CSES leadership along with representatives from key action teams.

During the spring 2017 semester, the steering committee will also address ongoing data and report needs. Our work throughout the fall has provided insight as to appropriate direction. A schedule of data/reports and points of intervention will be developed and implemented to allow us to monitor student behavior on an ongoing basis. In addition, baselines and targets will be created for the Key Performance Indicators and measures referenced in this plan.

Earning a degree from Radford University can change the trajectory of a student’s life. Their success also impacts their families and communities. In addition, successful students and improved retention impact University enrollment.

The initiatives included in this plan can help realize the potentials that already exist at Radford University. The stakes are high and we must act with urgency. Our work together can help Radford University excel as an innovative, premier university focused on its students.