

Apply Health Care's Case-Management Model



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At the U. of South Florida, staff and faculty members meet to discuss retention efforts, using a case-management model.

IN 2015, the University of South Florida's retention and graduation rates had plateaued. With progress stalled for about three years, university leaders brainstormed new ways to keep improving.

Around that time, USF introduced a predictive-analytics platform to flag which students were least likely to persist into the next semester. That's when "the lightbulb went off," says Paul Dosal, vice president for student affairs and student success.

"We would generate these lists, and we'd get maybe 80 students or so," he says. "We can get in touch with them in a hurry. What are we going to do with them?"

Eventually the university realized that there wasn't a single best point of contact for every student. Sometimes the financial-aid department was the best resource; other times it was an academic adviser. In some situations, a knock on the door from an RA was the preferred way to check in. So, borrowing a model used in health-care settings, USF created a case-management team that brings together staff members from departments across campus to stage interventions tailored

to each student.

The case-management approach is twofold: On the ground, a team of 12 academic advocates, or case managers, determines which students are most in need, and then either works directly with those students or connects them to other campus departments. Meanwhile, a Retention and Persistence Committee provides strategic guidance. It includes about 20 people from across campus, including residence life, financial aid, academic advising, and the cashier's office.

"Any office that touches the life of an undergraduate student, we try to have them

represented," Dosal says.

Committee members discuss patterns and common stressors they see among the students they serve. Often students who enter the case-management system face crises stemming from the transition to college or family emergencies.

Since adopting the case-management approach in 2016, the university has moved past its plateau, Dosal says: Its six-year graduation rate hit 72 percent in 2018, up from 67 percent in 2015, and freshman-to-sophomore retention is projected to reach 91 percent, up from 88 percent.

To keep things going, South Florida recently developed an in-house communications platform that allows staff members to create a case file for each student and share notes. If a student visits a study-abroad adviser, for example, that person can look at the student's file to get context from, say, the student's recent meeting with a financial-aid counselor.

"When you go to a doctor to get an X-ray, your doctor will have all available information about you," Dosal says. "We're borrowing shamelessly from health care."

THE CHALLENGE

Push past a plateau in retention and graduation rates.

THE APPROACH

Combine predictive analytics with a multidisciplinary case-management approach, and intervene when students are most at risk of dropping out.

THE RESULT

In three years, retention and graduation rates have both increased by several percentage points.