

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Highlights of Graduation Rates Outcomes Study, March 2005

Vision: To be “one of the best student-centered, comprehensive universities in the nation.”

Murray State University’s six-year graduation rate rose from 39.1% in 1997 to 56.5% in 2004, an increase of 17.4 percentage points. The University experienced an especially striking increase between 2000 and 2001: from 46.2% to 55.4%.

The President has challenged the campus to raise its graduation rate to 60% by 2009, representing the graduation rate of the University of Kentucky.

The one-year retention rate is 74.3%.

Culture

“Excellence begins here.”

The campus culture focuses on student success. The expectation of success is clearly, intentionally, and repeatedly communicated to students in multiple ways.

Graduation is an expectation of the campus culture. Faculty and staff expect that students will succeed and have programs in place to support this goal. This expectation also is clearly communicated to prospective faculty.

A genuine commitment to students is embedded in the culture. Students are treated individually with personalized attention, “like a private university.”

Programs provide a “web of support” for students to help them be successful. They “don’t get too far out there before they’re reeled back in.”

The “culture is committed to outcomes.” They place important reliance upon data: monitoring graduation rates of various groups of students, NSSE, alumni surveys, focus groups of students.

They are continually asking, “What can we do to move to the next level?” This has led to programs such as the “secret shopper” that is designed to enhance student services.

Programmatic Features

Residential Colleges began in 1996 to promote a sense of community. Demonstrates commitment to the integration of learning throughout the total undergraduate experience.

Students are encouraged to participate, to get involved. Learning occurs inside and outside the classroom.

They have retention alerts that are filed by faculty if students appear to be struggling or are not attending class.

Campus security personnel attend student government meetings within the Residential Colleges, eat with students, and know students by name.

A special class (FYE 098) is in place for students who are admitted with conditions. Once they complete this, they also must enroll in FYE 099 which is a general introduction to college required of all freshmen. FYE 098 is a graded, one-credit hour course.

Each academic college is responsible for conducting FYE 099 courses for its majors. Special sections are offered for undeclared majors.

A student peer mentor (First Year Leader) is assigned to groups of new students. Formerly, the Leaders were assigned directly to the FYE 099 class to work with the faculty member. Based on the First Year Leaders' recommendations, this has been changed so that the First Year Leaders are assigned to the Residential Colleges and report to the College Head. First Year Leaders contact students before they arrive on campus.

The faculty mentor/coordinator for undeclared students tracks them closely. They encourage students to move into a major to develop connections within and identify with a program.

The freshman reading program focuses on works by individuals who have achieved success despite significant personal odds. The clear message is that the students, too, can succeed if they persevere.

Some half semester (8 week) courses are offered to help students who are struggling academically (courses include art appreciation, music appreciation, public speaking – not math or science).

Alert letters are sent to students who are close to graduation (within 12 hours) to encourage them to finish their degree.

Students who receive major scholarships are required to perform 5 hours of service.

Faculty-Related Features

Midterm grades are required of all faculty.

Faculty have a special ID so that only they can lift their advisee's flag.

Program for new faculty: When funds allow, the President takes the group of new faculty to their 3 off-campus sites so they learn first-hand about all campuses. He also believes in familiarizing them with the region through visiting a coal mine or farm and arranging a meeting with mayors.

Monthly luncheons are held for new faculty to highlight special aspects of campus such as the retention alert, advising, etc.

Merit is tied to the annual evaluation process.

The "Roads Scholars" program assigns faculty or professional staff to high schools across the state as resources. They visit the schools and also have some scholarship funds to offer students with ACT scores of 19 to 23. Approximately 69 faculty and staff are participating.

Other

The Registrar aggressively monitors the cohort data to ensure its accuracy (can omit students who die or become permanently disabled and those who leave for military reasons, join a foreign aid service of the US, or join an official church mission).

A critical external factor: Kentucky implemented Key Indicators for funding that included graduation and retention rates in 1992.