



Langston University
A Plan for Student Retention,
Persistence, and Program
Completion

Prepared by the Retention Committee through the Office of Institutional Research and Planning,

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A Plan for Student Retention at Langston University (Draft)

In 2000, Hilary Hurd offered a special report in *Black Issues in Higher Education* where she claimed that “retention is the lifeblood of institutions” (p.43), particularly historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Fourteen years later, the issues of persistence and completion remain in the forefront for HBCUs (Tinto, 2012; U.S. News, 2013). While participating in a focused discussion on significant issues for HBCUs, university presidents claimed that student retention and graduation rates remain the most urgent issues their institutions face today (Grummon, 2012).

Langston University (LU) is no exception when considering the urgency of student retention and program completion. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, the retention rate at public institutions was 72% in 2012 compared to 60% at HBCUs.

Currently, the retention rate from freshmen to sophomore year at LU is 51%. While graduation rates have increased over the past few years at Langston, **the current six-year rate of 21%** is below the national average for public institutions (57%), for all institutions (52.9%), and for HBCUs (42%). Program completion also is an ongoing challenge.

With this data in mind and considering national trends concerning retention, persistence, and program completion, a retention committee was formed in the spring of 2014 to consider the issues impacting student retention and program completion at Langston University. The committee is comprised of university faculty, staff, and administrators. For the past year, they have reviewed national trends concerning retention and program completion; analyzed data specific to LU; and, created retention and graduation goals for the university. Based on the work of the committee, the following plan is proposed for consideration.

Goals for Retention, Persistence, and Program Completion at Langston University

1. Increase the freshmen to sophomore retention rate to 65% at incremental rates of 3% per year.
2. Increase the sophomore to junior retention rate to 83% over five years.
3. Increase the junior to senior retention rate to 83% over five years.
4. Increase the graduation rate to 35%, at incremental rates of 3% per year.

In the report that follows each goal and its respective action steps will be discussed. In addition, underlying academic and foundational issues that cross all goals will be presented.

Foundational Issues

Four major foundational issues have been identified by the committee as absolutes to be addressed by the University.

1. **Communication** - an environment of fluid and open communication between faculty and staff, and among faculty, staff, and students should be created.
 - The website will be updated on a quarterly basis to reflect the most accurate information available.
 - Faculty and Staff will have access to frequently asked questions and be able to tell students where to find answers to questions. A communication tree will be created for distribution.
 - Policies and procedures for communicating with students will be consistent so that students will receive the same information regardless of who they ask for assistance.
 - Faculty and staff will be required to use their Langston email accounts both to communicate with one another and to communicate with students.

- Seminars on effective communication will be offered to all faculty and staff.
 - An Office of Student Services will be established that will serve as a communication outlet for student questions and a method for offering student support.
2. **Physical Environment** – prepare the physical plant for students.
- Repair the technology infrastructure. Ensure wireless infrastructure is working across campus. Repair all classroom technology. Establish a system for monitoring and maintaining all classroom equipment and lab equipment.
 - Establish a plan for the cleanliness and maintenance of classrooms and living spaces.
 - Create a plan to address concerns about the quality of food service.
3. **Academic Expectations**– build an academic environment for student success
- Provide training to students about academic expectations and college life; modify academic programs to identify best practices and options for students.
 - Revise Lion Camp to have a stronger academic focus.
 - Provide students with summer experiences that prepare them to take the placement tests and to become a college-ready student. Short term summer programs such as Math Boot Camp and a three week study skills course can be offered.
 - Create co-requisite courses to replace remedial courses.

- Change the freshmen experience to include 8 week courses that emphasize study skills and core curriculum.
- Create “required” workshops for students on academic probation and suspension.
- Establish a general studies associate’s degree.
- Create celebrations for matriculation and “full admission.”
- Build Residential Colleges by school or discipline.
- Create a procedure for conditional admission.

4. Customer Service – establish a customer friendly and useful environment.

- Provide training to all service areas on customer service techniques and expectations.
- Conduct an internal communication and process audit to identify areas/divisions of concern that repeatedly are challenged with customer service. Provide each area with necessary training.
- Establish a plan for addressing critical areas of communication breakdown and for assisting staff to remedy ongoing concerns.

Goal One

Increase the freshmen retention rate to 65% at incremental rates of 3% per year over the next five years, beginning with the 2015-2016 academic year.

1. Establish a communication plan for sharing information and educating incoming freshmen.

- Create a plan of conditional admission that includes the steps freshmen must take to be in full academic standing and share this with students and families.
- Establish a mailing procedure that shows thought and an integration of efforts among all divisions contacting incoming freshmen. Use a freeze mailing procedure for summer mailings.

- Create online and DVD resources for parents to explain the college experience, financial aid, and university expectations.
- 2. Teach students academic expectations prior to the start of classes.**
 - Teach students what to bring to school.
 - Required participation in Lion Camp. (students who do not attend must participate in a weekend orientation prior to the start of class)
 - Train students on how to move to full admission status
 - Train students/counsel students about their assessment test results.
 - 3. Create a freshmen experience that assists students with the development of strong academic processes and skills.**
 - Develop a new freshmen curriculum that includes 8 week courses, study skills, background knowledge for academic success.
 - Remove remedial courses from the curriculum.
 - Identify a method for recognizing faculty to work with freshmen.
 - Revise the assessment process
 - 4. Create a stronger advising and counseling process for freshmen.**
 - Train university college staff on retention and academic issues.
 - Change the procedure for withdrawal from school.
 - Determine methods for improving the way the Plan of Study is used.
 - 5. Assess and modify the social elements of the freshmen experience.**
 - Evaluate existing social activities on campus and create a comprehensive plan for freshmen inclusion.
 - Compare current social activities with other land-grant HBCUs to create social events.
 - Request a revision to the football schedule that ensures games earlier in the fall semester.

Goal Two

Increase the sophomore retention (persistence) rate to 83% over the next five years, beginning with the 2016-2017 academic year.

- 1. Create a unique Sophomore Experience.**
 - Hold a sophomore retreat.
 - Hold a Sophomore Summit
- 2. Strengthen student advising**
 - Transition students out of University College.
 - Create experiences for students to identify a major. Hold “majors fair”
 - Establish protocols for advising within each major.
 - Modify the way the Plan of Study is currently used.
- 3. Provide students with an introduction to Career Services.**

- Offer seminars on Collegiate Links.
 - Provide training on Resume Building.
 - Offer seminars on seeking and finding internships
4. **Restructure the mid-term assessment in such a way that it provides students with supplemental support in content areas that need reinforcement.**
 5. **Evaluate curriculum offerings to ensure relevancy and rigor in general education and core content areas.**
 - Modify general education curriculum to be lean and relevant.
 - Conduct a comparison study of current course offerings to other regional institutions and HBCUs; modify course content as necessary.
 6. **Strengthen Peer Leadership Opportunities**
 - Expand the Ambassador Roles on Campus
 - Expand the peer tutoring (i.e., Supplemental Instruction) program

Goal Three

Increase the junior retention (persistence) rate to 83% over five years, beginning with the 2016-2017 academic year.

1. **Modify the upperclassmen advising system.**
 - Create a system for pre-graduation checks that begin with enrollment into the first semester of the junior year.
 - Ensure that infrequent course offerings are planned for by the student.
2. **Build a stronger student internship program.**
 - Establish corporate partnerships.
 - Create and implement training for interns.
 - Connect students with databases and resources for internship opportunities.
 - Provide training on resume building, interviewing, and internship searches.
3. **Facilitate career placement and internship opportunities for students.**
 - Offer courses on resume building, interviewing, writing, etc.
 - Familiarize students with search engines and on-campus opportunities to participate in job fairs.

Goal Four

Increase the graduation rate to 35%, at incremental rates of 3% per year beginning with the 2016 graduating class.

1. **Expand advising procedures.**
 - Educate students on six year Pell limitations.
 - Conduct pre-graduation check at the beginning of the fall semester of the senior year.

- Establish procedures for assisting seniors to graduate upon reaching the 120 hour mark.
- 2. Meet with all seniors about Career Placement.**
 - Hold trainings on resume building, interviewing, job searches, etc
 - Facilitate Career Fairs, training sessions on resume building, interviewing, and appropriate dress for seniors.
 - 3. Establish a faculty mentors/supporters program to offer encouragement as students experience senior burnout.**
 - 4. Build a Senior Community Engagement Program that connects seniors with their broader community.**

A plan of this type must be a fluid document. The committee recognizes that on an annual basis goals should be reviewed and modified based on the implementation of action steps and on the results of implementation. It is the recommendation of the University Retention Committee that this plan be approved by Administrative Council and shared with faculty for feedback.

Retention Committee Membership

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