

Transitions Dimension Report
Lawrence Technological University

Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission. Beginning with recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first year, institutions communicate clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments with secondary schools and linkages with secondary school personnel, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.

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Focus of Report

This report examines the Transition experiences of Lawrence Technological University students. The focus of this study is on two transitions time periodsâ€”

1. Prospective Student through Admitted Student
2. First Year Student to Second Year Student

Current Situation

Communication to Prospective Students

The University has done an admirable job in expanding marketing efforts beyond traditional methods to reach and communicate with prospective students through social networking and interactive programs. Web-based marketing and recruitment tools such as Zinch, Hobson's enrollment management database, Blue Devil's VIP, and UPeers facilitate communication between prospective students and LTU. The Future Students website offers a full range of helpful information and links to support areas. Traditional recruitment methods such as Friday Visit Days, Exploration Days, Out-of-State Information Sessions, and High School Principal/Counselors meetings continue to provide opportunities to share our university. A focus group or other survey question(s) would be helpful in evaluating the websites and offering ideas for future improvement.

Programs for Admitted Students

New Student Experience-Admissions/Orientation

2006 Noel Levitz survey data show LTU students rate their experiences with Admissions and Financial Aid counselors and staff higher than the national average with respect to helpfulness, knowledge, and accurate portrayal of the campus in recruitment efforts. Financial aid staff tries to take extra care with First Year Students so they thoroughly understand their aid packages and options. Despite these efforts, the FOE Students Survey results show 47% of students say LTU did not communicate financial aid opportunities prior to attending LTU. Transfer students may also need additional communication about tuition costs, so they are prepared at the time of registration. Evaluation of current procedures for incoming students should be conducted periodically, in order to improve service. This committee suggests increased collaboration between the Help Desk and Admissions Departments and an extension of online access to areas such as the Help Desk, One Stop, Library, and E-Learning.

First Year Student Experience

The First Year Programs Office is responsible for the development, implementation and coordination of academic support programs related to the academic achievement and the growth development of first year students. Their primary role is assisting first year students with the transition to college life and helping them successfully complete their first year of college.

The FY Programs Office also is responsible for communication to parents of First Year students. Despite the efforts of the FY Programs Office to communicate with parents, only 27% of FY students felt that LTU had helped their families feel a part of their college experience (FOE Student Survey).

Academic success is a major concern for the First Year Programs Office. The Academic Achievement Center offers tutoring and study skills workshops. Another skill closely linked to academic competency is information literacy, which was offered through the University Seminar in the past. This committee is recommending that Information Literacy skills be taught to all FY students, whether in University Seminar or in another FY class.

At present the Introduction to Engineering class is offered in several sections, each concentrating on a different type of engineering. This committee's recommendation is to have one class which introduces all areas of engineering. This change will facilitate advising, registration and give students more information to make career decisions.

Communicating University Mission and Expectations

Develop and add the University and First Year Student Mission on the website and in the Student Handbook. Add specific information about LTU's value as a private University.

First Year student FOE Survey results give LTU very high marks on communicating the importance of academic honesty. This is evidence of the effectiveness of the Student Code of Conduct and the Academic Honor Code in conveying our basic core values.

Advising- First Year Students

Survey results show LTU students rating the quality of their academic advising to be above the national average (2006 Noel Levitz Survey). However, the Student FOE Survey revealed that only 34% of students said their advisors discussed future enrollments plans (staying at LTU, dropping out, or transferring). The Transitions Committee devoted much of its time discussing current deficiencies in LTU Advising. The committee concluded that advising could be improved at O & R by providing more student information to each advisor, such as whether they intend to enroll part-time or full-time. In addition, if a copy of O & R advisor recommendations is kept, this will be helpful for future advising. Finally, the committee recommends that our current advising procedure be evaluated. At present, the College of Arts & Sciences advises most of the FY students, including Architecture and Engineering. The Arts & Sciences advisors have more knowledge of the core curriculum and remedial sequences of classes, which would benefit the FY student. One weakness of the existing advising process is Architecture and Engineering students are not exposed to faculty advisors in their area of interest until later in their college years. Does this lack of connection with Architecture and Engineering faculty result in a missed opportunity to engage the interest of these students with faculty?

Non-Academic Programming

Creating an active campus life is a part of the LTU Strategic Plan. Students are encouraged to become involved in the University beginning with the early stages of recruitment, throughout orientation, re-emphasized during Discovery/Welcome Week and continued with a variety of programming throughout the first year. The University also provides many opportunities for students to become familiar with the various departments within the university and the overall expectations of the institution.

Students are encouraged to participate in civic engagement during their first year. Service learning is built into the University Seminar course. Additionally, there are campus initiatives that exist for all students, including those in their first year. Some examples are Alternative Spring Break and the Martin Luther King Day of Service. There is also a volunteer services database that is maintained for students to search additional volunteer opportunities.

2006 Noel Levitz results for Campus Life questions show LTU students rating the quality of campus life above the national average on subjects such as intramural sports, residence hall life, dining hall selection, student activities, and new student orientation. Yet, less than half of students responding to the FOE Survey felt that LTU communicated the importance of out-of-class activities. During Discovery Days just prior to the first day of classes, students are introduced to University life, organizations, and activities. Perhaps, more follow-up is needed to remind students of this non-academic programming.

First Year Students Social Connection to LTU

Retention research shows that academic success is only one predictor of student retention. "Students who master course content but fail to develop adequate academic self-confidence, academic goals, institutional commitment, and social support and involvement may still be at risk of dropping out." [1] NSSE Survey data shows high marks in providing academic support for students (90% rated LTU in top two areas). However, improvement is needed in helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities and in supporting them to thrive socially. FOE Student Survey results reiterate the need to improve assistance to students with non-academic matters.

The FOE Survey results do highlight the need for the university to help FY students connect with 2nd, third, and fourth year students and also offer more opportunities to interact with faculty outside of the classroom.

The LTU Scholar's Program is one program that provides social support as well as academic support through peer tutoring and building leadership skills.

One way of improving social support is by encouraging First Year students to become involved in organizations that will provide opportunities to meet other students and faculty. For example, Introduction to Engineering students could be required (or receive credit) for active membership in a student chapter of a professional engineering organization. FY students can also volunteer at Exploration Days as this will be a way to network with faculty and students, as well as share the LTU experience with prospective students. Mentoring programs can also be an effective way to develop skills, self-confidence, and social networks. Special care should be taken to keep students engaged with their departments even though they may be completing remedial classes which delay entry into departmental curriculum.

Formation of University-wide First Year Experience Advisory Board

Oversight can be provided on a university-wide level by forming a First Year Experience Advisory Board. This group would be charged with evaluation of all programs related to the two transition phases of students discussed in this report. These phases follow the LTU student from pre-admission through the first year. Board members would represent all departments that deal with prospective and first year students. Board meetings could be held annually, bi-annually, or quarterly and could address strategic and financial planning, training for first year advisors, and the creation of a First Year Mission Statement.

[1] Lotkowski, V. (2004) The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention: ACT Policy Report.

Committee Leaders:

Glen Bauer, Associate Dean
Leslie Michalik, Administrator of Student Services

Committee Members:

Lisa Kujawa, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management
Alan McLaughlin, Director, Student Sport and Recreation
Cathy Phillips, Reference Librarian and Head of Technical Services
Charlene Ramos, Help Desk Director
Jane Rohrback, Director of Admissions
John Tocco, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Civil Engineering

Steering Committee Advisors:

Gladys Aviles, Coordinator of First Year Programs
Larry Chesnutt, Data and Applications Analyst
Steven Howell, Associate Provost & Dean of Graduate Programs
Mary Thomas, Director of Institutional Research and Academic Planning

Recommended Grade: C

Recommended Action Items:

- University mission (Marketing) (*High priority*)

Add the university mission and the mission of FY programs to the Student Handbook toward the beginning of the book along with mission, vision, value and presidents message. The University Mission should be first and foremost.

- Engineering - Student engagement with professional organizations/Mentoring (Engineering Department) (*High priority*)

The introduction Engineering class should require freshman to participate in student chapter professional engineering organizations such as Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), Society of Women in Engineers (SWE), and National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) etc. Promote the idea of upper class mentors for freshman so they feel more connected to all LTU engineering majors. Investigate alternative ways of including engineering students in campus activities, as a means of building confidence and increasing social integration.

- Introduction to Engineering class (Engineering Department) (*High priority*)

Consolidate all Introduction to Engineering sections into one class to encompass all engineering disciplines (including Engineering Technology) so students will be exposed to all fields of engineering. The general focus of the class will allow students to gather more information to help make educated career decisions and facilitate advising and registration.

- Expand Information Literacy to all FY students (Library, First Year Programs, Arts & Sciences) (*High priority*)

Offer information literacy programs to all FY students. This could cover research skills, evaluating information and ethical use of information or anti-plagiarism techniques.

- Retaining O&R advising notes and recommendations (Departments) (*High priority*)

Need to capture copies of the course recommendations and notes delivered to each student at O&R. This would allow follow-up to verify reasonable choices (if desired) and provides a point of discussion for the advisor if inappropriate or ill-advised selections lead to problems.

- Advisor/student discipline mis-match (Departments- Dean's Council) (*High priority*)

Evaluate the present procedure of A&S faculty advisors for engineering and architecture students. A & S faculty are more knowledgeable about developmental class sequences and lower division course prerequisites, for which most FY students need to register.
A problem exists, largely one of perception (both student and advisor) and, to a lesser extent, with regard to expertise, in having first-year students in engineering and architecture advised by A&S faculty.

- Brand LTU as a private university (Marketing) (*High priority*)

All LTU communications should emphasize the value of an education at a private university.
This will help First Year Students understand why a private university has higher tuition and costs.

- Form University-wide First Year Student Advisory Board (All Depts. relating to FY Programs.) (*High priority*)

Board members would represent departments and programs dealing with prospective and first year students. Meetings could be quarterly, bi-annually, or annually. Evaluation of assessment data, financial resource budgeting, strategic planning, training of FY advisors, and creation of FY Mission statement could be some of the responsibilities of the board.

- Engineering Exploration Day (Engineering Department) (*Medium priority*)

Use engineering students as volunteers for Exploration Day. This will keep students involved in engineering, even if they haven't started taking Engineering coursework. This will create an opportunity to meet upperclassmen and faculty, thus staying engaged in engineering.

- Use expressed F-T vs. P-T intentions of students attending O&R (Enrollment Services/IT Services) (*Medium priority*)

Response in this regard included on application that is not accessible online. Therefore, it is not available for use in advising preparation. Having these data would allow more customized schedule recommendations for non-traditional students.

- Evaluate First Year Student Website (LTU Students, Webmaster, FY Programs) (*Medium priority*)

Evaluate the need to change the First Year Student Website by making it more interactive using blogs, humor, video clips. This format can convey information using the style that is user-friendly.

- Packaging FY programs (Marketing/Enrollment Services/First Year Programs) (*Medium priority*)

Create a marketing tool for prospective and admitted students by packaging our First Year Experience. A timeline of Admissions, O & R, First Year Programs, and Advising can provide information for students and parents before the events begin.