

## **REPORT**

### **Task Force for Graduation and Retention - May 2012**

#### **York College—CUNY**

A. Ntoko, Chair (School of Business and Information Systems); P. Babaali (Mathematics), A. Costley (Gerontology and Health Education) C. Foster (Chemistry), T. Gibson (Dean Student Development), W. Smickle (Behavioral Sciences), R. Stuckhardt (Office of Institutional Research)

The Retention and Graduation Task Force was created to assist the President in shaping York College's future actions to improve student outcomes in first year retention, advancement to the sophomore year, and the six-year graduation rate.

The Task Force was formed to review current outcomes, practices, procedures and policies at York in comparison to national, regional or peer best practices, and subsequently to make a series of recommendations that might be implemented in fall 2012.

Deliberations included a review of what we currently do at York College to retain students and steps taken to improve the retention and graduation rate and best practices nationally, regionally, and at our peer institutions in order to recommend a comprehensive set of actions, policies and procedures that can be implemented at York College as well as estimated potential related costs.

<b>Table of Contents:</b>	<b>Page</b>
Data on Retention and Graduation Rates:	03
Student Perspectives: Data from Student Experience Survey (SES) 2010	04
Current Efforts for Retention and Graduation at York College	05
Barriers to Retention and Graduation:	08
Academic Advising	08
Advising in Major Departments	10
Admission to Professional Programs	10
Course Availability and Scheduling	11
Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) Guidelines	12
Transfer Audit Review	13
Filing for Graduation	14
Recommendations	15
Estimated Costs	19

## Data on Retention and Graduation:

In the fall of 2011, 62.5% (5151) of York students were full-time; 37.5% (3091) were part-time. Over the last five years while the total number of full-time freshman each fall has remained relatively flat (between 955 and 1100 students), there has been a substantial increase in total enrollment due to increases in the number of transfer students. According to the 2011-2012 Institutional Fact Book: “The First-time Freshmen headcount enrollment decreased by 13.4%, from 1103 in Fall 2010 to 955 in Fall 2011, while New Transfer Students headcount enrollment increased by 56.1%, from 633 in Fall 2010 to 988 in Fall 2011 (OIR, 2011: 12). Data from 2011 show that there are more freshman and juniors at York compared to those with sophomore and senior class standing. While 34.2% of students (2820) were freshman in 2011, only 18.2% (1501) were sophomores. While 25.8% (2128) were juniors, only 21.4% (1761) were seniors. There appear to be drop-offs or delays in freshman and juniors rate of advancing to sophomore and senior standing, respectively.

The retention of first-time full-time freshmen is a major problem at York College. As reported in the CUNY PMP data (2011), the one-year retention of first-time full-time freshmen who entered in fall 2009 was 74.9%. Data from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) on one-year retention rates among CUNY senior colleges show that while York College made consistent progress from 2005 to 2009, it still had the lowest rate in a range from 75% to 91%. The CUNY senior college average is 84%. The two-year retention is 52.2% for the students entering York College in fall 2008, which is 16.4% lower than the senior college average and, again, the lowest among all the senior colleges.

Data from OIRA (2010) showed that 14.6% of sophomores who were in “good academic standing” in the fall 2010 semester did not return to York College for the spring 2011 semester of their sophomore year. In an effort to understand the reasons for their departure, Dean Gibson, from Student Development, designed an exit interview survey that was administered in spring 2011 to the students who did not return for the spring 2011 semester as sophomores. Dean Gibson’s survey findings revealed that of those who left after one year, 61% transferred to another institution, 37% said they planned to return, 14% took a leave of absence, and 5% withdrew. Reasons for leaving included: not having enough money, needing to work full time, needing to support self and family, being unable to get into their desired program of study, not enough courses being offered in a chosen program, and a major not being offered at the York College.

The retention of transfer students (typically entering as juniors) is a problem as well. The one-year retention of full-time transfer students who entered in fall 2009 was 65.7% which is the lowest of all the CUNY senior colleges and 11.7% lower than the senior-college average. The two-year retention rate for the full-time transfer students who entered in fall 2008 was 52.5%

which is again the lowest of all the CUNY senior colleges and 16% lower than the senior-college average.

The graduation rates for both of these groups (freshman and transfers) are the lowest of the senior colleges as well. For first-time, full-time freshmen who entered in fall 2006, only 4% graduated in four years; the lowest rate of all the CUNY senior colleges (with an average of 20%). The six-year graduation rate at York College has not been improving. Existing data among senior colleges shows that from 2000 to 2004 York College again had the lowest six-year graduation rate (19.5%). Among senior colleges (in 2004) the average rate was 46%. The highest rate (60%) is at Baruch College, followed by Queens College (51%), Brooklyn College (48%), Lehman (34%) and Medgar Evers (23%). The graduation rate for transfer students follows a similar trend. To state the obvious, if we are not able to retain students, we have no chance to graduate them. We are aware that students at urban commuter schools have special challenges including work and family responsibilities that often limit their ability to attempt at least 15 credits each semester (needed for the “four-year plan”).

### **Student Perspectives: Data from Student Experience Survey (SES) 2010**

In a study conducted by the Patrick T. Terenzini, and Ernest T. Pascarella (n.d.) using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), it was shown that some of the strongest predictors of students returning to college after their freshman year are “good teaching” and “exposure to diversity.” Study results also showed that the likelihood that freshmen returned to college for their sophomore year increased 30% when students observed those teaching practices in the classroom. “Good teaching” was not defined by test results. Instead, its attributes were identified on a nine-item scale, which included student appraisals of how well the teacher organized material, used class time, explained directions, and reviewed the subject matter.

The first year of college is considered the most critical period for any student. In his research, Alexander Astin (1993, 1977) determined that the persistence or retention rate of students is greatly affected by the level and quality of their interactions with faculty and staff and peers (National Academic Advising Association, 2012). This is also the time when many students decide whether they want to continue their academic career here at York College or go on to another institution. When a student’s overall experience has been negative (e.g. due to receiving poor advisement, failing to make connections with faculty members, a lack of course availability and poor scheduling, receiving poor auditing of transfer transcripts, and being unable to get into desired academic and pre-professional programs), they will make the decision to go elsewhere. The most critical period or stage of vulnerability for student attrition continues to be the first year of college (as cited in Cuseo, n.d.). This is the time when students are developing a

relationship with various faculty members, learning about the various college resources, adjusting to college life, trying to figure out their academic and career goals, and other factors.

In the Student Experience Survey completed across CUNY (2010) it seems that students at York College are not too different from those at other senior colleges in terms of socio-economic background, participation in school activities, commuting time to and from school, the amount of work done for pay and other non-academic activities.

A number of issues, however, are unique to York College. At York College, the amount of time dedicated to studying is lower. For instance, the number of hours spent studying outside school per week at York College is significantly lower than the CUNY average. 43% of students at York spend less than 5 hours per week studying outside of school (the CUNY average is 31%); for 6-10 hours per week, York is 27% (the CUNY average is 34%). For more than 6 hours per week, York is 30% (the CUNY average is 35%). Another notable factor at York is students' dissatisfaction with their contacts with faculty, particularly the lack of one-on-one time in the office or on-line, via email interaction.

### **Current Efforts for Retention and Graduation:**

There are now several committees at York College charged with looking into this problem. They include:

- The Enrollment Management Group (EMG) examines many areas of enrollment. The original EMG was divided into two groups. One group now deals with recruitment and the other specifically with retention;
- A Presidential committee originally called the Strategic Retention Group (SRG) was recently renamed the Research Group (RG). Many of the discussions in the Research Group deal with retention and graduation data and research;
- The Academic Advisement Committee (AAC) is also examining the role of the current advising model as it contributes to retention and graduation;
- The Freshmen Year Experience (FYE) committee was also formed to help improve retention (and will be discussed in more detail later in this report);
- The President's Task Force was specifically formed to deal with retention and graduation issues.

The focus of each group and the direction are somewhat different. There certainly is some overlap on these committees and some members serve on two or more committees. More coordination between these committees could help to synthesize data, reports, and recommendations. However, it is clear that there are no simple reasons for the low retention and graduation rates and no simple solutions.

In late fall of 2010, the Enrollment Management Group (EMG), adopted a revised enrollment management model to focus on student retention. Not only does this new model provide clear leadership to the college's student retention efforts, it will allow the college to determine if there are policies, procedures, and appropriate interventions in place to support students in successfully completing their degree requirements. The student retention component of the Enrollment Management Group will house retention efforts, including the newly launched First-Year Experience Program.

The First-Year Experience (FYE) program was initiated to help freshmen form a bond with each other and with the college. Special events were planned where first-time freshmen had the chance to meet. Students were encouraged to attend campus events and programs to help develop school spirit and identity. The FYE is a comprehensive program of academic and co-curricular activities started in fall 2010 to assist in promoting the successful transition, achievement, and retention of first-year students to college life at York. The program was initiated as part of the college's continuing efforts to improve the institution and provide the small-college experience to students. The program components include Freshman Advisement, The Freshman Reader, First-Year Student Orientation, Week of Welcome (WOW), Spirit Week, Convocation, First Year Seminar/SD110, Early-Alert System (Cardinal Pulse), Civic Engagement (Jumpstart), Mentoring, and "The Freshman Pledge."

Other retention priorities under review or in development are better Freshman Advisement and the development of a Sophomore-Year Initiative. The Sophomore Initiative will serve as a bridge for the First-Year Experience program to engage those freshmen who are retained. The two-year retention of first-time freshmen is also a continuing issue. York College loses approximately half of its first-time freshmen after two years.

In an attempt to improve the retention of transfer students, a Transfer Breakfast with the Deans of the three Schools was held in the fall of 2011. First-time transfer students were invited to attend a breakfast meeting with the respective Deans of their School. They had the opportunity to meet fellow students and faculty and staff and ask questions.

The Provost has also raised the importance of Articulation Agreements with the department chairs. The ongoing process of developing new articulation agreements and updating existing ones is a good way to improve the retention of transfer students. If agreements can be made with feeder programs from area community colleges, transfer students can be better prepared when

they arrive at York and come in with more credits in the major courses completed. This could help reduce the number of transfer students who graduate with more than 120 credits.

An effort is also underway to encourage students to declare their major early. York College students are now required to declare a major by the 45<sup>th</sup> credit. There are still a large number of students with undeclared majors. Having students declare their major as early as possible should lead to students who are more focused and are able to meet and complete their degree requirements within a reasonable amount of time. These students will make strong connections to faculty advisors early in their college careers. Interaction with these faculty advisors will prevent them from taking “extra” or wasted classes and credits that do not contribute to the major. Students who declare their major earlier are more likely to have an academic purpose and a goal of degree completion.

Undeclared students who do not gain admission to competitive programs with limited capacity (e.g. Nursing and PA), are at higher risk for leaving if they are not targeted for advising and counseling to another major.

There has been a major emphasis in the last six years to raise the admissions standards and criteria to attract students who are better prepared, more qualified and college-ready. The goal is to continue to make incremental improvements in both high school average (CAA) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. The hope is that better prepared students will be more likely to stay. The data show that there has been a slight rise and improvement in the retention and performance rates. There has been an increase in the average number of credits earned, thereby improving the chances of students being able to graduate sooner.

Of course we must point out two important issues: 1) as other senior CUNY colleges also increased their admission requirements, York gets better prepared students who could not get into their first college of choice. They are better prepared, but still did not choose York as a first choice on their CUNY application. This leads to the second point; 2) these students and others like them are now more mobile and more able to transfer out and get admitted to another (“brand name”) senior college.

Efforts are being made to provide better academic and career advisement to all students and in particular, those students who reach the point where their academic credentials make them highly unlikely to gain admission into the competitive programs at York College. The area of academic advisement has been a major theme of most of these committees as well as on a special Advisement Committee whose sole mission is to improve the advisement process. There will be much more said about this later in this report.

The Student Retention Group developed a listerv to share information and discuss issues in advisement. The listerv includes all faculty and staff who deal directly with advisement issues such as: 1) Student Development Counselors who handle freshmen advisement, 2) staff in the

Academic Advisement Center who advise new transfer students and undeclared liberal arts majors, and 3) department chairs or their designees who advise declared majors. However, anyone can join or opt out of this listserv.

This Task Group also spent a significant amount of time sharing anecdotal stories about poor service and other problems faced by students. Issues regarding poor service in administrative offices, miscommunication and inconsistent information, problems with course scheduling and registration, and others were discussed. It was generally agreed that more effort must be made to serve our students. If we want them to stay, we must make them feel welcome. We need to exceed their expectations in terms of service.

### **Barriers to Retention and Graduation:**

Committee members all agreed on several issues including:

- Infrequent and inaccurate advising,
- Students not getting academic advising in major academic departments sooner (for degree-specific advising);
- A lack of capacity in professional programs and students not understanding the admission process for these programs (e.g. nursing, physician assistant, social work, occupational therapy);
- Lack of course availability and conflicts in scheduling (especially for required courses);
- The impact of Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) guidelines;
- Poor auditing of transfer transcripts in a rushed process;
- Transcript data not making it into Cardinal Check in a timely manner;
- Students not knowing how many Writing Intensive (WI) courses they need to graduate;
- Students not filing for graduation on time. Conversely, graduation audits are not reviewed and/or returned to students early enough to allow for meaningful corrective actions.



## 1) Academic Advisement

Academic advising has been referred to as the “cornerstone of student retention” (as cited in Cuseo, n.d.). Drawing from the results of in-depth interviews with more than 1600 undergraduates over a ten year period, Light (2001) concluded that, “Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience ----- Of all the challenges that both faculty and students choose to mention, good advising ranks number one”. Students have every reason to expect adequate and accurate academic and career advisement to facilitate a timely path toward graduation. They need to have all of the facts and options to make the right decision for their individual goals and expectations.

Academic Advising is a major problem since there are limited resources in both the Counseling Center and the Academic Advisement Center with only about 8 counselors (four in each center). The current Advisement Model at York College indicates where and when students should receive academic advising. All students with less than 30 credits are advised in the Counseling Center. Students with 30 credits and above who have not declared a major are advised in the Academic Advisement Center. Students with 30 credits and above who have declared a major are advised in their specific academic departments.

The Counseling Center has been doing advisement for many years, for freshman students and probationary students as well. Other services include personal and psychological counseling and Student Development course instruction. . In fall 2010, there were 1103 freshman students. In fall 2011, there were 955 freshman students. Current staffing patterns are low and pose a challenge to do a credible job of both counseling and academic advising.

The Academic Advising Center is a fairly new center which was initiated only 8 years ago. The current advising model indicates that sophomore and transfer students (with more than 30 credits who have not yet declared majors) are to be referred to the Academic Advising Center for advisement. In fall 2010, there were 633 first-time transfer students and in fall 2011, there were 988 first-time transfer students (a 42% increase). Dr. Clark, the Dean of the School of Health and Behavioral Sciences has also suggested that, in this model, sophomore students at York College are a “neglected” group. With 35-40 credits they are often at an in-between stage in terms of our existing advising model (i.e. between the Advising Center and their Academic Departments). Here also, the task-force felt that the resources available in the Academic Advisement Center were inadequate to the task.

Faculty members at York College have never been explicitly trained in academic advising and often do not have the necessary comfort for advising students. Only about one-third of college campuses provide training for faculty advisors; less than one-quarter require faculty training (as cited in Cuseo, n.d.). While faculty members know their own programs and course requirements, they cannot advise students properly without adequate training and access to

accurate information regarding students' transcripts. Being an effective developmental advisor requires skills, knowledge, and information beyond any given academic discipline (as cited in Cuseo, n.d.). Faculty members often find themselves advising students after the students have received misinformation from overworked counselors in the Academic Advising center.

A new Faculty Handbook was completed in February 2012 and distributed to faculty members in March 2012. This handbook addresses the purpose of Academic Advisement. However, it failed to address guidelines, policies and procedures for advisement. Academic advising is one of the major academic and social domains of the college experience that affect students decisions about staying or leaving (Cuseo, n.d.). This Task Group considered poor advisement of students to be one of the major issues impacting both retention and graduation.

## 2) Advising in Major Departments:

Other committees (e.g. the Academic Advising Committee) are working to clarify the existing "tri-structure" advising model that appears to be unique to York College (in the CUNY system). The current advising model indicates that all freshman and students with up to 29 credits should be advised in the Counseling Center. Advisement with faculty members begins with 30 credits or more and only if the student has declared a major. Students with 30 or more credits who have not yet declared a major are to be referred to the Academic Advisement Center. First-time transfer students with 30 credits or more are also referred to the Academic Advising Center. Task Force members feel that students should be directed to departments and faculty in specific programs as soon as possible, even if they are still contemplating a major in that department.

Faculty members know the details of pre-requisites and course sequences for their programs that should guide students' course selection even in General Education courses, before making it to major course requirements and electives. In some cases, students could be taking introductory-level pre-requisite courses within a major program (within the first 45 credits). These courses could help students move more quickly toward upper-level courses in the major. We feel that advising in major departments should also include students who are "undeclared" in various professional programs (e.g. School Health K-12, Physical Education K-12). For programs with very large undeclared headcounts (e.g. Social Work), the department might consider doing group advising in an "open house" format for potential majors.

## 3) Admission to Pre-professional programs (e.g. Nursing, Physician Assistant)

Of all the professional programs (Med Tech, Nursing, Occupational Therapy (OT), Physician Assistant, and Social Work), Nursing and Physician Assistant (PA) have the highest ratios of undeclared to major students. The undeclared major students are those who are intending to be admitted to the program and obtain the degree. Data from fall 2011 show 511 undeclared students per 70 majors in Nursing (a ratio of 7.3 to 1) and 420 undeclared per 124

majors in PA (a ratio of 3.4 to 1). To compare, the ratio is 2 to 1 for Social Work, and 2.3 to 1 for OT.

It appears that many students are not fully aware of the admission requirements and procedures for these highly competitive professional programs. These programs do not only require high GPAs overall, and in all pre-requisite courses, but also a high number of completed credits and Gen Ed courses prior to admission.

Even then, students with high GPAs can be denied entry into these programs because of limited capacity. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that some very good students from York College who are denied admission to these programs at York College are getting admitted to similar programs at other universities. It seems to go against the public service mission of York College to limit admission to these programs, given their potential economic benefits to the population served by York College.

Students, who assume they will eventually get into PA or Nursing, can learn after accumulating a large number of credits in Gen Ed prerequisites and several “screening” courses that admission is not guaranteed. Unfortunately, many of these courses are not transferrable to other majors (e.g. in health and physical education) and students typically graduate with more than 120 credits. Having dedicated so much of their time completing prerequisite Gen Ed and screening courses, students who then have to choose another major will find themselves lagging behind in a required sequence of major courses without the necessary foundation courses. As major courses must be taken in a set sequence, many students will either find that they cannot complete all major courses in their remaining two years or, when courses cannot be taken simultaneously, that they are not able to maintain a full course load. We feel that all undeclared students in these programs should be given more advising and guidance by the major department (even before they are admitted).

#### 4) Course Availability and Scheduling:

Course availability and scheduling seem to be some of the factors that are influencing both retention and graduation. There are multiple disciplines in which required classes for graduation are not offered every semester, or even every year. Course schedules are increasingly being determined based on early-registration numbers and only a few students (e.g. athletes, SEEK students, and Honors students) have the ability to register earlier than scheduled. The minimum enrollment requirements are a problem in certain departments as well. For example, in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences it is reported that students need to wait to see their grades in the Probability class before they register for Statistics. Students need to take this class for graduation, but unfortunately, due to the low early-registration numbers, it is often cancelled and is typically only offered every two years.

The issue of having only one faculty member who can teach a specific course is another challenge. For example, Gerontology is an interdepartmental degree where students are required to take courses in Psychology and Social Work and at least two other elective courses from other departments (e.g. Anthropology, Biology, Political Science, Sociology) to graduate. The Gerontology program has no control of when or how often these other courses are offered. Often times, the courses are not scheduled based on the students schedules, but on the instructor's. This can affect graduation if courses are not offered when students are able to take them. As a result, students are sometimes advised to seek the course at another college with an E-permit.

Data from SES 2010 suggest that more students would like to have courses available in the evenings, and weekends. 51% of students agree or strongly agree with the statement "I would like my college to offer more courses in the evening." Online and hybrid classes may also be beneficial for students as a replacement for traditional courses. In the same survey, 52% of students prefer to see more hybrid courses offered and only 16% strongly disagree with courses run as a hybrid.

Course scheduling, from semester to semester, does not seem to be planned strategically to help the timely graduation of students. For example, a required course might be offered on a Saturday or in the evening in one semester, but then on a weekday in the afternoon in the next semester. Strategic planning should address enrollment demands (i.e. the number of students who need a specific course and the best time for the majority of students). In addition, existing enrollment data could easily be used for annual scheduling to determine which time slots for courses typically have the highest enrollments. The method of block scheduling is quite ineffective. It seems that scheduling is not informed by the needs of the traditional or non-traditional student population, but geared towards the faculty's availability or preference.

The time frame for keeping courses listed in the semester course schedule (before cancelling due to low enrollment) appears to be shrinking. Courses not meeting minimum enrollment are being cancelled before the summer and before the traditional late registration period. One Task Force member described the method of creating "shadow classes" where multiple sections of one course are proposed at the same time and canceling low-enrollment sections later, if needed. Many classes, including required courses, are getting cancelled for low enrollment before students have the final grades needed to register for the next-level course.

#### 5) Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) Guidelines and Attempted Credits

A four-year graduation requires that students earn (not attempt) at least 15 credits each semester (or 30 credits annually which would include Winter and Summer courses). Data from OIRA shows that, on average, students are taking  $\frac{1}{2}$  a credit more than before. However, the majority of all students at York (approximately 89%) are not attempting 15 credits each semester. In fall 2011, only 8% (616 students) actually earned 15 credits. At 12 credits per

semester it will take at least 5 years to graduate. Many students at York are “non-traditional” and the average student (all students) is attempting 10 ½ credits per semester, and earning an average of 9 credits. At 9 credits per semester, it will take more than 6 years to graduate. More than half of all students at York College are only earning an average of 5.2 credits per semester. At this rate, students would have to take courses during all winter and summer sessions to increase the six-year (and four-year) graduation rates. First-time, full-time degree-seeking freshmen (the cohort used in PMP) are showing an increase in credits earned. However, they still do not take enough credits annually to graduate in four years. Moreover, efforts need to increase to get students, particularly first-time freshmen, to take summer and winter classes to increase their progress towards graduation.

The Task Force feels that the student body and students’ awareness of TAP guidelines play important roles in the graduation rate. From 2007 to 2011, the percentage of students eligible for TAP funds has increased steadily from 89% (2007) to 93.25% (2009) to 94.53% (2011). It appears that the majority of students when choosing courses each semester are following TAP minimum rates of 12 credits (for full-time enrollment). Again, only 11% attempt 15 credits, even though TAP covers up to 17 credits per semester.

It is not clear if students are making the connection. TAP only covers 8 semesters of school. At 12 credits per semester (5-year graduation rate), students will be left with at least 2 semesters without financial aid. If they ultimately earn fewer than 12 credits per semester, they could be facing more semesters without aid. In addition, new federal reports show that Pell Grants eligibility guidelines will be getting tighter for students beginning next year (2012-2013). The maximum annual award has been maintained (\$5500), but annual income caps are now lower (falling from \$30,000 to \$23,000). In addition, new guidelines limit Pell funds to 12 semesters (down from 18 semesters). The six-year graduation rate for first time students entering York College in fall 2004 was 19%.

#### 6) Auditing of Transfer Transcripts:

This is an area that the Task Force feels needs a larger investment of resources (i.e. staff and technology). This is especially evident when processing “direct-admit” transfer students who arrive at the Academic Advising Center or in major departments with transcripts in hand that have been audited by hand in red pen. Given the rushed process, errors and imprecise calculations can occur. This is especially evident when assigning course credit versus blanket credit. In some cases, we have seen two students arriving from the same community college, with the same associate degree, getting different credits for York “equivalent” courses. In one case, course credit is given. In the other, blanket credit is given. In some cases, we have discovered that when a thorough analysis is made using the CUNY TIPPS program, errors are made with both students. Given the number of students who come to York as transfers and especially given the number of students who arrive during late registration, we feel that greater

resources and support should be given to the one person who is currently assigned this duty. Even more support and training should be given to extra staff members, as needed, during times when a high number of “direct admits” are arriving.

#### 7) Transfer Data in Cardinal Check:

This is another weak area in the registration system. There seems to be a delay and a considerable lag time in entering degree and transcript data for transfer students. In some cases while advising students in the spring, we have seen transfer students who entered in the previous fall with completed AS degrees, whose Cardinal Check profiles still did not show junior standing and waivers from Gen Ed requirements. Without this basic data in the system, students can easily be misadvised and routinely blocked from enrolling in courses where “upper-level” standing and Gen Ed prerequisites are needed. Unfortunately, students are only discovering these problems during registration. When degree data is missing and not updated quickly, students’ course selections can be inappropriately blocked. If the profiles are not updated quickly, students can find that they are left out of courses that fill quickly. Missing out on required courses can easily add another semester or more on to their time at York College.

#### 8) Lower-Level WI Courses:

Again, we don’t have a headcount on the prevalence of this problem, but this comes up repeatedly during advising sessions, especially with students who are close to graduation and with transfer students. Most students, including transfers, soon learn that York has Writing requirements in addition to required English courses. The 300-level Writing courses (301, 302, and 303) are very visible in the Gen Ed distribution. Most majors also offer a WI course in the major requirements that fulfill the upper-level WI requirement. However, two other WI courses at lower levels (100 and 200) are also required. Many students approaching graduation have not completed these 2 WI requirements (which are typically found in selected sections of Gen Ed courses), especially among transfer students with completed Associate degrees and therefore move quickly into major course requirements when they arrive. Looking for these lower-level WI courses often means going back to take extra electives outside the major and this can easily add another semester to their time at York.

#### 9) Not Filing for Graduation:

Students who intend to graduate in June of any year are required to file for graduation early in the previous semester. On many occasions, Task Force members have advised students who failed to file for graduation because the courses they needed in the final semester were either not available or were scheduled at times that conflicted with work schedules. These delays can easily add another semester on to their time at York College.

## **Recommendations**

The Retention and Graduation Task Force has set forth the following recommendations:

### **Academic Advisement:**

- Intensive and extensive professional development program for all academic advisors is recommended. Redressing the unpreparedness of faculty advisors requires systematic design and delivery of intensive and extensive professional development programs (Cusoe, nd).
- Long term adjuncts could receive training in academic advisement. These individuals can conduct advisement during peak periods if funding was provided.
- A comprehensive Faculty Advisement Handbook should be created and updated regularly. Our new Faculty Handbook does not address policies, guidelines, and procedures for advisement.
- Advisement should be mandatory for all students. Undeclared majors with intent, and all students who have declared majors (regardless of the number of credits they have earned), should be advised by their respective departments
- Undeclared majors up to 45 credits should be advised by the Academic Advisement Center.
- Freshman and transfer students who have declared a major should be advised in the respective departments.
- The Counseling Center should not be responsible for academic advisement.
- The caseload method should be incorporated. Students should be assigned specific faculty members as advisors. Students will be able to develop a stable, ongoing relationship with their advisor/mentoring agent.
- Revise the current York College Advisement Model. The current model is not in line with our recommendations.
- Assess and evaluate the quality of student satisfaction with academic advisement. Analysis of the data will allow us to correct areas of weaknesses.

### **Academic Advising Center Staffing:**

- Add two additional staff members to the Academic Advisement Center. This center is short-staffed and could benefit significantly with additional staffing.
- Hire another staff member to assist with the evaluation of students' transcripts. Currently, there is only one individual in the Registrar's office who is doing this.

- Hire Higher Education Officers to assist in academic advising in departments which have a large number of majors and with very high students to faculty ratios (e.g., Behavioral Sciences, Business, Social Sciences, and Biology)

### Admission to Professional Programs

- There should be earlier intervention/advisement for students attempting to get admitted into these programs. Students should be informed about the requirements for these professional programs at a very early stage.
- Mechanisms should be designed to identify students who are unlikely to get into the professional programs early during their stay at York College. These students should be provided with other alternatives (e.g. majors/programs).
- Increasing capacity in these programs seems to be strategically important for the branding of York College and for keeping good students at York College. It is also important to determine if the departments are meeting their corporate responsibility to York College when they restrict access to these programs to otherwise deserving students.

### Course Availability and Scheduling

- Scheduling of classes should be done on the basis of students' demand as opposed to faculty's availability. For example, courses that are necessary for graduation should be offered every semester, or every year.
- Build flexibility into scheduling i.e., more hybrid and online courses and weekend courses. Also, faculty should be trained to offer more hybrid classes.
- More full time faculty should be hired, both to facilitate advisement as well as more accountability in teaching. Also, include advising effectiveness as one criterion for recruiting and selecting new faculty.
- When possible, different instructors should teach multiple sections of a course, and the courses with multiple sections should follow uniform syllabi, assignments and exams.
- To be able to run courses each semester, when possible, multiple instructors should teach different courses in different semesters. This will prevent cancellation of classes when an instructor is not available to teach a course.
- It is very beneficial to give departments autonomy in offering classes, so that important courses and those that are required for graduation are not cancelled due to low enrollment. This requires setting an average enrollment target for departments or schools, and as long as the department meets this figure, keeping or cancelling classes is left to individual departments and schools. This will give departments and schools the ability to schedule strategically, and also fix responsibility for failures in meeting graduation targets.



### Tuition Assistance Programs (TAP) Guidelines and Attempted Credits

- All departments must have a recommended four-year plan to alert students to the timeline. This is actually in place. Students should be made aware of the plan.
- In advising sessions, students should be told that 12 credits is full time for TAP, but will take at least 5 years to complete.

### Auditing of Transfer Transcripts

- Timely and correct auditing and evaluation are required.
- Additional staff and resources are needed in this area, especially during periods of increased late enrollments and “direct admits.”
- Automation is crucial. Students should not be left with a transcript that has been “audited” by hand. Errors result.
- TIPPS should be used consistently and rigorously.

### Transfer Data in Cardinal Check

- Transcript data for transfer students and current students should be processed and entered in a timely fashion.
- Cardinal Check should be updated and reviewed on a consistent basis for accuracy.
- All students should be informed of Cardinal Check and be encouraged to use it.

### Filing for Graduation

- Preliminary audit should be conducted by advisor before student is referred to the Registrar’s office.
- Students should be encouraged to apply for graduation in a timely fashion.
- A final review of students’ transcript, i.e., senior check is required. This should be done in a timely fashion and students should be informed if they are missing a course (s).

### Mandated Tutorials:

- A relatively large number of students at York College seek entry into programs which have entrance requirements that include satisfactory performance in some gateway courses. Unfortunately, a significant number of students who desire to gain admission into these programs have difficulty meeting these requirements. This creates a large number of undeclared or intended majors who spend a considerable amount of time trying to meet the requirements. The result is that graduation and retention rates suffer.

Another section of this report contends that an efficient advisement system will proactively counsel these students about other alternatives available to them at York College.

- Resources should also be provided to help these students gain entry into these programs within a reasonable time period by providing sustained and systematic assistance to students in these gateway classes.
- This should be done in the form of mandated tutorial labs for these courses. Students registered in these courses would have to register for a lab (3 hrs per week) which would be taught by an adjunct instructor. This would give them help from an instructor, and would force them to allocate an appropriate amount of study time to these courses.
- Many colleges provide students with a summer academic boot camp experience (credit bearing courses) to prepare them for entry into degree programs that require an entrance application. In addition to mandatory tutoring, we may want to recommend such a program.

#### Coordinating Committees:

- Maintain only one standing committee on retention and graduation to monitor process.

#### Accountability:

- Department Chairs and Deans should be more accountable for retention and graduation rates of the students within their own departments and schools.

#### Lower Level WI Courses:

- Faculty members need to highlight these requirements in advising sessions, especially as students approach the last two to three semesters. Transfer students need to clarify exactly how many WI courses are needed apart from the 300 level writing courses (301, 302, 303).

#### Freshman and Transfer Orientation:

- Freshman Orientation and Student Development courses (e.g. SD 101, SD 110) should be mandatory for all incoming freshman. This should not be optional.
- On-campus orientation for transfer students should be mandatory.

#### Branding and College Profile:

- Seek accreditation for all programs where national accreditation is possible (not only where mandated)
- The College needs to be clear about its “brand” and how to market it.

Customer Service:

- Training should be provided to all employees in customer relations.
- Administer a customer survey and use the data to address current problems.
- Implement customer management software to keep track of student complaints.
- Respond to student complaints in a timely fashion.

**Budgetary Implications**

The Task Force made some recommendations about additional resources in some specific offices of York College to help improve graduation and retention rates.

Academic Advising	2 x 45,000	\$90,000
Transfer Transcript Evaluation	1 x 45,000	\$45,000
Large Department Advisement	4 x 45,000	\$180,000
Labs for Gateway Courses	4,000 x 15 x 2	\$120,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$435,000</b>

Assumptions:

- The average salary of an HEO = \$45,000
- The average salary of an adjunct instructor to supervise a tutorial lab = \$4,000
- The number of labs = 15 per semester

The task force was not in a position to detail the costs of increasing capacity in the professional programs.