

## **Vision for Student Success**

My vision for student success in the College of Agricultural Sciences is aligned with the success objectives outlined in the draft 2.0 CAS strategic plan. We seek to increase our 5-year graduation rate to 85% while at the same time eliminating existing success gaps based on race, ethnicity, Pell-eligible and first generation status. We seek to increase the percentage of students that are employed in their area of study to 95% within 6 months of graduation, and we will do this while ensuring that current and future CAS students are provided the training they need for the careers they want. If we increase our student's success rates, we will attract and recruit more students helping to meet our goal of increasing our undergraduate enrollment by 50% to 2,500 students.

These goals are challenging: Currently, our 5-year graduation rate is 56.4%<sup>1</sup>. The success gap (based on the differences between 6-year graduation rates) is 22% for minority students, 15.6% for first generation students and 12.5% for Pell recipient students. Clearly we have work to do, and meeting these goals will require the commitment and energy of all faculty, staff and administrators within the College.

As an instructor and professor, I share these goals of increased student success with the College. In 2008 I took on the job of re-designing a large non-majors freshman level course with the goal of reducing the course's DFW rate while teaching critical thinking and communication skills. Our goal was and is to provide first-year students with the skills they need to be successful in college and in life. What I've learned though this re-design process is that the most important practices we can implement arise from an analysis of student outcomes and then seeking evidence-based pedagogical or content practices specifically chosen to improve outcome gaps. We have been somewhat successful using this approach.

## **Philosophy**

To achieve these goals we will need to continue to improve what and how we teach our students and how we mentor and advise our students. As we move forward our efforts need to be guided by solid data on outcomes and gaps, and the solutions we choose need to be based on evidence from the teaching literature. Fortunately, CSU has a robust and talented Office of Institutional Research capable of providing fine-grained data on student performance and success. These data are available by program or course, the student body as a whole or at the level of the individual student. Further, there are a wealth of pedagogically and statistically rigorous studies that can provide approaches to addressing gaps we find between our goals and our current student outcomes.

For example, student retention is strongly influenced by whether students see course content as relevant to their career and life goals. Retention is also increased when students see that the College, Department and most importantly, individual instructors view their jobs as primarily to ensure each student's success instead of as being aligned with other institutional or professional goals. Courses that provide active learning, service learning or case study-based approaches also increase engagement and retention and success. Importantly, changing courses so that they are

designed to increase student success and retention rates helps all students, regardless of group or identity. Research consistently shows that curricular or co-curricular efforts to increase student success help all students do better.

No one set of pedagogical approaches will work for every class. Differences in class size, level, and content necessitate that we use different approaches to engaging and teaching students. However, at the level of each of our majors we must ensure that the practices we employ are aligned with and designed to help us meet our goals of increasing retention and success. Perhaps we could call this “intentional curricular design”. Concepts such as backwards course design (where we first identify the learning outcomes we wish to achieve, and then design content and activities and assignments to achieve these outcomes) are of course relevant to curricular planning at the major or college level.

### **Role of the Associate Dean for Academic Programs in Ensuring Successful Outcomes**

The College of Agricultural Sciences Associate Dean for Academic Programs works to ensure that all College programs and activities serve to help us meet our goals for success and retention. We cannot meet our goals unless all within the College are engaged and committed to meeting them. The Associate Dean takes the role of asking at each level “How does this contribute to meeting our teaching and learning goals?”

*1) Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness.* The Associate Dean should take a role in guiding Departments to use evaluation structures that are aligned with the student success goals. First, we need to link the annual evaluation process for instructors and faculty to CAS success goals. The current process is often based on a shallow assessment of number of courses taught and (usually) student course survey results. Neither of these is congruent with student success. Indeed, student course survey results may at times inhibit progress: innovations seldom work perfectly the first time, and student approval ratings often reflect this, providing incentives for faculty to not make changes when they should. One way to approach this is to transition to the use of *Teaching Portfolios*<sup>2</sup> to evaluate teaching effectiveness. A second, perhaps less time consuming method would be to use Weiman and Gilbert’s Teaching Practices Inventory<sup>3</sup> as a guide to the effective preparation of evaluation materials.

#### *2) Evaluation of College majors and curricula*

The Associate Dean should take a lead role in helping Departments analyze current curricula to identify key pivot points for retention and success, and to ensure that each major’s curriculum is designed for the careers that our current and future students desire. The Associate Dean will also assist Departments in selecting evidence based-changes to programs and curricula that should be made to increase student success rates.

#### *3) Assist in the implementation of extra / co-curricular / service learning opportunities.*

Student retention and engagement is increased when students feel that they belong to a community and that they value the community’s goals and mission. The College of Agricultural Sciences should start a Learning Community to engage and retain first year students.

Additionally, we need to increase the use of service learning opportunities in our courses, and assist undergraduate clubs to increase their service and engagement activities throughout the state. For example, the Gillette Entomology Club performs outreach activities reaching thousands of K-12 students and community members each year. Service and outreach activities connect our students to each other and the College, and have positive learning, personal, and student success outcomes.

4) *Advocate for reward structures that are congruent with College student success goals.* The Associate Dean should take a leadership role in working with Department Heads and Department Promotion and Tenure Committees to ensure that we are rewarding excellent teachers and advisors appropriately. This involves the development of better assessment methods (1, above) discussions with faculty on how we can better assess teaching excellence, and also the development of tenure, promotion and merit-based salary increase policies that fully incorporate teaching and advising excellence. To foster and reward innovation, I would like to see the College implement a “mini course improvement grant” where faculty apply for 1 – 2 weeks of summer salary to design and then implement practices designed to improve student success.

5) *Advocate for the College at the University level.* It is essential that CAS remain fully represented at the University level to ensure that our needs are addressed and incorporated into University policy decisions.

1. Colorado State University, Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness. 2017. College Portrait. [http://irasp101.ir.colostate.edu:9704/xmlpserver/Public/Reports/RTR\\_Trends/RTR\\_CollegePortrait.xdo?&\\_xmode=2](http://irasp101.ir.colostate.edu:9704/xmlpserver/Public/Reports/RTR_Trends/RTR_CollegePortrait.xdo?&_xmode=2)

2. Colorado State University Institute for Learning and Teaching 2015. Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness Task Force Report. <https://tilt.colostate.edu/sotl/taskForces/effectiveness/>

3. Wieman, C and Gilbert, S. 2014. The teaching practices inventory: a new tool for characterizing college and university teaching in mathematics and science. *Life Sciences Education* 13:552-569