

Comprehensive Retention Plan

Leveraging relationships formed between students and their faculty and support staff across campus has made a tremendous impact on student retention and satisfaction at BVU. Leading the initiative is Mike Walker, Senior Director of Retention and Student Support.

“Relationships are the number one thing that drives retention at BVU. It’s not easy to leave a place you’re connected to,” says Walker. “By focusing on fostering relationships across campus, by being in a student’s corner and getting to know them is making the biggest difference.”



BVU is comprised of faculty and staff willing to give their time to help students reach goals and be successful by connecting with them on a personal level. This initiative added another layer of support to this encouraging environment with the Early Alert Program. Any faculty or staff member on campus can submit an alert that a student may be struggling, missing classes, or having financial troubles.

“Students trust and confide in BVU employees,” says Walker. “This communication has enhanced our ability to support our students and meet their needs before it becomes a deal breaker, causing them to leave BVU.”

He says the number one predictor of retention is academic success, but there are many components, including finding the right area of study. Admissions partnered with EAB, a

company that provides research and insights to enhance the advising process. Through predictive analytics, first- and second-year students are placed into classes that they are more likely to enjoy—which leads to long term success. If there are students struggling in a major, the advising staff can intervene and provide a potential new major that may be a better fit while completing their degree in the shortest timeframe possible.

And while finding the right major is a key factor in academic success, a student's mental health and social activity play a role as well. All the divisions within Student Success work together on this front.

“I have had regular conversations and check-ins with other divisions of Student Success such as the Center for Diversity and Inclusion and Health and Wellness,” says Walker. “Through these meetings we align our initiative with their visions and make sure that student needs are being met by those offices.”

Relationship building may have taken on a new direction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but the connections are still there.

“We are still able to maintain connections through email and Zoom,” says Walker. “We have a lot of people who are invested in our students and want them to do well. We didn't have to renegotiate our strategy due to COVID-19 because the people of BVU continue to care and connect with our students, and our students know we want to see them come back to their second home at BVU this fall.”

First- to second-year retention rates are currently around 77 percent for the Storm Lake campus, with overall retention rates close to 90 percent, which is a significant increase from before the plan was implemented. Walker is confident these numbers will remain high and continue to increase with the help of BVU's supportive faculty and staff.

Initiative Description: Develop a comprehensive University- wide retention plan that focuses on admissions, academics, and student success. Focuses on first & second year students, transfer students & OS students. Implementation of Student Success Management System to improve advising and student satisfaction.

Success Metric: Academics and Student Success: Exceed projected 1Y to 2Y retention rate by 4% each year for 5 years

Initiative Owner: Senior Director of Retention and Student Support

Cabinet Sponsor: Provost, Vice President for Student Success (primary), and Vice President for Enrollment Management