

INSIGHTS

National Louis University (NLU), a private nonprofit university based in downtown Chicago that has historically served adult, part-time graduate and undergraduate students, recently reengineered its offerings for first-time, full-time freshmen with the objective of dramatically increasing first-generation college-goers' access to and ability to complete a bachelor's degree.

This reimagining was prompted by a 2014 University of Chicago Consortium on School Research report, which detailed that only 14 percent of Chicago Public Schools high school freshmen go on to earn their bachelors' degrees. Evidence further showed that many capable students—particularly those between a 2.0 and 3.0 GPA—did not enroll in college at all, and others enrolled but did not graduate. National Louis created the Harrison Professional Pathways Program to meet the needs of the large number of students who graduate high school and who are qualified for college but historically have enrolled, persisted, and graduated at low rates. These students are often first-generation college-goers, low-income, and underrepresented minorities.

STRATEGIES

In order to increase the effectiveness of the Pathways Program, NLU structured it with common barriers to college success in mind:

It is affordable (\$10,000 a year), and flexible, with two days a week for in-person instruction and access to an online learning platform which functions as their textbook throughout their coursework, thus enabling students to balance school with personal responsibilities such as work and family.

To help ensure that students are selecting courses that build to a degree, they choose from one of three “meta-majors,” and the first two years of courses are pre-defined.

NLU strives to offer a personalized experience, capping class sizes at 30 students, utilizing adaptive courseware and a flipped classroom environment, and providing students with a Success Coach who serves as a counselor and mentor for all four years.

When data revealed that the strongest predictor of Pathways students' GPAs at NLU was not their high school GPAs or ACT scores but rather their level of college attendance and online courseware engagement, staff crafted messaging that communicated to students' that their efforts would pay off.

A dedicated data strategist equips professors and the program's success coaches with weekly data reports that flag students with “red light” patterns of attendance and assignment performance, supporting individualized intervention planning.



SCHOOL OVERVIEW NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

School Type	Private
Undergraduate Enrollment	1,393
Pell Grant recipients	49%
African American	41%
Hispanic or Latino	25%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 8/31/2016 at: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/school/?147536-National-Louis-University>

RESULTS

By the end of the first year of the program, 60 percent of students were on-track to graduate within four years based on their GPA, while only 20 percent were on-track early in the first quarter; i.e., **many students showed growth throughout the year.**

The Pathways Program is projecting that nearly 70 percent of its initial enrollees will return in the fall of their sophomore year, whereas the average retention rate for CPS graduates with a similar academic profile (2.5 average high school GPA and average ACT score of 16) is approximately 55 percent.

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