

The Centralized Retention Unit (CRU)

Strategic Plan Theme: Student Success

Funding Level: Between \$1-5 million

Facility Needs: Adjustments to existing facilities will be needed

Submitting Unit: NSSC

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

APUE, NSSC, All Colleges, Enrollment Management, Student Life and Engagement, Institutional Research, Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, Campus Student Success Group, and NSSC Identity-Conscious groups

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

An 86% graduation rate with no opportunity gaps requires a collaborative, intentional, and strategic retention strategy. MSU's current retention efforts are segregated, missing data, and under resourced. A Centralized Retention Unit (CRU) is necessary. Hallmarks of CRU would include retention fellows from units such as academic advising, financial aid, and faculty, whose bought out time would allow them to engage in centralized retention efforts, facilitate a retention council of key collaborators (e.g. Colleges, enrollment services, student life and engagement, Institutional Research) who would advise and participate in the work and develop CRU's four key areas: Data, Policy and Communications, Alignment, and Initiatives.

CRU would lead a campus wide mixed method inquiry exploring these questions. Retention outreach efforts must be individualized, student-centered, and through an identity-conscious lens. Currently, data related to student retention (course engagement, financial need, advising notes, etc.) are in various data systems. This fragmentation requires staff to log into multiple databases and contact numerous colleagues to fully understand student needs, limits the possibilities of data visualization and analysis, and hinders robust proactive retention efforts. CRU would collaborate with data partners to create a structure that supports systematic collection of retention data and connects data systems to provide proactive, holistic, and collaborative retention outreach.

CRU would undertake a comprehensive policy and communications analysis from a retention lens, identifying ones that create barriers and, where possible, making modifications to enhance retention. Often, the messages educators intend to send are not the messages students receive. CRU would ensure all retention related communication (EASE reports, hold placement, probation correspondence, etc.) are psychologically attuned to reduce shame and increase sense of belonging to positively impact retention.

Currently retention work happens on campus in a disjointed and siloed structure. Different units are unaware of the various initiatives happening in other units. CRU would create an inventory of current initiatives that would be continuously updated with new programs and initiatives. It would also serve as a clearinghouse, sharing results from initiatives across the institution, identifying promising practices to scale, and creating alignment across various initiatives.

With data informed and identity conscious lenses, CRU will identify barriers to retention and launch institutional wide initiatives to address and remove barriers to eliminate current gaps in retention for marginalized students and ensure all students can learn, thrive, and graduate. These could be new initiatives, campus wide versions of promising pilots, or policy analysis and improvement.

What is the proposal's goal?

The goal of this proposal is to create a coordinated, strategic, well-resourced, student-centered retention unit that uses data to create retention initiatives and proactive direct student outreach to reach MSU's goal of an 86% graduation rate with no opportunity gaps. In creating this centralized retention unit, MSU will remove unnecessary barriers preventing student success, ultimately ensuring all students can learn, thrive, and graduate. It will also engage in proactive outreach efforts to students to identify and provide support when students first face barriers. Specifically, this campus-wide, multi-year initiative would have several workstreams all leading to the goal of increase retention for ALL students at MSU with the following goals/deliverables:

Data and Analysis

Perform an in-depth quantitative and qualitative analysis on why students leave, barriers students face while at MSU, how students overcome barriers, and why and how they come back

Create a comprehensive, campus-wide retention data system that would compile all retention related notes/interactions/information/data in one system allowing for intentionally designed proactive outreach and wholistic student support during outreach

Using the data from above, creating intentional, proactive outreach strategies to increase retention

Policy and Communication

Analyze MSU policies from a student success lens to identify unnecessary barriers and potential improvements

Psychologically attune student communications to ensure messages convey support and belief in their success

Alignment

Complete an inventory of all retention efforts on campus from deposit to graduation. Identify areas that need more retention efforts.

Identify promising practices that could be scaled across MSU

Create a centralized collaborative space that connects all the retention efforts on campus

Initiatives

Creation of 1-2 specific strategic retention initiatives a year designed to remove systemic and structural barriers for students identified through data analysis. Preliminary initiatives considered include:

A comprehensive probation project to identify new and expanded ways to prevent students from getting on probation and support their individual needs to successfully move off probation

Expanding bridge programs and pre matriculation activities

Creation of persistence mentors

EASE review and improvement

A second-year program focused on the specific needs of second-year students including second-year UGS courses and second-year bridge programs

Evaluate and refine readmission and reinstatement processes

Creation of coordinated and intentional retention outreach efforts several times a year

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

In order to meet the goal of an 86% graduation rate with no opportunity gaps by 2030, MSU will need to significantly increase and change the retention work it engages in. MSU's current retention work is piecemeal and scattered, with limited staff dedicated to retention work. Other institutions who have significantly increased their retention and graduation rates have done so through centralized processes with dedicated

staff to engage in and coordinate the work. This proposal would allow MSU to engage in strategic retention efforts in order to meet its graduation goals.

The creation of the CRU Retention Fellows and Retention Council would bring together staff who engage in retention work (faculty/instructors, financial aid advisors, academic advisors, Student Life and Engagement staff, Student Accounts, IT, etc.) to collaborate and align initiatives, identify promising practices, and share information across divisions and units. This would allow MSU to shift from a reactive framework for retention work to a proactive, student-centered framework. It would also substantially increase the number of FTEs dedicated to retention work and bring us closer to the retention staffing of our peers.

The mixed method research on why students stay, leave, and return would help MSU understand what factors lead to student retention and would allow MSU to proactively engage in persistence and retention efforts. It will also allow MSU to create data-informed and student-centered retention initiatives to support students before they become in distress and risk attrition.

The comprehensive, campus-wide retention data system would make individualized outreach possible. Currently, limited units have the staff or data needed to engage in individualized outreach to students in distress. When advisors or others engage in outreach, limited data is available about those students. Looking up the student in numerous systems takes time and effort that prohibits all students who could benefit from outreach getting individualized support. A comprehensive retention data system would allow for all the information needed to be presented to retention staff on one spreadsheet, allowing staff to increase both the number and level of individualization in outreach efforts.

Finally, increasing our retention efforts and therefore our graduation rates, also supports our land grant mission to provide education to all Michiganders. It will also connect the institution with Governor Whitmer's goal of 60% of Michigan residents having a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030.

Who will be impacted?

MSU Undergraduate Students-as we learn more about why students stay or leave and the barriers to their success, we will be able to create a campus that better supports all students to complete their MSU degrees

State of Michigan-Increased retention leads to more MSU graduates which would help meet Governor Whitmer's goal of 60% residents with degrees or certificates. It would also increase tax revenue as more residents have college degrees.

Parents, Families, and Success Supporters

Increased enrollment revenue as retention increases

Faculty and staff on campus who get to serve as retention fellows

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

The Retention Fellows will increase the number of staff on campus who can be considered retention generalists. The year spent as fellows will provide them with a greater understanding of how their work intersects with and supports broader retention work on campus. As more faculty and staff from various units serve as retention fellows it will provide a cadre of retention minded individuals across campus helping to build a culture of retention across the institution.

When the CRU is fully staffed with retention fellows, has a retention council formed, and is engaging in coordinating and planning retention initiatives, sustainability has been achieved. The increase in tuition revenue from increased student retention should support the costs of the CRU. Sustainability will also be achieved when we are engaging in regular coordinated retention outreach efforts throughout the year.