

Academic Program Management

Recommendation:

Develop more strategic academic program management via establishing the role of program coordinator within academic programs.

Why:

Academic programs are the foundation of the university's existence. A program is essentially a set of strategically organized evidence-based actions designed to achieve specified outcomes. Academic programs thus consist of stated university-aligned outcomes (e.g. graduation, program-relevant employment, graduate school admission) with all program activities built around achieving these outcomes. External to academic programs, universities institute a variety of activities designed to support the same outcomes. However, *within* academic programs there is sometimes an absence of formalized strategic management. One example of this is the lack of regular, formalized communication strategies designed to engage students in their academic program, including regular dissemination of program-relevant information (e.g. new courses or other curriculum information, professional opportunities, program-specific orientations or events, etc.).

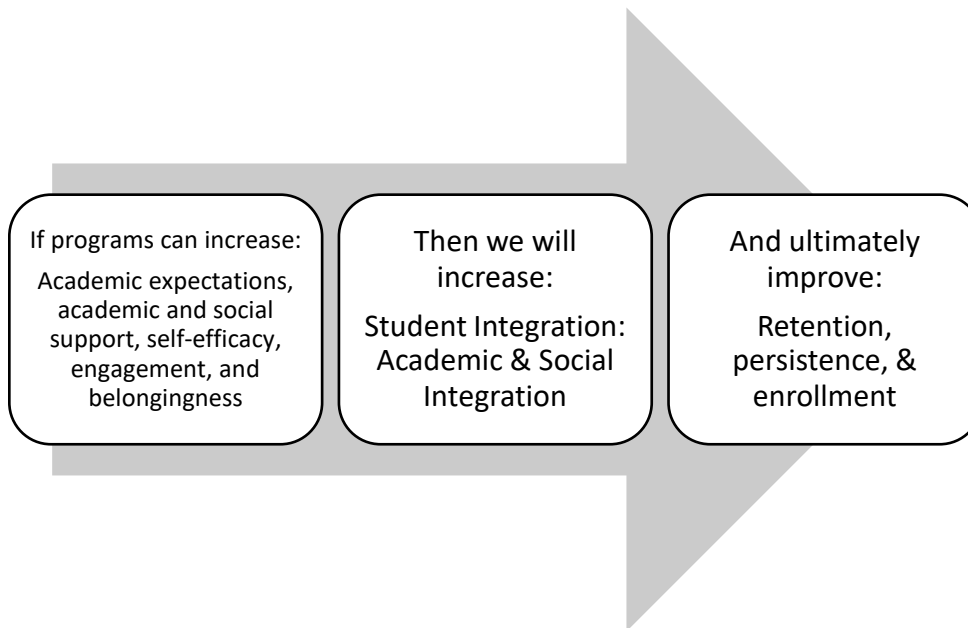
Though program-level decision-making certainly occurs and does so with outcomes like graduation in mind, current academic program management at Black Hills State University might be characterized as:

- Informal
- Ad hoc / reactive
- Ancillary
- Unsupported

We suggest that a lack of formalized strategic academic program management is a problem that likely affects the retention of first year students as well as other valuable university outcomes (e.g. enrollment, recruitment, graduation, program quality, etc.). The proposed role of academic program coordinator would support program-level management, including: recruitment, marketing and communication (internal and external), program evaluation, and curriculum development. In addition to other important variables, these actions will support increased student integration – a key factor found to influence student retention and persistence ([Tinto 2010](#); [Yu and Richardson 2016](#)).

Student integration is both a process (formal and informal) as well as an indicator of the degree to which students are both subjectively and objectively connected to their institution of higher education. [Tinto \(2010\)](#) identified two key aspects of student integration: 1) academic integration – the subjective and objective connections students experience to their learning, including to their academic program, and 2) social integration – the subjective and objective connections students experience via their relationships with peers, faculty, and other members of the campus community. Academic integration and social integration are key independent variables driving outcomes of retention and persistence of college students ([Tinto 2010](#)). Some indicators of academic and social integration are: academic expectations, academic and social support, self-efficacy, engagement, and belongingness ([Bean and Bogdan Eaton 2001](#); [Tinto 2010](#)). The figure below highlights the theory of change behind these independent and dependent variables.

Figure: Theory of Change for Academic Program Management



At a program level, these predictors of academic and social integration require the program to:

- Academic expectations
 - Communicate expectations regarding student extracurricular involvement
 - Establish student expectations of curriculum rigor and performance
 - Communicate the outcomes of program completion, including professional and graduate school opportunities
- Academic support
 - Increase knowledge and meaning of student academic supports, including math and writing centers
 - Provide tools to organize successful content-based study groups
 - Coordinate academic skills workshops, including writing and studying
 - Hold group registration events for program majors
- Social support
 - Organize social events, including:
 - Program orientations
 - Guest speakers from successful program alums or other professionals working in the field
- Self-efficacy
 - Through the above activities, provide students the tools and vision they need to know what to do to succeed and build confidence in their ability to learn and thrive as a student and graduate.

- Engagement
 - Through above activities and informally, foster student engagement with program majors and minors
 - Establish strategic regular communication with majors regarding program events and other relevant program information
- Belongingness
 - Through above activities and informally, build and foster a program culture and sense of inclusion and appreciation of diversity within the program
 - Establish strategic messaging to build and foster the academic program as an important component of student identity

Most of these are formal activities, but those in charge of program-level management also have a responsibility to informally support these factors as well. Ultimately, how do universities expect students to invest in their coursework or to feel a sense of belonging or identity with their chosen academic discipline, if they are not consistently exposed to what it means and where it can take them? One organizational response to this question might be for the University to make this part of a formal role undertaken by a willing program-affiliated faculty member – an academic program coordinator.

What:

Academic Program Coordinator Responsibilities

One key component of strategy, and organizational effectiveness, is to have clearly defined roles, including the responsibilities and expectations attached to those roles. The following are a list of roles and attached responsibilities. It is important to keep in mind that some of these responsibilities will form overlapping concentric circles – both within program coordinator responsibilities and with responsibilities of other important roles on campus (e.g. Recruitment & Retention advisors, faculty advisors, Director of Corporate Relations & Community Development). Also, the Academic Program Coordinator is the *coordinator* of these activities – meaning that their role is strongly a planning and organization role that will require contributions from other relevant university personnel.

- Recruitment
 - Community outreach
 - Meeting with high schools and other important educational institutions (e.g. tribal colleges, technical colleges)
 - Prospective student meetings and events
 - Preview days
 - One-on-ones with prospective students
 - Existing agencies, companies, organizations – who might have prospective students
- Marketing & communication (internal and external)
 - External
 - Meeting and networking with agencies, businesses, and other stakeholders most closely aligned with the academic program
 - Program webpage and social media presence

- Internal
 - Regular communication with program majors and minors
 - Beginning of semester welcome and important information
 - Midterm welcome and important information
 - End of semester welcome and important information
 - Registration information
 - Professional opportunities – conferences and research, volunteering, internships, jobs, graduate school
 - Other important program-level information
 - Communication with prospective students
 - Preview day / prospective student meeting follow-up email
 - Regular communication with program faculty
 - Recruitment and meeting with current and prospective faculty
 - Updates for School and College meetings
 - Establish and maintain program alumni engagement
- Coordinate events and Social Life
 - Program orientation
 - Group registration for program majors
 - Program-relevant speakers or professional workshops
 - Cultural education opportunities
 - Program graduation celebration
- Coordinate program assessment and evaluation
 - Summative evaluation – Exit Exams, Exit Surveys, Exit Interviews, Portfolios, etc.
 - Annual LEAP report
 - 7-Year SDBOR program evaluation
 - Pursuing, maintaining, and marketing accreditations
- Curriculum/course management & development
 - Assisting School Chair in scheduling courses
 - Reviewing and aligning curriculum with contemporary needs (e.g. established discipline standards, program-related employers from local to national levels, graduate programs)
 - Reviewing and updating articulation agreements

Anticipated Challenges

The following represent foreseeable challenges of implementing more strategic academic program management via establishing the role of program coordinators. The most significant challenge is likely resources, so this is listed last followed by a more extensive discussion of mitigating this barrier.

- Challenge 1: Factors external to the institution also affect academic and social integration – e.g. student college readiness.
 - Addressing this challenge: Academic program coordinators need good information about who the students in their program are, including identifying first generation students. This will help the program coordinator to have more meaningful and effective messaging

and interactions, especially when having informal interactions with students who may have more barriers to academic and social integration.

- Challenge 2: Cultural competence is a challenge in the sense that we need to foster / recognize existing cultural diversity of students while also connecting them with BHSU culture. We never expect students to drop their culture at the door, but instead need to find ways to foster aspects of their identity outside of their student identity.
 - Addressing this challenge: Connecting students with cultural resources and finding ways to communicate the value of diversity and to celebrate student diversity.

- Challenge 3: Resources – how do we provide necessary resources to make this happen? Effective academic program management requires this role be formalized and supported. Given preexisting constraints of university resources, this will be challenging.
 - Addressing this challenge may be achieved via one or a combination of these strategies:
 - Course release: Ideally, providing a reduction in teaching load during both semesters would assist a faculty member in performing some of these duties.
 - Summer stipend: Another way to support a program coordinator is to offer a summer stipend for program management / development. Ideally, this stipend would support program planning activities in order to establish a timeline and set up program activities over the upcoming academic year.
 - Chair as program coordinator: Adjust School Chair course load or summer responsibilities in order to increase academic program management role.
 - Sub-optimize: Review and revise program coordinator responsibilities to a sub-optimal set of responsibilities and then support these with appropriately adjusted support. This process may entail ranking program management responsibilities according to their effect on achieving academic and social integration and then selecting those that are identified as most effective to include in a scaled-back version of the program coordinator role.