



S.T.E.P.S to Retention

OZARKA COLLEGE

SPRING 2011

The Road to Success By: Ron Helm



The Ozarka College Career Pathways staff may assist the eligible student in locating the Highway of Success. The eligible student is given directions to overcome the barriers, road

blocks, and detours that often discourage success. The student may be place bound and need assistance with tuition, fees, books, child care, rising fuel costs, counseling, resumes, and other services. Confidence building is a critical and essential element to

the student's survival at Ozarka College. The Career Pathways team will enable the student to reach for the dream that is just around the next curve and to visualize the possibilities that lie ahead.

S.T.E.P.S to Retention: Career Pathways



Ozarka College Career Pathways Staff

Career Pathways provides various types of assistance to students leading to improved retention at Ozarka College. Ron Helm, Vice President for Student Services at Ozarka College, mentioned how Career Pathways students receive assistance with child care, fuel costs, books, and resumes. Beyond just the assistance, it takes a dedicated Career Pathways staff to truly make the connections with students in the Career Pathways program. Kim Lovelace, the Director of Career Pathways at Ozarka College, mentions that creating relationships with students is one of the main factors in Career Pathways retention. She says, "Once they start feeling comfortable with us, they come back when they need something."

Tracy Cone, Kendra Smith, and Charlotte Knox are the other members of the Career Pathways staff. Each member is dedicated to helping students succeed in school and pursue successful careers after completing

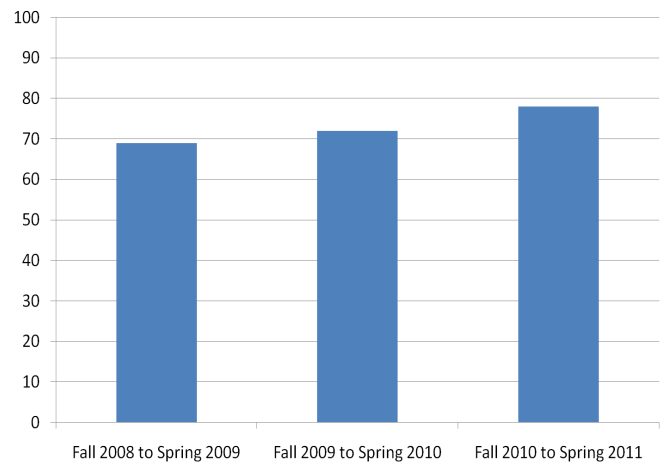
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their courses at Ozarka College. Career Pathways provides services at all four Ozarka locations. Beyond the services already mentioned, Career Pathways also provides conferences and workshops for students. Career Pathways provided an Employability Conference to Culinary and Health Information Management students during February 2011. This conference allowed students to learn about job opportunities, employability skills, and interview skills. Career Pathways provided TEAS Prep Workshops during March 2011 to help prospective nursing students prepare for their upcoming TEAS Test, which is one of the requirements for the LPN program at Ozarka College. These workshops were held at all four Ozarka locations. Career Pathways also works with TRIO to provide a Student Conference each semester and assisted the Student Success Center in providing an Allied Health Programs Workshop during March 2011.

The efforts of the Career Pathways staff show up in the retention data. In viewing the retention rates for the past three academic years, there has been an increase each year. The Fall 2008 to Spring 2009 retention rate was 69%. The Fall 2009 to Spring 2010 retention rate was higher at 72%. The Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 retention rate increased up to 78%. The chart at the end of the article shows this increase.

Kim Lovelace, Tracy Cone, Kendra Smith, and Charlotte Knox provide great examples of dedication and service to Ozarka College through the assistance they provide to students. However, as Kim Lovelace stated, it is the "relationships with students," that is key in retention.

Career Pathways Retention Rates



At-Risk Students

Laura Saret mentions several characteristics of community college students at risk of not earning a degree in an article titled, "Retaining Students in Classes: Putting Theory into Everyday Practice." The characteristics she lists include the following.

- Delayed postsecondary enrollment
- Part-time enrollment
- Full-time or significant employment
- Low commitment (e.g., only in college because parents want them to be or being in college is better than working) and no real intention to persist
- Low ability or underprepared
- First-generation college student
- High school dropout or GED recipient
- Friends attend other schools
- Family problems
- Lack of encouragement from family and/or peers
- Having dependents other than spouse
- Single-parent status
- Emotional and/or personal problems including substance abuse
- Lack of institutional/student fit and involvement
- Absence of significant interaction with faculty and other members of the college community
- Transportation issues
- Financial independence and/or financial issues

In what ways do we approach students who are considered to be at risk? Career Pathways, the Student Success Center, and TRIO provide services to such students. We also have an Early Alert program to target students who are struggling early in the semester. However, many students are at risk even before that first early alert is sent. Laura Saret mentions that "Most students decide whether to continue enrollment within the first 6-8 weeks of their first semester." Often, we need to contact advisees within those first 2-3 weeks of the semester to see how things are going and to offer our support.

References:

Saret, Laura, "Retaining Students in Classes, Putting Theory into Everyday Practice." www.oakton.edu/user/1/lsaret