

Report of the President’s Task Force on First-Year Retention
“Strengthening a Culture of Attention”
Spring 2024

Dashboard

Longwood’s 8-year retention trend of first-year students

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
79%	80%	75%	75%	79%	73%	76%	78%

National average 2021 for full-time, first-year students: 76%

Peer group average 2021 for full-time, first-year students: 71%

Takeaways

- The recommendation of the Task Force is to increase the rate of first-year retention by one percent annually, requiring the retention of about a dozen additional first-year students each year.
- Metrics show that the university is successful in serving the students we admit. We believe there are practical steps that can help us build on this core strength. With focused effort, it is possible improve retention rates for a student body that fits our current academic profile.
- While the university has a strong foundation in place to tackle retention directly, being more intentional and coordinated in our efforts is critical to achieving desired retention increases.
- Academic performance is the core reason that first-year students do not return for the second year. Community belonging is also a very important factor.
- This report makes a series of recommendations to boost the retention rate incrementally and intentionally. This report also highlights existing work that aligns with the recommendations.

Recommendations

HELP STUDENTS START and STAY STRONG

Establish retention coordinators for each college

Engage with students in the summer before matriculation by broadening the models that have been effective for CHC, Exploratory Studies, Nursing and Athletics. Serve as point of contact for families.

Focus on exceptional advising of first-year students

Establish a more uniform vision and expectations for students and advisors. Assess advising outcomes. Provide tools and development for advisors that go beyond registering for classes. Establish contact and check-ins very early in the term.

Use data intentionally to inform strategies on retention

Support department-level retention dashboards (including tracking of D/F/W rates) to inform revising policies and practices (curriculum sequencies, course design, etc.).

IMPROVE the ACADEMIC TRANSITION and SUPPORT STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE

Identify students in difficulty and intervene quickly

Enhance communication between instructors and staff who intervene, leveraging the Retention Coordinator's existing relationships with students. Conduct status-checks for first-year students in Week 4 or 5. Simplify the sharing of information among all points of contact: instructors, Care Team, Student Success, Housing. Assist students with academic recovery plans in their second semester as needed.

Review administrative policies and practices for unintended consequences

Conduct annual review and updating of policies and practices to ensure that they do not have an unintentional negative impact on retention. Offer clear and effective messaging to students and families about academic standing and academic recovery. Offer directed guidance to students through the suspension appeal process. Follow-up with students not in good standing.

FACILITATE STUDENT BELONGING

Focus attention on first-year student belonging and transition to college

Plan and assess initiatives at the departmental level, including course selection designed to promote academic success in the first semester. Plan and assess efforts in the months before matriculation through First-Year Experience and New Lancer Days. Assess Coaching Groups and coordinate with other key areas. Plan and assess programs within Student Affairs, including Greek Life and RA development.

Improve messaging and campus training on mental health concerns

Equip faculty to identify and appropriately support student's mental health struggles (e.g. asking questions, flagging appropriate students, referring to appropriate resources).

Philanthropy

Coordinate efforts with the Office of Grants and University Advancement to seek external funding for initiatives to support retention. Ensure requests align with university strategies and are scalable to our student population.