

A Eureka Moment: The "DFW" Solution

Acadeum Case Study

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CIC Online Course Sharing Consortium



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Introduction

Eureka College is perhaps best known as the alma mater of President Ronald Reagan. It has also long been known for its innovations in learning, service, and leadership.

The college was the third institution in the country to admit men and women on an equal basis, is a pioneer in transforming the general education curriculum, and has graduated more than 40 college and university presidents, as well as several governors and members of Congress.

But what Eureka was not known for was having an especially active campus during the summer. *"Most students have to go home and work during those months,"* says Ann Fulop, provost and dean of Eureka College. *"We are located in a small rural town in Illinois, and there aren't many jobs to support all those college students."*

For a school committed to increasing the retention rates of its students, this was a problem. Summer is an ideal time for struggling students to get ahead or make up lost ground.

Officials at Eureka knew online courses could help, but the institution has long believed its success as a small college is rooted in its face-to-face instruction and that, on the whole, its students are best served by a commitment to those in-person experiences. The institution also knew, however, that it needed a way to help some of its students get back on track.

Challenge: Poor Grades (Low Retention)

Students on academic probation or suspension typically struggled to return to Eureka. Often students who received a D or an F or withdrew (DFW) from a course found themselves in academic trouble heading into the summer. When they returned home, still needing to earn an important credit, their only realistic option was to retake a course at a community college.

Unfortunately, because those courses are not reviewed by Eureka faculty, they count only as transfer credit and not toward students' grade point averages, preventing them from improving their academic standing.

Poor grades place students in a real bind. It takes three good grades to offset one poor grade's negative impact on a GPA, and while most institutions allow students to retake courses at their own institution, these courses may not be offered frequently or conveniently. Accordingly, in the words of Eureka's President Jamel Wright, students with poor grades *"are often unable to do anything about them and are caught in a cycle of perpetual probation."*



The "DFW" Solution

What Eureka needed was access to additional courses whose quality could be assured by the Eureka faculty, and it found these courses within the consortium model supported by Acadeum.

Here Eureka was able to access hundreds of online course options from aligned institutions that could be selected and vetted by its faculty. Armed with these options, Eureka began in the Summer of 2018 to offer a variety of 100- and 200-level online courses to its students, and in particular, courses with high failure and withdrawal rates — DFW courses — that could be used for grade replacement.

Focusing on these courses, Eureka targeted students in academic trouble. Indeed, in the very act of placing a student on probation or suspension, the registrar's office began telling students the specific courses they should take and what grades they needed to regain good academic standing.

Importantly, faculty had complete control over the courses offered, which allowed the credits to be offered for Eureka College credit under the consortium model.

"The process was an easy one," Fulop says. "It did not require anything new from our IT folks, and we were able to work the offerings into our normal student registration system. The whole process was streamlined as much as possible."

Results

Over the past two summers – 2018 and 2019 – The DFW solution helped **35 of 43 students (81%) work their way back to good academic standing by the following Fall semester.** At a more granular level, the DFW solution alone **increased freshman retention in the Fall of 2019 by 6.5%.**

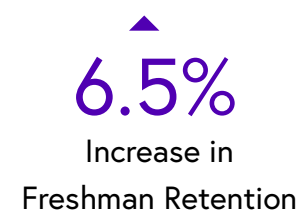
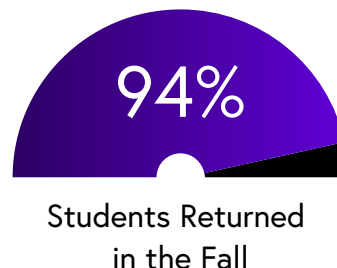
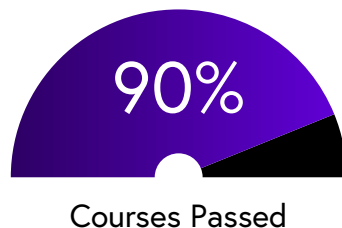
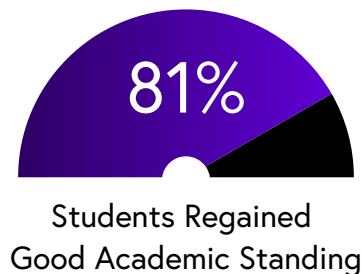
In addition, Eureka offered vetted online options to its other students to make progress, and reduce course conflicts and scheduling pressures in the upcoming school year.

Lastly, Eureka faculty also began intervening at midterm of the preceding Spring term to counsel students to withdraw from courses they were failing.

Naturally, some students were hesitant to withdraw, but with Eureka's new summer courses, advisors found that it was easier to encourage students to avoid a poor grade and make up the course during the summer.

"If you don't think you can get this grade to passing," as one faculty member put it, "bring your other grades up in your other four courses, and take this course over the summer. You'll still be on pace to graduate in 4 years."

All told, in the summer of 2019, **87 students took 138 summer online courses, students earned passing grades in 90% of the courses (124), and 94% of the students (82) returned in the Fall of 2019.**



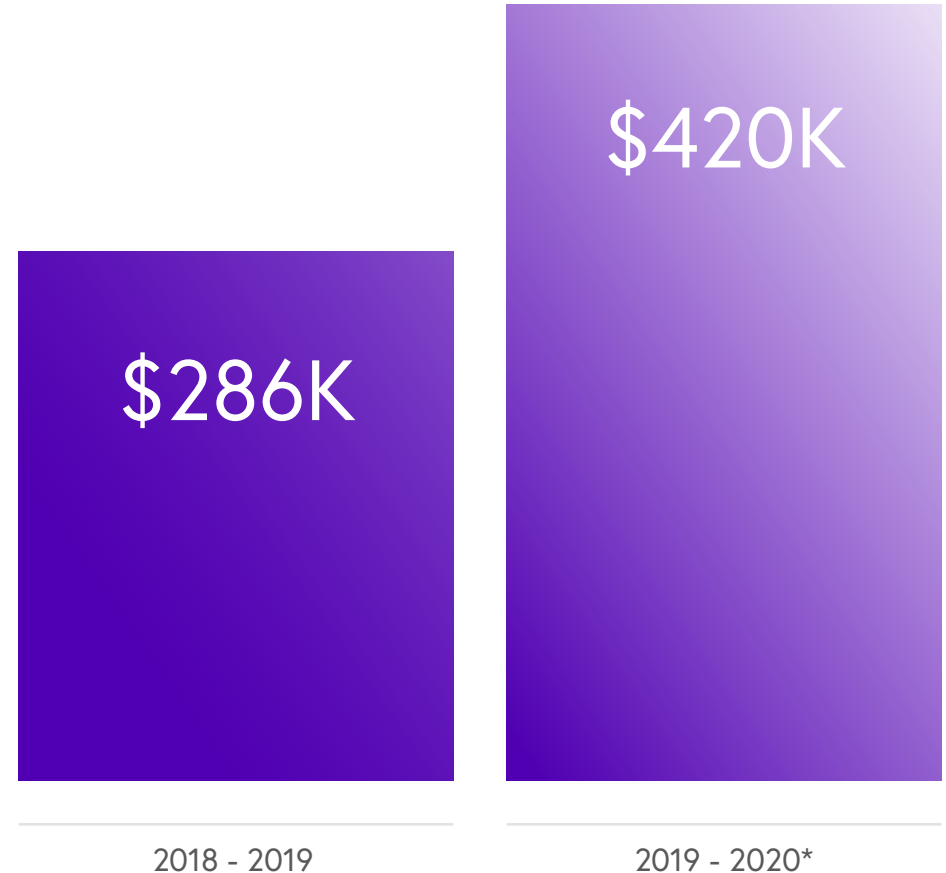
Overall Financial Benefit

Based on its inaugural success with the DFW solution in the Summer of 2018, Eureka repeated the strategy during the 2018 Winter intersession and the Summer of 2019.

For the 2018-2019 academic year, Eureka added \$285,797 to the bottom line through the revenue-share it earned on the courses it used and the retained students it kept through the DFW solution.

This year, Eureka is on track to add \$419,694 to its budget for the 2019-2020 academic year.

"We are happy for our students, but we're also happy it's a financial win," Fulop says. "We are helping students get back on track. We are helping more students to keep pace for graduation. The summer online courses seem to be the right tools at the right time."



*Projected revenue for Eureka from students taking courses via the Acadeum platform.

The Eureka Moment

Commitment to a Second Chance

Like many colleges and universities, Eureka College prides itself on the support it provides to its students. Leveraging an intimate campus and a tight community, faculty see students every day (or at least every other day) and advise them regularly. It's very easy to pull students aside, and at least one of the members of Eureka's campus retention committee will know each student personally.

Yet what most distinguishes Eureka's student support is its commitment to second chances and student progress. The DFW solution perfectly articulates that commitment. Even when placing a student on probation or suspension, Eureka shows that student a way back. In this way, Eureka heeds the call of legendary scholar and academic leader Vincent Tinto that *"Access is not enough."* In admitting a student, Eureka commits to his or her success — even if it takes a second chance. As one faculty member put it, *"So you got a D or an F; it's not the end of the world, try again."*

To learn more about the DFW solution or other Acadeum solutions for supporting student progress, contact:

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