

CIC Workshop for Deans and AVPs
Guide to Making Tough Choices
Case Study: Retention

As part of the new university strategic plan, student achievement is a key initiative, with a primary focus on retention. The focus on retention is linked to enhancing student outcomes, improving social mobility for students, and there are also clear budget implications as tuition, fees, and room and board from returning students making up the largest component of the university's revenue base.

As part of the retention initiative, Typical CIC University (TCU) has developed a robust data infrastructure to look at retention across schools, programs, down to the course level, and across student characteristics. This data is available to all deans, associate deans, department chairs and program directors. In your role as AVP or dean, you have responsibility for retention outcomes at the university. At the next Board meeting, you are scheduled for a presentation on the strategies being implemented to increase retention rates.

The retention data of the past several cycles shows some clear patterns. In particular, the DFW rate is clearly important for retention outcomes. Students who receive a D, F, or W in any class are less likely to be retained than students who receive no DFWs. In addition, high DFW rates are concentrated in specific classes and in specific schools. You meet with the department chairs in the departments with high DFW rates to discuss strategies for supporting students and addressing the high DFW rates.

The department chairs are not alarmed by the high DFW rates. They believe that the DFW rates are consistent with historical norms both within the department and nationally for these courses. In addition, from their perspective, students are coming to the university less prepared, so it is not surprising that DFW rates are high, but there is not much that faculty can do to address this. The department chairs agree completely that high DFW rates negatively impact retention, but they also do not see it as their problem to address.

- 1) What strategies can you use to help department chairs see this from a different angle?
- 2) How are the strategies different for a Dean or for an AVP?
- 3) How can you leverage relationships across campus in moving this initiative forward?
- 4) How do you begin developing and implementing strategies if the department chairs are not on board?
- 5) What help might you request in this situation and from whom?