



The Council of
Independent Colleges

Building Places
of Promise:
Unlocking
Student
Success

2025 Institute for Chief Academics Officers with
Chief Student Affairs Officers and Chief Student Success Officers
November 1–4, 2025 📍 JW Marriott, Indianapolis, IN

Retention Revolution: No More Silos!



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Building Places of Promise:
Unlocking Student Success

Presenters

- **Karlyn Crowley**, Provost, Ohio Wesleyan University
- **Kristin Flora**, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College, Franklin College (IN)
- **Andrew Jones**, Vice President for Student Development and Dean of Students, Franklin College (IN)
- **Dwayne Todd**, Vice President for Student Engagement and Success; Dean of Students; Title IX Coordinator, Ohio Wesleyan University
- Chair: **Laura Lowe Furge**, Provost, Muhlenberg College (PA)



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Building Places of Promise:
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Retention Revolution

No More Silos!

Ohio Wesleyan University

- Karlyn Crowley, Provost
- Dwayne Todd, VP Student Engagement & Success

Franklin College

- Kristin Flora, VPAA; Dean of College
- Andrew Jones, VPSD; Dean of Students





Three Legs of Retention Success:

- Academic Stability
- Financial Stability
- Psychosocial Stability



'All Hands on Deck' for Retention

Ohio Wesleyan is seeing its highest retention numbers in more than a decade, thanks to student success from multiple angles.

By Colleen Flaherty



Students talk on a panel at Ohio Wesleyan University's Connection Conference, focused on careers, internships and more.

Paul Vernon/Ohio Wesleyan University

Retention Results

- 8.0% increase in overall retention since 2017
- 6.1% increase in overall retention in last 5 years
- 9.6% increase in first-gen retention since 2021
- 9.3% increase in Pell-eligible retention since 2020
- 11% increase in students persisting to 4th year between 2018-2021

Cross-Functional Teams



THE HOW

- **Joint leadership:** Academic Affairs & Student Affairs
- **Shared responsibility** for retention efforts
 - Faculty commitment
 - Bishop Belonging initiative
- **Cross-divisional teams** work on topics (Credo)
 - Clearance
 - Holistic Advising
 - Academic Support
 - Student Employment
 - First-Year Experience
- **Core Curriculum reform:** OWU Connection

Academic Stability



- **Faculty Handbook Revision**=Student Success
- **New first-year seminar** from Gen-Ed reform
- **New Smith Center for Faculty Excellence:** DFW rates, Executive Function, First-gen, AI
- **Dismissal:** academic dismissal process revision; rewrote all student messages including dismissal
- **New Holistic advising** + peer advising
- **Red flag warnings** from faculty (Starfish)
- **New Summer block** scheduling
- **New Academic recovery** courses now required
- **Bishop ACCESS** program expansion

Psychosocial Stability



- **Camp Oh-Wooo** relationship before content
- **Bridge** program
- **Dean of Student Services** role
- **CARIT:** Care & Retention Intervention Team
- **Formal first-gen program** + staffing
- Renovated **first-year housing** complex
- Enhance **student engagement** + belonging (1842 Social Hub)

Student Involvement Dashboard

Academic Term

SPRING

Academic Year

2023

Gender

All

Ethnicity

All

Non U.S. Resident

All

Class Level

Multiple selections

Housing Status

All

Organization Categories

Multiple selections

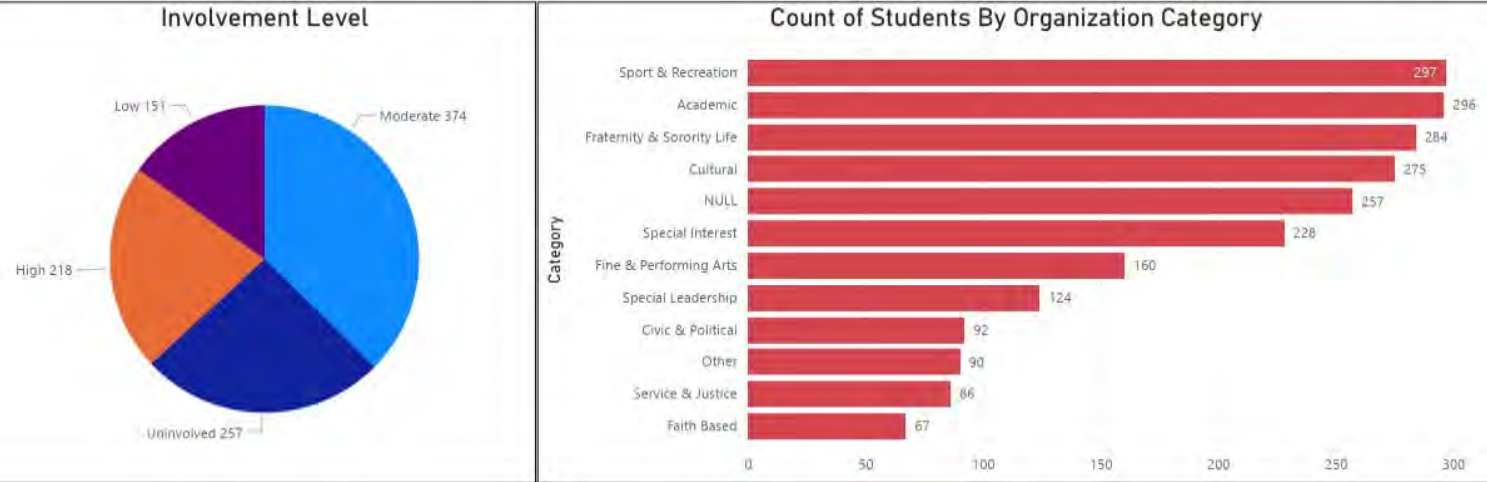
Student Organizations

All

Involvement Level

All

Total Students	Average Credits Taken	Average Overall GPA	Average Number of Orgs Involved In	Number of Students With No Affiliation	Number of Students with Atleast 1 Affiliation
1000	4.22	3.36	2.00	257	743



The 1842 Social Hub

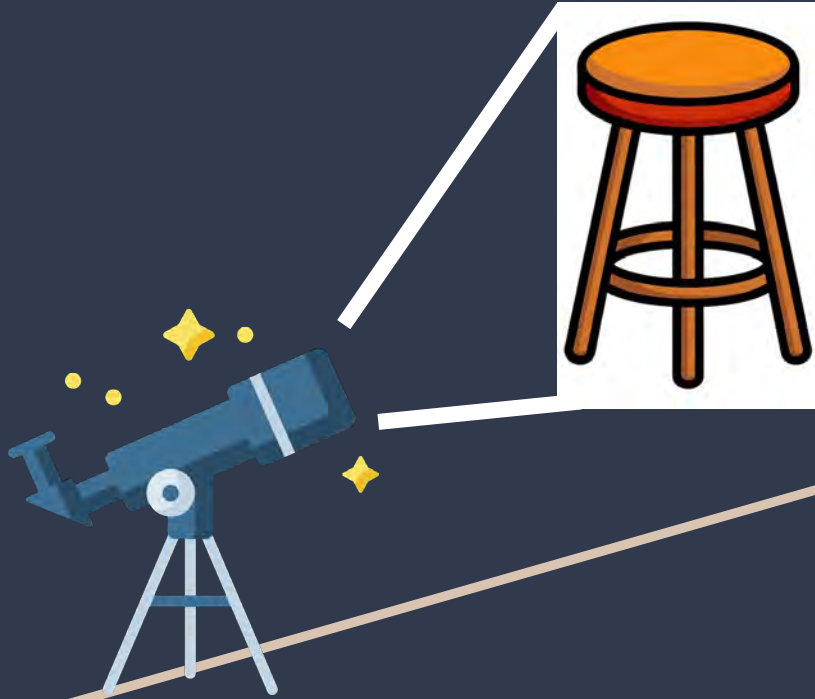


Financial Stability



- **Clearance** case management
- **Policy review** and revisions
- **Reduced packaging gaps**
- **Paper bills** sent home
- **Emergency grants:** unforeseen circumstances

Future Efforts



- Revamping **student employment**
- **New library**: “arts-infused learning commons”
- **New social hub** 1842 opens
- **International recruitment strategy** revision
- **Expansion of wellness initiatives**- financial
- Structured pathway for **undecided students**
- Further exploration of “**critical middle**”



Cross-Functional Efforts

- Retention as a shared AA and SD responsibility
 - Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
 - Associate Dean for Student Success
 - Retention Team
 - Pursuit of Grants
- Evolving structures and processes
 - Barrier to Success Team
 - Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT)

Academic Stability

- ASC 080
 - HS GPA 2.8 automatically added to fall schedule
 - Midterm 'just in time' enrollment in 8-week version of the course
 - Those on academic probation after fall semester automatically enrolled for spring
 - $\frac{2}{3}$ of enrolled students in good standing and eligible to continue
- NetVUE
 - Grants permitted us to expand professional development opportunities to invite athletics and student development staff into conversations about academic advising.
- First Year Advising

First Year Advising Data (NSSE) – First Year FC students scored **significantly higher** than peers at National Private Liberal Arts institutions on the following:

 - Reaching out to students about academic progress (2.8 vs. 2.3)
 - Following up with students about resources (2.8 vs. 2.5)
 - Connecting students with co-curricular activities (3.1 vs. 2.7)
 - Supporting student wellness and mental health (3.0 vs. 2.6)

Psychosocial Stability



- First 50 – signature program that promotes 50 activities in the first 50 days of the semester to better connect first year students to campus groups and programs
- EdSights chatbot
 - Uses framework by renowned scholar Dr. Vincent Tinto to proactively reach out to all students on matters related to finances, academic support and preparedness, and psychosocial needs
 - **77% of students flagged for follow-up in the fall semester persisted into spring, while 23% did not persist.**

Psychosocial Stability

★ Badges (1)

**1**

First Fifty

Attend at least 10 events during the first 50 days of classes to earn the Franklin First 50 badge.

[User Badge](#)**71**

Users with this badge

97% Opt-In

97% of students on the platform are opted into receiving texts from Griz 🐻

66% Engagement

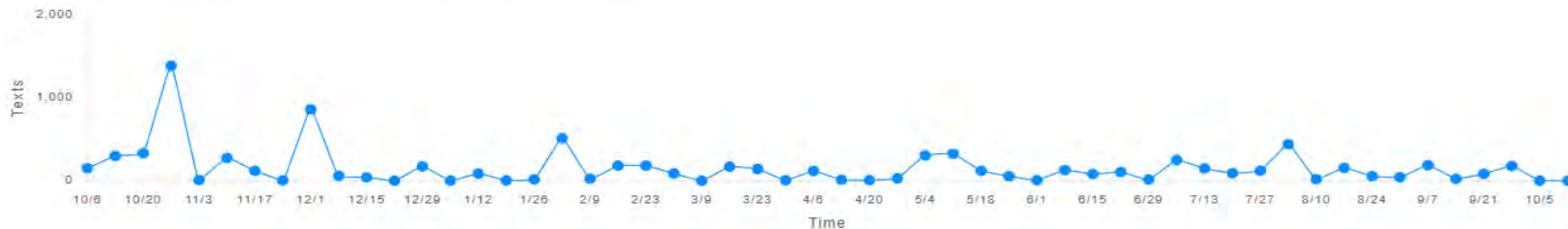
66% of students are actively engaged and texting Griz 🐻

8236 Texts Received

8236 student texts received in the last 12 months or since launching 🐻

Engagement over Time

The number of student texts received over the last 12 months or since launching.



Financial Stability

- Books on Beds
- Textbook grant program
- 21st century scholars
- Greek Life
Emergency Fund
- Tri Kappa Awards

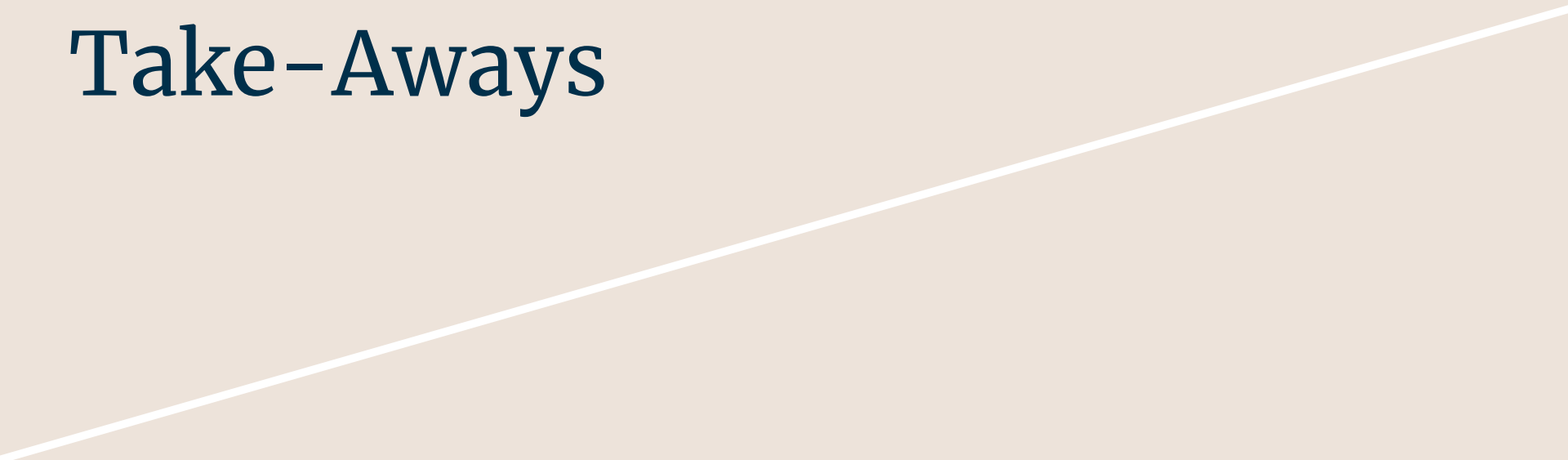
Future Efforts

- With a high percentage of student athletes, how can we better handle 'retirements'?
- Can we develop resources – like a dashboard -- to support data driven decisions?
- Can we expand efforts beyond Academic Affairs and Student Development?

Discussion Questions:

- What difficult conversations need to happen to shift the culture of your campus regarding student retention?
- Which strategies or activities have you heard about that would be low-hanging fruit on your campus?
- Which strategies or activities have you heard about that would be harder to implement, but valuable on your campus?
- What are your campuses strengths (personnel, resources, etc.) to leverage related to retention initiatives?
- What partnerships do you need to cultivate in order to make retention a cross-campus effort?
- How do you assess retention initiatives to know where to allocate limited resources?

Take-Aways



Take-Aways

- Make support mandatory (structure is important)
- Treat bureaucracy as retention work
- Relationships and mentors matter
- Communication is key
- Jobs are learning labs
- Faculty Development=retention frontier
- Radical Hospitality is student-centered
- Working the same will fail

Take-Aways

- Collaboration and partnerships create opportunity for innovation
- Retention is everyone's job; accountability is someone's job
- Pursue external and creative funding to enhance student support
- Assessment allows you to know where to allocate limited resources and energy

Q&A



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**Thank you for attending
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See Guidebook for resources



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