

2. Institutional Change (Cultural Transformation)

Shani P. Wilfred, Theresa J. Grove

Shani P. Wilfred

Theresa J. Grove

When facing adversity at the institutional level, many faculty find it hard to be innovative and optimistic, which can hinder the institutional transformation that is needed to adapt to changes in the higher education landscape. The challenges facing Valdosta State University (VSU) are not unique to comprehensive universities; through our self-reflections our goal is to become more responsive and adaptive to future challenges, and by sharing our experiences we hope that other institutions can learn from our past. This case study provides an overview of the cultural transformation that is taking place at an institution to build momentum toward student success, stakeholder buy-in, identity development, and a plan for continued growth.

2.1. A L L E Y L A T H

Periods of upheaval can lead to low morale and reduced buy-in from stakeholders, which can adversely affect a university's ability to move forward. In the fall of 2015, VSU experienced administrative turnover, budget reductions, reduction in force, and low retention rates. As a result, a task force composed of faculty, staff, and administrators from units across the institution was commissioned by the interim president to develop ideas that would increase student success as measured by retention and graduation rates. While this task force pursued change in a variety of areas including advising, pedagogy and curriculum, and student support services, which had the potential to transform institutional culture, under the leadership of a second interim president only the top three options were pursued: enhance the existing student support portal, transition to a professional advisor model, and participate in the Gateways to Completion (G2C) initiative, which is the focus of this case study.

The task force, with some input from departments, identified large enrollment courses with relatively high DFWI rates to participate in G2C because of the potential to positively impact a large number of students. Several courses with the highest DFWI rates were excluded because the large enrollment criterion was not met; all the selected courses were part of the required Core Curriculum and taught by disciplines in the College of Arts and Sciences. Unfortunately, a rumor spread that this college was being targeted because it was primarily responsible for VSU's low retention rate, which then created the challenge of obtaining and/or sustaining buy-in of the stakeholders who were being asked to participate in G2C.

This problem created the incentive that led to numerous opportunities for the G2C liaisons to interact directly with stakeholders to clarify the focus of the G2C initiative, which facilitated the growth of a culture of collaboration between faculty, administrators, and the G2C liaisons. It also presented opportunities for the G2C liaisons to interact with other local and national G2C liaisons (both faculty and administrators), members of the University System of Georgia leadership team, and the founder and staff of the Gardner Institute. These interactions were invaluable in helping the VSU G2C liaisons identify problems and then develop and implement plausible solutions. As a result, five courses from five separate disciplines were redesigned by nine faculty. These faculty worked with the G2C liaisons to

Campus Engagement

G2C has expanded its campus engagement through the participation of one of the G2C liaisons on the Student Success Council and the Faculty Success Council. These councils, which are designed to address issues related to the success of students and faculty, respectively, are composed of leadership and stakeholders from units across the institution and are able to address issues and opportunities at VSU. Serving on these councils ensures that innovations, comments, and concerns generated by the G2C course committee chairs or the steering committee are brought to the attention of the councils and are also taken into account by the councils as they develop and implement solutions.

Assessment

In the fall of 2018, the membership of the G2C steering committee was expanded to include members outside of Academic Affairs and was given the charge to identify the G2C course strategies and innovations that were working and that could be applied to all courses at VSU. This resulted in a renewed focus on how curriculum and pedagogy were assessed at VSU. In collaboration with the Director of Instructional Effectiveness and the Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Services, the G2C liaisons revised the existing Core Curriculum assessment plan and report templates so that they can be used to assess pedagogical and curriculum innovation in any course at VSU, and as such they are a potential springboard for the development of a multi-purpose data and assessment repository for institutional-related reporting. These revised forms will be piloted, revised, and fully implemented as a part of related general education revisions at VSU. 0 y oge sp y SU.

