

THE SMART APPROACH

TO CAMPUSWIDE STUDENT SUCCESS



Taking a smart approach

Every office on a college campus can contribute to helping students succeed. With the proper tools, you can have an impact on your students by using each point of contact as an opportunity to offer support and promote success.

As Missouri strives to reach 60 percent of working-age adults with a high quality postsecondary credential, the Missouri Department of Higher Education works with colleges across Missouri to educate students on borrowing wisely, completing their program of study, and repaying their student loans. Objectives include increasing the awareness of financing options for postsecondary education, reducing debt among students and parents, increasing student retention, reducing loan defaults, and enhancing students' knowledge about their personal finances. By taking a smart approach to retention and default prevention, we can help put students on the right financial path through college and well into their futures.

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Admissions office

The admissions office is often the initial source of information for potential students. To help inform prospective students, admissions staff can:

- Supplement recruiting and marketing literature with personal finance and debt minimization materials. For instance, it may be helpful to work with the financial aid office to provide a suggested financial plan for completing the entire program of study, including potential post-graduation earnings and budget examples for student loan repayment. You may find the Missouri Department of Higher Education’s “Planning for Financial Success” calendar a helpful tool. Recommended Missouri Department of Higher Education publications are listed on page 11.
- Evaluate admission standards in comparison to student retention rates to measure their effectiveness. Network with other institutional offices to review retention data, such as withdrawal rates and reasons for withdrawal, to develop strategies for improving retention. Revise admission standards if necessary.
- Encourage students and families to plan for a career and a future, not just the first year or term. Work with the career services office to ensure incoming students are familiar with campus resources for planning a career and finding employment.
- As prospective students seek out their best fit for college, make sure your office is clearly communicating available campus resources. Vulnerable students may need to know if your school offers an on-campus food pantry, peer counselors, an inclusivity or diversity office, or student success office. Student success on campus is often dependent on academic, financial, and social factors. Help students assess if your school will be the best fit for them.

Financial aid office

The financial aid office is an expansive source of information and support for debt minimization and default prevention. To assist with student success before, during and after program completion, financial aid staff can:

- Work closely with the Missouri Department of Higher Education and the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that financial aid staff are fully educated regarding best practices in debt minimization. The Missouri Department of Higher Education employs two full-time staff members who are accredited financial counselors through AFCPE®. They can assist schools in establishing student success programs and services.
- Consider changes to aid packaging formulas for an emphasis on grants, scholarships and part-time employment to help reduce student debt. Determine your high-risk populations. Provide materials that will encourage students to seek gift aid rather than loans, and educate students and their families about student loan responsibilities.
- Communicate with admissions, instructional, and program development staff to ensure that admitted and enrolled students have the ability to complete their educational programs. Cooperate with the other administrative offices on campus to ensure timely completion of deferment requests, enrollment histories and skip-tracing requests.
- Utilize Missouri Department of Higher Education publications and services. A list of suggested publications is on page 11 and may be ordered free of charge. A new line up of student success services has been developed based on the best practices and successful outcomes experienced by colleges that participated in Missouri's Default Prevention Grant program during the years 2001 through 2018. Some of the goals of these services include being student focused, contributing to increased college persistence and attainment, and helping students make wise financial choices, such as minimizing student loan debt. Visit dhe.mo.gov/success_services.php to access a variety of borrower notification templates and forms.

Business office

The business office plays an important role in student success and debt minimization. To help prospective and current students become more fiscally responsible, business office staff can:

- Evaluate billing and tuition policies to ensure that admitted students have the ability to make payments in conjunction with federal and state student financial aid regulations and policies. Consider allowing students to pay charges not covered by federal or state aid in installments.
- Work with the financial aid office to facilitate students' understanding of their loan responsibilities. When sending loan refunds, provide information on how to return unneeded funds and the benefits of reducing their loan balance. Also consider providing students with an annual debt notice, along with a repayment chart. Templates for return of funds and debt notices are available by simply completing the form at dhe.mo.gov/success_services.php. A sample repayment chart is available on the Success Services webpage and in the Missouri Department of Higher Education's "Planning for Financial Success" publication (page 22).
- Consider modifying institutional policies regarding the disclosure of student directory information to credit card companies to help prevent students from accumulating credit card debt. Students with high credit card debt are more likely to have problems repaying their student loans.
- Provide instructions for accessing students' loan history from NSLDS using the student's same FSA ID they used to complete the FAFSA. Direct students to the financial aid office for any questions they may have about their student aid.

Advising office

Advising staff are critical to student success. Studies show that program completion is one of the most important components of preventing student loan default. To present a logical course plan leading to timely program completion, advising office staff can:

- Provide good, sound advice to students who are considering a challenging program or course load. Do not overestimate a student's ability to complete a program of study or heavy course load. Refer struggling freshmen to the first-year experience office, if available.
- Communicate with the financial aid office if students are having academic problems or are considering withdrawing from the institution.
- Ensure that students are taking the required courses at the right time, so they can complete their programs of study in the prescribed time frame.
- Help students understand transfer options using the Missouri Department of Higher Education's Course Transfer Tracker at <https://journeytocollege.mo.gov/finish/transfer-credit/>.

First-year experience office

First-year experience staff can offer valuable advice on a variety of topics to students who are new to college. If your institution has a first-year experience office, staff can:

- Refer students to appropriate campus services (financial aid, retention, career services, academic advisor, personal counseling, homeless liaison) based on personal interactions with students.
- Familiarize new students with all school resources so they know where to seek help.
- Encourage students to address financial, academic, and personal problems immediately.

Student retention/student services office

Student services and retention staff support students in achieving their educational, personal and professional goals. The student services staff can:

- Establish an office or position to improve student retention and reduce default rates by facilitating coordination between key offices on campus (i.e., financial aid, admissions, the registrar, business office and career services). This office or position may be responsible for monitoring student retention, identifying at-risk student populations, and recommending services or strategies for increasing program completion rates.
- Develop retention-related programs and services, such as a student services referral network or assistance for students experiencing financial or academic difficulties. Recruit professionals from the local business community to act as mentors or role models for interested students. Contact the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Missouri Veterans Commission to develop support services for students who are veterans. Develop a sense of community on campus by coordinating and encouraging student participation in school-sponsored activities and events.
- Provide students with information regarding childcare options in the community or offer childcare services on campus. Create a community resource directory for students with information on other available services.
- Establish a procedure by which faculty notify staff when attendance-related problems occur. This should include notifying the registrar's office, financial aid office, business office, and any student support or retention offices.
- Develop a checklist for students withdrawing from your institution, directing them to financial aid, student transfer, and other appropriate offices. Create an exit questionnaire to determine factors contributing to student withdrawal and obtain input from state or local occupational and educational centers about postsecondary education completion concerns.
- Consider implementing a peer counseling program on your campus. Students often are more likely to seek guidance from a knowledgeable peer.

Career services office

Finding employment completes the education cycle for many students. Assisting exiting students in finding viable employment is a vital component to ensuring future professional success and the ability to repay student loans. The career services staff can:

- Establish an office or position to help students and graduates find employment and to stay abreast of local and national employment trends. Offer job placement services to current, graduating and former students.
- Contact state employment offices for information about employment and training opportunities. Utilize information available from the U.S. Department of Labor (*dol.gov*) and the Missouri Department of Economic Development (*ded.mo.gov*). Take advantage of other resources, such as Missouri Connections (*MissouriConnections.org*). Provide available information to prospective, current, graduating and former students.
- Facilitate professional internships within the local business community, including federal and state agencies. Consider offering reduced tuition rates for employees of participating businesses. Network with the local chamber of commerce and similar organizations.
- Help students understand the 8 percent rule when it comes to borrowing student loans. It is suggested that a student's loan payment not be more than 8 percent of their monthly gross income. Assist them in ascertaining possible starting and median salaries for their planned career and region, and compare to their estimated loan payment.

Instructional/program development office

Quality programs encourage student enrichment and academic success. The instructional and program development office may have a significant impact on student retention and debt management. The program development staff can:

- Ensure courses needed to complete programs of study are offered at the right time and in the right sequence. Too often, required courses are not available to students due to scheduling conflicts.
- Consider the needs of current students before changing program curricula or graduation requirements. Provide a means for current students to complete the program of study, such as “grandfathering” these students for graduation. When changes are made, be sure to publicize the new program completion requirements to all offices on campus, including the financial aid office, admissions office, and student retention or student services office.
- Add personal finance classes to the curriculum. Distribute the Missouri Department of Higher Education’s “Planning for Financial Success” calendar or other materials during the class. Invite a guest speaker to teach a lesson on personal finance. To request a speaker from the Missouri Department of Higher Education, complete the online Speaking Event form (dhe.mo.gov/success_services.php). Consider requiring successful completion of the course for graduation. For a list of the Missouri Department of Higher Education’s recommended publications, see page 11.
- Corequisite Remediation, Math Pathways, CORE 42, 15 to Finish, Missouri Reverse Transfer (MRT), and Dual Credit are initiatives Missouri Department of Higher Education has developed to promote student retention and degree completion. These programs were created to operate in the best interests of the student. Specific courses shall transfer one-to-one, fulfill major and graduation requirements, and ensure there are no “lost” or “wasted” credits. For more information on these initiatives visit dhe.mo.gov/AAU-Initiatives.php.

Entrance and exit counseling

Effective entrance and exit counseling programs help ensure borrowers are financially literate and prepared for student loan repayment. Be sure to follow all regulatory obligations. The counseling staff can:

- Include all aspects of financial literacy in counseling sessions. Staff may encourage borrowers to make interest payments on unsubsidized loans during in-school and deferment periods and on all loans during forbearance periods. Emphasize the importance of budgeting, provide information about budget and credit counseling services, and inform students about the loan repayment process.
- Inform borrowers about the importance of making timely payments and/or using auto-debit.
- Distribute the Missouri Department of Higher Education's "College Portfolio" to borrowers to facilitate organization of their financial aid documents.
- Advise borrowers of all the "players" (e.g., the U.S. Department of Education, their servicers and any third-party servicers your school uses) involved with their student loan(s). In July 2010 the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) ceased to exist. Make sure borrowers with loans disbursed before July 2010 understand if they have lenders and guarantors and how to contact them.
- Ensure that trained staff are available before, during or after the counseling sessions, and consider offering one-on-one counseling for interested or at-risk student populations. Make certain the counseling sessions are provided via methods and times that are flexible to accommodate student schedules, including nontraditional populations. Consider offering counseling annually for returning borrowers and transfer students.
- Provide borrowers information and/or assistance with repayment-related matters. Establish a loan liaison for borrowers to contact after leaving school. Remind borrowers of payment due dates or steps to resolve delinquencies. When corresponding with borrowers, request address corrections and provide updated loan-related information.

Publications/Resources

The Missouri Department of Higher Education provides a number of publications and online resources to assist with student success and promote financial literacy and default prevention. All of the following resources are offered free of charge to Missouri schools.

- **College Portfolio** — An expandable, tabbed portfolio that allows students to organize college and financial aid documents in one place.
- **Planning for Financial Success** — A handy calendar for both high school and college students, complete with financial literacy and money management tips to help guide them through the year.
- **The Missouri Source** — A comprehensive guide for students in search of federal and state grants, scholarships, loans, and assistance completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other information about planning and paying for college.
- **Journey to College website** — A website designed to help students plan and pay for college, succeed in school, and finish their degree. The website includes the redesigned College and Degree Search, and the new Course Transfer Tracker. When utilizing these online resources, students can search for programs of study by several criteria, and see how their general education courses will transfer to other public colleges and universities in Missouri. Direct students to journeytocollege.mo.gov to take advantage of these and other valuable tools during their journey to and through college.

Student Success Resource Library

There are many unique and innovative approaches to student success. To read about specific examples of programs with positive outcomes from colleges across the country, visit the MDHE's Success Services webpage (dhe.mo.gov/success_services.php). Links and articles are available and will be updated as new initiatives and research arise. Check back often to see the latest ideas in student success that may fit your institution.



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The Missouri Department of Higher Education administers a variety of federal and state grant, scholarship, and financial literacy programs. For more information about student financial assistance, contact the Missouri

Department of Higher Education at 800-473-6757 or 573-751-3940.

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