

Strategic Planning White Paper

Student Support: Curricular and Co-Curricular Working Group

Julie Mikles-Schluterman (Chair), Brandon Wright, JW Stratton, Amy Pennington, Kendall Tubb, Elizabeth Giroir, Kevin Solomon, Rockie Pederson, Mike Murders, Hanna Norton, Aubrey Holt, Tammy Rye and Jericho McElroy

Charge

This Working Group of the SPC is responsible for addressing the challenges and opportunities related to Arkansas Tech University's current and future patterns, priorities, and infrastructure for supporting students. Moreover this WG is charged with tackling the questions that emanate from the changing demographics of students, the increased deployment of technology in the delivery of courses for some distance education students, and the need to address support of adults returning to campus to start and/or complete a degree.

Approach

Based on this charge, we describe in this white paper, the task outlined to our group and our process for arriving at our final product. We conclude this paper with a discussion of general themes and challenges we uncovered in this process, and seven initiatives we propose for the direction of Arkansas Tech University. Each initiative is followed by a brief explanation and a list of proposed solutions for meeting that initiative.

Process

This working group met every Thursday afternoon from 2-4pm beginning on August 27th through November 19th with the exception of the Thursday of fall break (October 15th).

The following instructions were given to each group member:

- The final product will be a White Paper document in which we will propose 5-7 initiatives we think ATU should focus on concerning student services in the coming years. This will need to be completed mid-November. You will be asked to assist in the writing of this document.
- You will be asked to attend a weekly meeting during the fall 2015 semester. The dates and times have yet to be decided.
- Each group member will be assigned a series of questions that our group needs to explore. You will be asked to gather information and answer the questions assigned to you. Write up the answers and report to the group during the weekly meeting.
- Inform yourself about ATU's Student Services and what's possible in student services. I will periodically send you some links or reading materials. Begin talking to people about their experiences with student services or their thoughts on it.
- For the initial meetings I will invite speakers to attend our meetings and answer some questions. For example I would like Susie Nicholson and Amy Pennington to attend at least one of our early meetings. I also thought about asking a group of current students to speak to us about their experiences with student services. Begin thinking about others you think would be helpful.

We set a deadline of November 23rd to have the final product submitted. The meetings were structured so that the first half of the meeting would be an invited speaker, the second half of the meeting would be a presentation of the findings from our list of key questions, and the final 15 minutes would be spent discussing possible initiatives that came out of that day's meeting.

The following schedule was established:

- Thursday August 27th – discuss plans; Amy Pennington discuss current status of ATU Student Services

- Thursday September 3rd – Josh McMillan to discuss campus safety
- Thursday September 10th – Lori Wineland to discuss Student Support Services; Brandon Wright to discuss Career Services; Pennington and Stratton report on “Purpose”
- Thursday September 17th – Dr. Underwood to discuss retention; Norton, Giroir and Tubb report on “Demographics”
- Thursday September 24th – Kristy Davis to discuss Student Wellness; Murders, Wright, Holt and Pederson report on “Services”; Mikles to report on progress
- Thursday October 1st –Solomon, Tubb and Norton report on “Implementation”; propose first draft of initiatives (3-7)
- Thursday October 8th – Student Panel; discuss first draft of initiatives
- Thursday October 15th – fall holiday, no meeting
- Thursday October 22nd – Mike Murders and Dr. Norton to discuss Bachelor of Applied Science degree and stackable degrees/certificates; receive 1st draft from group
- Thursday November 5th – give draft to group for comment
- Thursday November 12th – receive from group and begin to make final edits
- Thursday November 19th – send final to group
- Turn in final product to SPC Monday November 23rd

In addition to these weekly meetings we also participated in a series of open forums and hosted one specifically addressing student success.

Themes and Challenges

The focus of this working group has been to explore making our students successful. We have defined this as not only graduation success, but also as career success. Through the process outlined above, we have established five avenues that lead to student success. We consider all of these equally important.

- **PREPAREDNESS** – Those students who come to college ready or prepared are more successful. These are students with higher ACT scores and meet the ACT benchmarks. These students are more likely to graduate on time, are more engaged and have higher grade point averages.
- **FINANCES** – Students who are not stressed with finances are more likely to be successful. When students lose scholarships, they are less likely to graduate. Working a significant number of hours outside of school makes it difficult for students to be successful in the classroom and to be engaged on campus. In addition, the stress itself of worrying about finances is problematic.
- **ENGAGEMENT** – Students who are involved on campus or who are engaged in the classroom are more successful.
- **ACADEMICS** – The academic experience we provide to students is an important part of their success. This means students need good professors, classrooms, resources and technology.
- **CAREER** – The career guidance we provide to students is also an important part of their success. This means students need mentoring (how to choose a career path, how to draft a resume, how to prepare for an interview). They need assistance with social networking and making connections with employers.

During this process, we have also identified challenges. Two of these are challenges ATU faces as it attempts to implement a strategic plan for the future:

- The first is that campus-wide, there are issues of being understaffed and underfunded. For many years faculty and staff have accomplished great things on this campus without much assistance or resources. We have found many individuals performing different roles and being responsible for several different tasks with very little funds or resources. Increasing staff and faculty is a significant need for ATU and providing them with adequate funds and resources to do their jobs is important.

- The second challenge is the need to improve communication. Among faculty, staff, and students we have repeatedly heard “I didn’t know about that.” Faculty are uninformed about programs and plans happening in academic affairs and student services, while those in academic affairs and student services do not know about the work and interests of the faculty. In addition, communication with students needs to be improved. Students are unaware of programs and services available to them. There is a need to explore better communications options.

Equally important, we *pose* two challenges to ATU as it moves to implement a strategic plan:

- First, we challenge ATU to create a campus wide sense of empowerment. In the coming years we find it imperative that ATU empower its staff, faculty and students with the resources and the authority to do the things they are trained and knowledgeable to do for Arkansas Tech University.
- And finally, we challenge ATU to be a leader. In the past, there has been a sense that ATU is always attempting to catch up with what other universities are doing. We challenge Arkansas Tech University to do some things so innovative and outstanding that others look to us as an example.

Proposed initiatives

As a result, we have chosen the following initiatives for the University. These initiatives reflect these challenges and the five avenues to student success outlined above:

- Initiative 1: To improve college readiness of incoming students as well as to increase retention and persistence to graduation of current students
- Initiative 2: To improve career success of our graduates
- Initiative 3: To better coordinate the Russellville campus, the Ozark campus, and the Career Center
- Initiative 4: To improve infrastructure
- Initiative 5: To engage students in the classroom and on campus by improving collaboration between faculty and student services
- Initiative 6: To improve academic success by empowering and assisting faculty
- Initiative 7: To recognize the unique needs of various subgroups of ATU students

Initiative 1. The University needs to improve the college readiness of incoming students as well as increase retention rates and persistence to graduation of current students.

Academic College Readiness. ATU needs to partner with secondary education (K-12) to improve the college readiness of incoming students. Students who come to college ready and prepared are more successful. These students are more likely to graduate on time, are more engaged, have higher grade point averages, and are more likely to have a job upon graduation. Currently, we assess college readiness with ACT scores and, in particular, ACT benchmark scores. In fall 2013, ATU had the fourth highest remediation rate, 45.2%, as compared to all four-year public institutions in the state of Arkansas. The university needs to work to lower the high remediation rates of its underrepresented populations of students. In addition, data shows that most ATU students come from the state of Arkansas, with ATU having the highest percentage compared to other Arkansas universities.

Retention Rates. ATU must improve the second and third year retention rates of current students. When compared to other four-year institutions in Arkansas, ATU continues to struggle to retain students after the first year of enrollment. In cohort year 2011, ATU ranked fifth in Arkansas for both second and third year retention rates compared to other four-year, public institutions in the state.

Graduation Rates. ATU must improve the graduation rate. Currently, ATU’s graduation rate is 45% which is tied for second highest in the state with UCA. The current national average is 60%. ATU’s goal is to achieve a 55% graduation rate by 2020. As part of this objective, ATU needs to place emphasis on improving retention and graduation rates for underrepresented populations.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- ATU should create a Student Success Center (SSC).
 1. The SSC staff will be charged with studying college readiness, student intent (goals), persistence, retention, and graduation rates.
 2. The SSC staff will be charged with collecting data for the purpose of determining why a student does not succeed at Arkansas Tech and why students withdraw from the university (even individual courses). The research gathered and analyzed in the SSC should be used to assist campus leaders currently engaged in providing services and programs designed to promote student success determine if the programs are effective in their current format or need modification to ensure the best results.
 3. The SSC Staff should assess and analyze underrepresented populations (adult students, online students, minority populations, etc.).
 4. Add the position of a Student Ombudsman (possibly multiple positions). This position will focus on helping students express their concerns in a secure and comfortable place. If marketed and promoted correctly, this person could be a hub for all student questions and concerns ensuring that students receive good customer service and avoid the frustration of being passed from office to office in search of help and assistance. As part of this initiative, a 24-7 online chat option or call center could be explored.
 5. Implement a formal exit interview/counseling process from the university if a student chooses to withdraw from the institution. This process should include collecting data (centralized in Banner) about specific reasons for leaving the institution (i.e. should require specific reasons other than generalized responses such as financial reasons). Depending on the reason, staff members should be available to attempt to intervene and connect the student to resources that may resolve the issue and result in the student being retained. This should include: 1) Increasing the number of financial counselors in the Financial Aid Office to handle referrals from the SSC staff, 2) Redirecting the Early Warning System reports to the SSC staff, 3) Providing a “Leave of Absence” option for students, 4) Creating a return plan with a point of contact for re-enrollment that includes follow-up (i.e. phone call from SSC staff at the beginning of next term).
 6. The creation of a program to specifically assist those students who enter college as high risk or are on conditional admission status by requiring that they take their first-year of courses in cohorts consisting of smaller classes with specific resources available to them to support their success. In essence, a program with a series of multiple required measures associated with conditional admission (i.e. mandated tutoring or attendance at workshops, mandated meetings with academic coaches, etc.)
- ATU should partner with Arkansas high schools to improve college readiness. Through this partnership, ATU could provide services that would not only assist with college readiness but would also create a relationship between high school students and ATU. Improving college readiness of incoming students is a key issue in efforts to increase retention and graduation rates. Many colleges and universities are turning to better collaboration with secondary education (K-12) to address this issue (Choy, Horn, Nunez, and Chen, 2000; Kirst and Venezia, 2006; Laguradia, 1998). All secondary education (K-12) initiatives should be approached with the mindset of providing community service. The services and programs associated with this initiative should be aimed at encouraging all Arkansas high school students to be successful in college, not matter the choice of higher education institutions. ATU should be perceived as a valued and caring part of the larger community. Services under this initiative could include:
 1. The creation of a “success plan” for high school sophomores that provides a roadmap for college, including tasks and activities appropriate for this classification of students to complete to best

prepare for college. Continuous follow up with high school juniors and seniors should take place to ensure that students stay on track.

2. Provide literature or in-person training to high school students in the process of applying for admission that clearly compares tuition, fees, services, programs, graduation rates, etc. for all Arkansas colleges and universities to assist students in making the best college decision based upon individual circumstances and goals.
 3. Provide mentoring and/or workshops from ATU staff, faculty, and students to Arkansas high school students and parents with information on how to navigate the application process and how to apply for financial aid and scholarships. Online tools should also be developed to streamline the application process (i.e. <http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org/>).
 4. Remedial and general education courses should be redesigned to allow students to take these courses prior to beginning college. For example, students should have the option of completing all remedial courses during their senior year of high school or the summer prior to the freshman year. Remedial courses (and some general education courses) could be offered online or in condensed versions, or as free Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS). These options would allow students to get a “head start”, save time, and save money.
- ATU should re-evaluate and improve probation policies such that there are real consequences. Provide mandated interventions for students placed on probation, as well as for students who continue on probation. Address the fact that students can continue in a probationary status for multiple terms until they reach 30 earned credit hours. Implement a program that requires students to meet with an academic coach during the first probationary semester. Other requirements could include workshop attendance and mandatory tutoring/study hall sessions for students in a second probationary semester.
 - ATU should promote personal connections between faculty/staff and students. These personal connections have been identified as a key component in student success. The practice of this concept is a defining characteristic of ATU’s “family culture.” To retain this culture of individualized service, ATU must commit to adding additional staff to provide adequate services and support to create the personal connections needed to impact success rates. As enrollment has increased, staffing has remained fairly even. To add more high impact/high touch programs, additional staff is required.
 - ATU should intentionally focus on issues related to college affordability. One of the major obstacles ATU students face related to student success involves finances. ATU can assist students with financial challenges through the following programs:
 1. ATU should create a second-chance scholarship to allow students who lose their original scholarship and bring up their GPA to get their original scholarship or portions of their scholarship reinstated. Academic coaching could be a requirement of the new model that would intrusively engage the student in a process focused on how to recover and perform better in future academic semesters.
 2. ATU should offer financial counseling to students to educate them on money management and how to avoid debt.
 3. ATU should address textbook affordability. Textbook expenses are a major obstacle for many of students. ATU should explore a hybrid model bookstore, a lease option bookstore, and a textbook free campus option.

Initiative 2. The University needs to improve career success of students.

Placement. As an institution, Arkansas Tech's placement rate is 66%. Norman Career Services has plans to improve this number by 4% annually. Graduates are not only pursuing a place of employment, but also a substantial salary. According to the Census ACS 1-year survey, the median household income for Arkansas was \$40,768 in 2013 (Arkansas QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau, 2015). Presently, Arkansas Tech graduates median starting salary is \$40,000 per year. The goal of Arkansas Tech should be to post the highest placement rate of all Arkansas colleges and universities.

Career Counseling. Research reports that 75% of incoming freshmen will change their major during their undergraduate tenure (Freedman, 2013). Effective career counseling is not generalized. Arkansas Tech needs to provide more specialized career counseling because students need individualized attention from experts who have industry-specific knowledge and experience.

Exit Graduation Placement Questionnaire. There needs to be a system in place to collect graduation placement data the day of graduation, three months, six months, and one year after graduation. This will allow Arkansas Tech to understand where graduates are employed and what graduates are earning. In addition, Arkansas Tech should implement an annual questionnaire to collect placement information on alumni. Both of these types of assessments would be beneficial to all areas of the institution especially Development, Alumni Relations, Admissions, and Norman Career Services. The exit survey must be mandatory for all graduates before receiving their diploma.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- ATU should establish career services divisions within academic areas.
 1. Career Counselors should be assigned in each academic college. Currently, one career counselor serves the Arkansas Tech main campus. These additional Career Counselors will provide industry-specific career development training to increase employability of Arkansas Tech graduates. Being in constant communication with faculty within their college and heavily involved in integrating career curriculum into the academic curriculum, Career Counselors will be able to minimize the placement gap and increase student preparedness. The Assistant Director of Career Development will oversee career programming and counseling, ensuring the career counselors stay educated on current research and trends.
 2. Employer Relations Coordinators (ERC) should be assigned to each college. The ERC's will work to connect human resources personnel and recruiters with specific degree programs. Each ERC will establish and oversee an Employer Advisory Committee for each department within their college. This will allow Arkansas Tech to continuously improve and meet the needs of ever-changing industries. We currently have one ERC serving the Arkansas Tech main campus. ERC's will work collaboratively with employers to boost the number of internships and cooperative experiences offered at Arkansas Tech. *"Almost 97 percent of employers planned to hire interns and co-ops in 2014."* The Assistant Director of Employer Relations will oversee relations between Arkansas Tech and employers. An Associate Director of Career Services will oversee employer relations, student employment, internships and cooperative experiences. With increased ERC's comes the opportunity to increase placement rates and internship opportunities. If Arkansas Tech wants to set itself apart from the other 4-year colleges and universities, we can ensure, with this investment, that students who attend Arkansas Tech are employed with internships, co-ops, and full-time jobs upon graduation.
- ATU should improve the work study and non-work study process. Many students are seeking work study and non-work study positions on campus, yet the process of acquiring an on-campus job complicated in its present form. Students must run back and forth from Student Services to Financial Aid to Human Resources and various departments. We seek to create an office that is a one-stop shop

for students seeking work-study and non-work study positions. The office will be overseen by a Coordinator of Student Employment. This position will oversee the on campus student employment program for the Arkansas Tech main campus. Students will be able to go to one place and view positions open on-campus, apply, and be placed across campus. Hiring a Coordinator of Student Employment will allow Arkansas Tech to offer more on-campus opportunities. This individual will ensure training for departments and student-workers. Research is showing that students that work less than 20 hours/week are able to perform better academically (Lederman, 2009).

- ATU should further develop a graduation exit questionnaire. Currently, career placement data is gathered at time of graduation, but data also needs to be collected and analyzed regarding why student chose to persist at Arkansas Tech, their perceptions of their collegiate experience, measure of grit, etc. ATU must incorporate the graduation placement questionnaire into the graduation process. It is an internet-based questionnaire and can be administered via email or completed in a visitation process. The ability to collect information three months, six months, and annually after graduation is also within the scope of the solution. CSO Research offers The Outcomes Survey and The Alumni Current Occupation Survey to collect career outcomes.

Initiative 3. The University needs to better coordinate the Russellville campus, the Ozark campus, and the Career Center

Shared Administrative Policies and Procedures. Ozark faculty and staff feel that decisions made on the main campus affect their work, and that governance and administrative structures do not adequately ensure communications and consideration of cross-campus impacts.

Services to Students. There is a need to streamline many of the policies, procedures and offering of services between the Ozark and Russellville campuses. For example, student advising would be improved if campus admissions offices were more familiar with all programs of study offered. In addition, many Ozark campus students desire to utilize Russellville campus services, particularly when they live close to the main campus or live on the main campus. Current policies need to be re-evaluated so that services are accessible to all ATU students regardless of campus. Services on the main campus should mirror the services and policies provided to the Ozark campus student.

Transfer of College Credits Earned at the Ozark Campus and Career Center. Clear coordination of college credits earned at the Ozark campus and Career Center needs to be maximized for bachelor level credit creating stackable degrees. These efforts include furthering development of pathways for students to acquire degrees and credentials along a trajectory that can lead to a baccalaureate and beyond, but that has exit and entry points to allow students to reenter wherever they left off on route to the next level of achievement. The road block is how to make the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree flow into a bachelor's degree. AAS is a terminal degree that is designed for workforce development/job placement. With the current Governor's initiative to educate more Arkansas adult learners, it makes sense to seek avenues to support those with AAS degrees to further their education while minimizing repeating course/hours.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- ATU should complete a comprehensive curriculum map for all campuses. This should include a comparison of learning objectives, assessments, and student outcomes. The purpose of this is to reduce confusion about program requirements.
- ATU should involve all appropriate stakeholders in the decision making process. ATU should ensure that any decision with the potential to impact multiple constituencies (campus, divisions, departments, programs, etc.) is vetted by appropriate representative stakeholders.
- ATU should encourage robust, regular communication between campuses through both formal and informal processes.

1. ATU should increase use of technology to minimize travel requirements to increase ability to meet more frequently.
 2. Encourage key stakeholders to develop cross-campus initiatives which can enhance a sense of university-wide community (i.e. visiting lecturers, events, etc.).
- ATU should improve the ability for students to utilize services and facilities on the other campus:
 1. Develop short and long-term plans for additional services offered to Ozark students.
 2. Make available residence life activities for Ozark students who are living in Russellville paid for through a fee attached by residence life. Identify possible elective fees for elective services.
 3. Develop fee for certain services, such as health clinic availability to Ozark students via yearly fee or pay as you go (fee schedule).
 4. Develop a reporting process to identify Ozark Campus students who are living in Residence Life facilities in Russellville.
 5. Student accounts should 1) take payments from students on either campus; 2) allow for photo ID's to be created at both campuses; 3) make online hang tags available to Ozark students at main campus.
 6. Develop an enrollment and advising system to include 1) a process that allows advisors to work and register students from either campus when appropriate; 2) an online application that fits the needs of both campuses; and 3) when appropriate, share recruiting resources (visits, marketing, and events for example).
 - ATU has developed the Bachelors of Professional Studies (BPS) degree. The BPS was designed to help adult learners with some college to complete a bachelor degree in an accelerated timeframe. However, with AAS students, the BPS accepts some/most (depending on the major) hours but not all 60 hours. The idea of a Bachelors of Applied Science is to allow AAS students to apply all 60 (not matter what major) to a bachelor degree.
 1. BAS takes all 60 hours (includes 15 or more hours general education); requires 20 additional hours of general education (35 total); requires 40 hours of upper-level course in selected fields of study.
 2. BAS could be added to complement (not replace) the BPS option for Arkansas adult learners. Adult learners could earn BPS or BAS depending on their situation. BAS could be utilized to attract AAS graduates from any of the 22 community colleges, some 4-year institutions, and military graduates earning AAS degrees.
 3. BAS could be a solution to the 2+2 option for AAS graduates at ATU.

Initiative 4. The University needs to evaluate and improve its infrastructure to better serve all constituents.

Since 1997, ATU's enrollment has grown 159%, yet ATU's infrastructure, in particular its physical space, has not experienced the same growth. These inadequacies have led to the suffering of essential services that meet the basic needs of the campus community. In particular, we have noted these inadequacies in:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| • Campus Security | • Student Recreation |
| • Counseling Services | • Student Housing |
| • Affirmative Action Services | • Multi-Use Non-Academic Space |
| • Health Services | • Disability Services/Campus Accessibility |

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- ATU should create a comprehensive campus master plan regarding current, and planned facilities. This should also include additional university owned properties/land and any future acquisition possibilities. Upon completion of this plan, a committee comprised of key stakeholders within Academic Affairs,

Financial Affairs, Student Services, and Facilities Management should be established to monitor and push appropriate development.

- ATU should conduct an annual review and explanation of all fees and related expenses. This should be conducted by appropriate administrators and should include a needs based assessment of expenditures related to the appropriated funds gained from implemented fees.
- ATU should evaluate the possibility of adding these infrastructures that have been requested by students, faculty and staff during this process:
 1. child care services
 2. mail/copy center
 3. print/publication shop
 4. parking deck
 5. rental space (retail stores, conferences, etc...)

Initiative 5. The University needs to better engage students in the classroom and on campus.

Research shows that students who are more involved and engaged are more likely to persist to graduation and gain the needed skills to gain employment (Astin, 1999). Astin's student involvement theory defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience." The student behavior is an essential piece to involvement. Students must be active in the learning process, and a student's time must be considered a resource. The amount of time and effort a student devotes to a developmental goal is key to their achieving it. The University must make providing engagement opportunities and encouraging student participation a priority.

Creating opportunities for engagement will help develop a sense of community among students, faculty, and staff that further benefits student learning inside and outside the classroom and increase retention. Students would be able to interact with their professors as well as staff members in a myriad of ways resulting in increased personal development. These opportunities should foster and encourage innovation among the ATU community.

There should be intentional efforts for faculty and student affairs professionals to collaborate. The Division of Student Services provides a great deal of valuable programming, some of which fall within the focus of particular faculty members' areas of research or teaching. It would benefit faculty to be more involved with students through these events, and these programs could be more effective and valuable with input from faculty on the topic.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- Spaces for engagement should be created. For both curricular and co-curricular student engagement, these spaces should include:
 1. *Student Union:* This space would provide a place for commuter students and non-traditional students to connect and become engaged in the University community. This would provide students a space to gain access to the life of the campus. Students would be able to spend time between classes or after class and engage with their fellow students. This space would allow students looking for involvement opportunities to engage with various student groups. Student groups would be able to conduct their business and seek guidance when needed.
 2. *Living Learning Communities:* These are homes with a greater residential neighborhood of students, joined together for a common purpose. This allows for students with each other, as well as faculty and staff around that common purpose, which further fosters community and

personal development. These communities would ideally have classrooms within the residential facility to embed academics within the program.

3. *Student Recreation Center*: Students need an opportunity to engage in an active and healthy lifestyle that enhances a sense of well-being and fosters community. This would include exercise equipment, tennis courts, basketball courts, racquetball courts, pool, track, fitness classes, outdoor recreation services, etc.
 4. *Innovation Center*: This space would allow for education, research, and assistance in creating ideas to better our society and foster entrepreneurship. This would allow for project-based courses, research, business incubation, as well as co-curricular experiences for students. It would include a Student Center for Research. This space would provide students with diverse hands-on learning opportunities and encourage creativity. This would allow faculty and students to come together and further their academic interests, resulting in increased knowledge and a sense of community.
- ATU should adopt an Honor Code. An Honor Code would foster integrity amongst the University community. Students, faculty, and staff would adhere to the honor code. This is a statement that each individual will uphold the Honor Code in matters of academic work and employment. It is recommended that this program be strongly student led in development as well as implementation.
 - ATU should increase and improve the opportunities for students to work on campus. This would ideally be modeled after the IOWA GROW® program, where student employment is a high-impact activity that allows students to reflect and integrate learning through work-academic connection conversations with their supervisors.
 - ATU should increase and encourage collaboration between student affairs professionals and faculty/staff. This involves improving communication and intentional efforts of relationship building. For example:
 1. *Faculty Ambassador*: Create an ambassador for each academic department and student affairs department appointed to participate on a joint committee where programs and initiatives from academic departments as well as student affairs departments can be discussed. The ambassador would be responsible for bringing the information back to their respective departments for further collaboration.
 2. *Email Listserv*: An email listserv can be created and operate on an opt-in basis. Emails can be sent to all of the faculty and staff who desire knowledge of activities going on throughout campus.
 3. *Partnerships*: Student affairs professionals should partner with faculty research areas and begin building collaboration efforts which would reduce program costs by utilizing faculty as a resource.
 4. *Cross-Training*: All departments make cross-training an opportunity for employees to learn about other sectors of the University and foster community and collaboration.
 - ATU should create more Registered Student Organizations. These need to be created around student interests inside and outside the classroom. Currently, Arkansas Tech has approximately 130 RSOs. Other institutions in comparable size have 200 or more RSOs. Faculty and staff can support by serving as advisors and encouraging students to take an active role within the University community. Furthermore, Arkansas Tech can begin to allocate funding for RSOs at the beginning of the school year to provide student groups an opportunity to plan their own events that are geared towards their interests.
 - ATU should implement a Common Hour into the weekly schedule. A common hour is a time during the 8 am-5 pm week day where no classes are held. This provides an opportunity for commuter students and non-traditional students to engage with their peers as well as the University community as a whole.

Student organizations can meet during this time when advisors are more likely to attend. University wide events can be held and create an environment where everyone is encouraged to engage.

- ATU should integrate the On Track program throughout students' curricular and co-curricular experience. This program can be embedded into courses where learning outcomes of specific tracks and academic courses intersect. This provides a tracking measure for faculty to gauge students' engagement and learning outside the classroom. It also maximizes the resources put towards these services and programs
- ATU should create a multi-media lab utilizing efforts of campus resources. This effort synthesizes existing the work of the Academic Broadcast Facility (TV and Radio), The ArkaTech newspaper, University Relations and some broadcast support and offer a new advertising and marketing consortium that uses students from Art, Communication and Journalism, Computer Science and Engineering, Marketing and others for a cross discipline news, public relations and reporting agency combining the use of email, social media, digital signage/TV channels, news print, fliers, desktop screen savers – advertising and other media, pushing these through existing channels into the community.

Initiative 6. The University needs to improve students' academic experience by empowering and assisting its faculty.

Faculty are often times the first point of contact for many students. Many students cite the importance of professors who know them by name and treat them as more than just a number. Students look to faculty members for guidance, leadership and mentoring, yet ATU faculty often do not have the time or resources to carry out these important parts of their job. As a result, empowering faculty to do their jobs will improve student success (Kuh and Hu, 2001; Micari and Pazos, 2012).

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- ATU should hire more faculty. At 20 to 1, ATU has a higher student to faculty ratio than 13 of our 21 peer institutions. In the state of Arkansas, ATU has the highest student to faculty ratio. Increasing the number of faculty means professors can spend more time with each student which research shows can improve student success.
- ATU should implement better scheduling of classrooms and improve the quality of existing classrooms. We need to address the inefficiencies of classroom space as departments struggle to find classrooms for courses each semester and many of these classrooms are poorly equipped. Faculty teach in classrooms in which the temperature is uncomfortable and out of their control, classrooms in which the chairs and desks are broken, in which the equipment doesn't work, classrooms in which there are broken window treatments and an overall depressing atmosphere. In order for faculty to do their job to the best of their ability, they need an environment that encourages student learning and success. Ideally, we need a plan such that all of the current classrooms will be updated within 5 years and then the rotation begins again, so that classrooms are always kept up to date.
- ATU should increase space for faculty offices and improve the quality of faculty offices. Students' perceptions of their faculty influences how they learn. When students see their professors as valuable and skilled, then they are more likely to learn from them. Faculty offices need to express that the faculty are valued by the university in order for students to value them. For many years, departments have struggled with finding office space for new faculty members and current offices do not convey to students that faculty members are valued. For example, offices are cramped and there is poor temperature control, old furniture, poor ventilation, and poor lighting. Again, a systematic plan needs to

be put in place that keeps offices updated on a scheduled rotation. In all future building plans, faculty office space needs to be included.

- ATU should allow departments to hire full time or half time advisors. These individuals would be responsible for assisting with advising of the juniors and seniors. They could also teach a reduced class load or be an administrative assistant. This would give faculty more time for the quality mentoring that is needed to provide student success.
- ATU should improve support of faculty scholarship. Faculty scholarship improves the experiences of students, providing valuable learning and mentoring experiences. It also enhances the professor's teaching in the classroom. Yet, to increase scholarship, faculty need space for conducting scholarship and need reduced course loads to increase scholarship. When buildings are built or renovated, adding lab or storage space for faculty research should be a priority.
- ATU should create workshops for faculty to become students of ATU. Faculty need to be better informed about the many services and programs available on the ATU campus for faculty and students. There are many valuable services provided by offices across campus, yet faculty and students are unaware of them. There should be required workshops in which faculty are made aware of and trained on how to use these services and programs. At the beginning of every semester during professional development, one office (e.g., registrar, financial aid) could talk about their function and resources for students and faculty. Keeping faculty up to date on the programs in Academic Affairs and Student Services needs to be an ongoing and continuous effort to improve student success.

Initiative 7. The University needs to address the needs of particular sub-groups of students to improve their success.

The University needs to address the needs of particular sub-groups of students. These students have needs that are distinct and put them at a higher risk for not persisting. While certain services currently exist for these students, a more strategic plan, particularly for each sub-group, needs to be considered as the university moves forward. Here are some of the proposed needs discovered through the strategic planning process. However, this list is not exhaustive. Each sub-group's needs should be addressed individually. For example, the university's main campus student minority population has increased from 13.58% in fall 2006 to 24.93% in fall 2015.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

- ATU should conduct standardized research with sub-groups to determine their needs, frustrations and satisfaction. This research will include surveys as well as focus groups with the listed sub-groups of: African Americans, Hispanics, International students, Older students (those 50 and above), Students with disabilities, Commuter students, Online students, Graduate students, Veterans, Non Traditional, and Students between the ages of 20-24 with additional life, work responsibilities.
- ATU should consider how these groups could use the Student Success Center (outlined above) as well as creating online opportunities for academic success. Some examples as related to the student success center include:
 1. Having multi-lingual staff would be a benefit to our students where English is not their first language. This would require hiring additional staff so students in distress do not have to translate their thoughts to speak with a staff member.
 2. Mentoring relationships for students where English is not their first language should also be fostered and organized as a function of the student success center (with some type of benefit).

Although IMSSO has done work before with student and faculty paired relationships, this effort would be for those students not required to engage with IMSSO.

3. The student success center should hire designated mentors for each of the student groups. The mentoring could be akin to registered student organizations, but it would be more structured and the mentors and participating students would ultimately be led by someone in the student success center. These trained mentors would be ombudspersons for each of their groups, filtering questions and requests into the student success center that might otherwise get lost. For both mentoring relationships mentioned above, internal data could determine links to success and persistence.
- ATU should address the needs of Students with Disabilities (SWD).
 1. Improve campus accessibility. We're making progress but it's not enough given how far behind we are and given the increasing number of SWD. We continue to construct facilities that don't take into account that people with disabilities will be frequenting classes and events in these areas. This sends a very strong message that SWD are not going to be valued or included on our campus.
 2. Provide professional training to faculty regarding principles of universal design and making coursework and the classroom accessible. This should be mandatory. We don't currently offer anything during orientation and that would be a good place to start. The faculty is on the front lines with SWD. How the faculty communicates via their syllabus, their body language, and their attitude,
 3. We need to offer other supportive programs such as early move-in and support for RSOs that are specific to SWD with staff who are qualified to direct these initiatives.
 4. On-campus transportation. The lack of accessible parking combined with the condition of the sidewalks make it very difficult for SWD to get where they need to be in a reasonable amount of time. Distance is also a factor. Furthermore, it would be great if we moved towards the development of an on-campus para-transit to meet the needs of these students. During inclement weather they have to miss classes, events on campus, and forgo trips to BazTech or the cafeteria because they can't use an umbrella and hold onto to their walker, their crutches, or use their hand(s) to propel their wheelchair. This is a much bigger problem than many people realize.
 - ATU should meet the needs of non-traditional students. One way in particular is to have face-to-face classes run at alternate times (weekends, evenings). To get buy-in from faculty there could be a premium placed on teaching at alternate times. A study should confirm this anecdotal evidence obtained during student and Ozark campus forums regarding the student interest. If there is a true interest, the university should look at offering these additional class time offerings. Similarly, the university should examine block scheduling and building of cohorts (Complete College America Game Changer <http://www.completecollege.org/gameChangers.html>) for these higher risk audiences.
 - ATU should offer Graduate College Students opportunities currently available to undergraduates.
 1. The addition of grant or scholarship opportunities would be very beneficial to graduate students' success. The main options students have to pay for their education is out of pocket or with student loans. A Graduate Assistantship is helpful financially with the tuition waiver.
 2. Secondly, creating a fund to support graduate student research as it is very expensive to travel and present at different conferences. Providing a venue to present their research on campus could be very helpful as well. The Graduate Student Council is currently working on a Research Symposium for students to present their research on campus. (Contributions from Sara Bradberry, Director of Graduate Support Services).
 - ATU should consider the needs of Military Affiliated Students that are currently unmet.
 1. Create a veteran section of Tech 1001/CSP 1013 based on the idea of Warrior Scholar <http://warrior-scholar.org/>

2. 2. Create a Green Zone to provide training to both faculty/staff and students. Interactions faculty, staff and students have with the service members and veterans impacts their experience thus influencing their success, retention, and their ultimate decision to stay at Tech or not. (example: http://www.ou.edu/veterans/green-zone/green_zone_training.html)
 3. A position within the Office of Veteran Services dedicated specifically to advising the service members and veterans, both academic, career and financial aid advising. This could also be filled by a specialist in the Academic Advising Center.
 4. Make as many services as possible available online. (career services, tutoring, financial aid, mentoring, disability services)
 5. Veteran/military identifier (in progress) on application for admission.
- ATU should consider the needs of Online students. With the creation of a College of eTech, the university solidified its support of online learning. What is needed now is the infrastructure to further assist existing students and encourage enrollment of additional online students. This development is housed in four areas:
 1. *Program Development to include marketing and recruitment, Online Outreach and Military Partnerships (existing with one employee), State Authorization support (existing with one employee):* The largest need is to have quality data via market research on programs (from certificates of proficiency through post graduate work) of interest to students and of value to Arkansas and regional employers. We also need framework to support online leads generated through advertising and the university website. Lastly, we need the resources to inform the university personnel about online course expectations of the C-RAC Guidelines <http://nc-sara.org/files/docs/C-RAC%20Guidelines.pdf> as required for participation in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement. This also meets our online requirements for HLC.
 2. *Student Services to include Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, Advising, Library/Resource Coordinator, Proctoring, Ombudsperson:* The current model has student services employees and the library working with online students via dedicated staff located in their respective offices. As online enrollment increases, the existing model does not offer scalability or a centralized approach addressing student support. There needs to be a centralized location for all online student support that would work in tandem with the face-to-face campus offices. Furthermore, the university does not have standardized proctoring requirements and instead recommends products to course developers. These proctoring requirements should change with the impact of the assessment (i.e., a quiz vs. a licensure exam). Finally, online students need an advocate(s) that assist with concerns.
 3. *Course Development via a Program Development Coordinator, Instructional Designers (existing with two 12-month employees), Multimedia Coordinator (existing with one employee), Faculty Developers, and Approved Instructors:* As the university moves toward having all online courses reviewed by 2020, we will need existing staff and possibly more to have the 244 online courses that have not been reviewed, reviewed by the College of eTech. The College, working directly with departments, needs to build a cadre of approved developers and instructors. In addition to their obvious roles, these developers and instructors can serve as liaisons between the College and their own departments ensuring questions and concerns are asked and addressed. Currently, questions remain in the department and are not asked to the College of eTech.
 4. *I.T./Instructional Support via a dedicated Blackboard Administrator and technical support for online students:* The additional personnel would be focused exclusively on online students' experiences vs. the current model with one Blackboard Administrator for Blackboard Learn and a 24/7 campus support line for all student and faculty computer issues.

References

- Arkansas QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau. (n.d.). Retrieved November 17, 2015, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/05000.html>
- Almost 97 Percent of Employers Plan to Hire Interns and Co-ops in 2014. (n.d.). Retrieved November 17, 2015, from <http://www.naceweb.org/s02192014/hire-interns-2014.aspx>
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518. <http://74.217.196.173/docview/195180247?accountid=14482>
- Choy, S. Horn, L. J. Nunez, A. & X. Chen. (2000). Transition to college: What helps at-risk students and students whose parents did not attend college. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 107, 45-63.
- Freedman, L. (2013, June 28). The Pennsylvania State University Division of Undergraduate Studies. Retrieved November 17, 2015, from <https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2013/06/disconnect-choosing-major/>
- Kirst, M. W. & A. Venezia. (2006). Improving college readiness and success for all students: A joint responsibility between K-12 and Postsecondary education.” An issue brief for the secretary of education’s commission on the future of higher education.
- Kuh, G. & S. Hu. (2001). The effects of student-faculty interaction in the 1990s. *The Review of Higher Education*. 24(3), 309-332.
- Laguardia, A. (1998). A survey of school/college partnerships for minority and disadvantaged students. *The Urban Review*, 30(2),167-186.
- Lederman, D. (2009, June 8). The Impact of Student Employment | Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/06/08/work>
- Micari, M. & Pilar Pazos. (2012). Connecting to the professor: Impact of the student-faculty relationship in a highly challenging course. *College Teaching*, 60, 41-47.
- Walker, K. R. (1992). History of Arkansas Tech University 1909-1990. Russellville, AR: Arkansas Tech University.