

Intrusive Advising as a Retention Strategy

Educators are often not aware that students are struggling until it's too late. We encourage students to contact us if they have concerns, but very few students do. How can we get ahead of problems before it's too late? Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) uses intrusive advising as a retention strategy for nursing students in the Breakthrough Solutions for Nursing: An Educational Model for Underrepresented and Disadvantaged Students program (BSNEM). By assigning each student an intrusive advisor upon their entry into the program, advisors meet with students early and establish a collaborative relationship.

About Intrusive Advising

Intrusive advising is not a new concept; it has been used in academic settings since the 1980s. Intrusive advising is best described as an action-oriented, proactive approach to assist and support students through their educational journeys. By building a relationship with each student, advisors learn about existing and potential barriers that may impede students' academic success. In the BSNEM program, advisors create an advising tool to help them identify any social determinants of education that may negatively impact academic performance.

Program Summary

QCC was awarded a four-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration Nursing Workforce Diversity Program. All students in the BSNEM program are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Seventy-six associate degree nursing students meet one-on-one every other week with an advisor, all of whom are registered nurses familiar with the nursing program and the college's resources. During the initial meeting, the advisor helps students create an Individual Success Plan (ISP) that includes a plan for continuing their education after completing an associate degree in nursing. During subsequent appointments, the primary focus is on academic monitoring, but students often initiate conversations about socioeconomic matters they encounter on the road to reaching their goals. Acknowledging that students can benefit from additional assistance, advisors refer students to appropriate college resources. Advisors then follow up to ensure students receive the help they need.

The Advising Form

The advising form, developed based on research and input from QCC faculty working within BSNEM, is a valuable tool used to help advisors collect consistent and concise information about students. However, it also serves as a resource guide for the academic, financial, and emotional support services provided

by the college. During the initial 60–90-minute meeting with the advisor, students are asked for basic information such as their academic history and current course load. To gain insight, advisors ask more invasive questions regarding personal support systems, coping strategies, and stress levels as time goes on. Students are asked about their study habits, including how many hours each day they set aside for studying, where they study, and if they study alone or in groups.

Questions regarding possible barriers to success are addressed including transportation, the number of hours worked weekly, non-work responsibilities, and conflicting priorities. All social determinants of education are covered to gain a better understanding of students as whole persons and to develop a unique plan tailored to the needs of each student.

The ISP was developed to provide a clear pathway for students to further their education beyond an associate degree in nursing. An expectation of the BSNEM program is that students will eventually transfer to a Bachelor of Science in nursing program after gaining their associate degree. Monitoring prerequisite courses is part of intrusive advising and was included in the ISP.

Each time students meet with their advisor, key elements of the form are updated. Together, the advisor and student review previously established goals and determine if the goals are being met. During every meeting, advisors monitor academic progress, but also inquire about the student's stress levels, coping strategies, and any roadblocks they are experiencing. After each session, the advisor summarizes the meeting, schedules the next meeting, and the student and advisor sign the form, with a copy going with the student for reference. In between meetings, students are encouraged to contact their advisor by phone, email, or text with any academic or personal updates.

Student Perceptions

Student surveys capture common themes of belongingness, support, guidance, caring, and accountability. Frequently, at the start of their involvement in the BSNEM program, students resist the idea of meeting with an intrusive advisor. It may be viewed as "one more thing" added to an already busy schedule. Over the course of their first semester, students see the value of the time spent with their advisor and look forward to advising appointments to discuss their accomplishments and disappointments. When students do not perform well on an exam, a conversation with their advisor may open a door to understanding why. Students report leaving appointments with

a plan and success strategies, and by circling back at the next appointment, students are held accountable for completing these plans.

Many students in the program are of non-traditional age and often balance academic pressures with family responsibilities. Advisors become a source of advice on how to manage competing priorities. As students become more confident in their abilities, they begin seeing advisors as peers and mentors and ask questions on negotiating social and structural issues in their mutual profession. It is not unusual for students to call or email their advisor after graduating from our program to share personal, academic, and career successes.

Conclusion

Intrusive advising proves to be an effective retention strategy for students in the BSNEM Program, with a program completion rate of 83 percent. Sixty-seven percent of graduates continue their education and enroll in a BSN, MSN, or DNP program. By offering support and guidance early and consistently, intrusive advising can increase students' academic success.

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