Understanding Your Readiness and Capacity to Improve Student Success

University of Idaho
October 27, 2017

The Starfish Capacity and Readiness Framework allows for a point-in-time assessment of an institution's capacity and readiness to deliver on goals.

1. Develop the foundation for student success
2. Understand the challenge
3. Plan to deliver on your goals
4. Drive implementation
5. Be a student ready institution
The Readiness Diagnostic was performed against these elements

1. Develop the foundation for student success
   - 1A) Define your Aspiration
   - 1B) Engage the Campus Community
2. Understand the challenge
   - 2A) Evaluate past and present performance
   - 2B) Understand drivers of performance and relevant system activities
3. Plan to deliver on your goals
   - 3A) Determine your reform strategy
   - 3B) Draw the delivery chain
   - 3C) Set targets and trajectories
4. Drive implementation
   - 4A) Establish routines to drive and monitor performance
   - 4B) Solve problems early and rigorously
5. Be a student ready institution
   - 5A) Build capacity and sustain momentum
   - 5B) Communicate the message

COMMUNITY | STRATEGY | ANALYTICS | ACTION | OUTCOMES

The Hobsons team gathered evidence from key stakeholders to assess University of Idaho's capacity to achieve its goals for students

We spoke to:
- Deans
- Associate Deans
- Department Chairs
- Student Services Managers
- Student Success & Retention staff
- Student Services front-line staff
- Academic Advising Directors
- Lead Advisors
- Information Technology Services
- Institutional Effectiveness & Accreditation
- The VandalStar Implementation Team
- Student Representatives

We also looked at:
- IPEDS Information
- College Profile reports
- U. of Idaho Faculty Handbook
- U of Idaho Strategic Plan and Process 2016-2025
- U of Idaho 2016 Organizational Chart
### Readiness Assessment (1/5)

**1) Develop the Foundation for Student Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A) Define your aspiration</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>The Strategic Plan lays out a clear set of public goals, rationales, and targets. Administrators, faculty, and staff collectively affirm the goals of increasing enrollment and retention (&quot;as many as we can&quot;) and becoming a Research One university as top priorities. Many also cited the personal nature of the campus as key—that faculty and staff are accessible and approachable—and highly supportive in how they serve students and help them to navigate toward graduation or through personal issues and crises. The vision is clear, but the &quot;how&quot; requires ongoing focus.</td>
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<td>1B) Engage the Campus Community</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Leaders at the institution both demonstrate and articulate a shared responsibility for improving student success. This is exhibited by the wide input that was gathered in defining goals and in the work to implement toward those goals. Decisions, such as new positions, organizational changes, and even tool expansion, demonstrate a shared commitment to drive toward the goal. All departments have cascaded plans that describe what work is being done in support of the aspirations defined for the university.</td>
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**2) Understand the challenge**

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<td>2A) Evaluate past and present performance</td>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Data are plentiful at the institution, and this is an area of improvement for the university. Many routine reports on major metrics are posted, shared, and available for staff—although many weren't aware of dashboards. However, these data are often insufficient for evaluation and assessment of individual programs or to understand the impact on students. They noted that they can always request additional data but have limited senses of what's available. Of note, data are often shared as locked PDF documents which prevents staff from further manipulating and analyzing data to understand performance patterns (unless they build out their dashboards or tools). Many shared frustrations about the lack of data available re courses (success, scheduling, predictive, etc.) and also described a &quot;culture of hesitancy and fear&quot; around sharing data—resulting in uneven use in decision-making. Having multiple systems across common functions (e.g. documentation of student interactions, appointment scheduling) hinders the collection and analysis of data to support the effectiveness of student success activities.</td>
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<td>2B) Understand drivers of performance and relevant system activities</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Participants broadly understand the needs of students and reported the breadth of interventions and supports available as comprehensive. But many shared issues prevent staff from either maximizing or understanding impact. These include: uneven use of technology solutions like Blackboard, cumbersome and paper-based processes, differences in advising across colleges/departments, FERPA concerns that prevent staff from &quot;having the access that they need&quot;—both within and across departments.</td>
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Readiness Assessment (3/5)

3) Plan to deliver on your goals

3A) Determine your reform strategy
Has the institution identified and defined a cohesive set of interventions (programs, policies, practices, etc.) that will maximize the collective impact on the aspiration?

3B) Draw the delivery chain
Do institution leaders understand the chain through which implementation must occur?

3C) Set targets and trajectories
Have the aspiration and associated goals been translated to concrete end targets and trajectories?

Strength Rationale

G There are a robust set of academic and student supports that exist to support a range of needs and circumstances—including Undergraduate Research, Supplemental Instruction (expanding), coaching, the Interaction Model in the Residence Halls, as well as specialized supports for students with numerous backgrounds and interests. Perception of technology use varies widely; faculty leaders shared that most staff use software, like Blackboard, routinely—many students reported frustration at not having more real-time feedback.

Good relationships between leaders and departments seem to exist across campus, and staff are able to work together well to support students. However, staff did voice that many colleges and departments operate very differently with both systems and expectations—making it difficult for students to navigate or for common issues to be systematically addressed. Implementation planning is not a core strength—resulting in scope creep or inconsistent implementation.

Aspirations have been translated into clear strategies and SMART goal metrics, including interim targets. They are clear and publicly shared with stakeholders. Some staff expressed questions around the ability of institution to realistically attain the goal targets.

Readiness Assessment (4/5)

4) Drive implementation

4A) Establish routines to drive and monitor performance
Are there regular results-driven conversations that allow for shared review of and action on performance?

4B) Solve problems early and rigorously
Are there mechanisms to ensure problems are identified, raised early and solved in order of priority?

Strength Rationale

G The institution has high level metrics that are supported by department level metrics. Annual results are published for the overall plan, but the process is not clear for cascaded plans—what to report on? To whom? And when? Data are routinely provided to take action with specific students (calls, offer supports, etc.), but the data cannot be used for further analysis, to track outcomes, or to understand impact. Student support and academic managers indicate that data reports are challenging to interpret and that it is difficult to turn the raw data the information they would like to see and use.

There is a shared sense of responsibility across the institution for student success. However, there are "bureaucratic processes" that tend to be more faculty centric than student-centered, so some of these issues are known but left unsolved; students shared this as "faculty don't listen to us; they are resistant to change." This leads to numerous exceptions, firefighting, and staff being reactive instead of systematic. Faculty and staff work together across departments, but siloed work (e.g. customized reporting, college level dashboards) prevents efforts from comprehensively benefiting more students. The institution has reorganized and is continuing to change in order to efficiently support students.
Readiness Assessment (5/5)

5) Be a student ready institution

**5A) Build capacity and sustain momentum**
Is building implementation capacity a priority for institution leaders and an ongoing endeavor? Does the institution maintain its focus through challenges and distractions?

**Strength**: Green

**Rationale**: New organizational structures and expanded investment in students supports (e.g., Supplemental Instruction) and BI tools are evidence that the university is continually shifting to better support students. The "highly encourage" instead of "mandate" culture of the institution means that bringing staff and faculty along with new directions will be critical for success. As example, current use of BB Learn by faculty has increased over time but is not at the levels students would like to see. As the university takes on shifts like centralized advising, consistent training for both faculty and staff will be an essential part of implementing a new system. The university could also take more time to "pause, assess, and celebrate."

**5B) Communicate the message**
Does the institution regularly communicate about the aspiration and the strategies to achieve it?

**Strength**: Green

Staff felt well informed about the core student success work of the university. The institution's strategic planning process was seen as a collaborative experience for nearly all participants. Many different forums for communication of strategic objectives (as well as updates on progress) were cited by participants; nearly all felt they were well informed of that plan. The Cascaded Plans help to further connect the goals of the overall plan with core departmental strategies and efforts. That said, student voices are often not heard—or are dismissed, and space for them to have larger voices is needed.

Self Assessment: The readiness assessment for University of Idaho shows both areas of strength and opportunities for growth

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Starfish Calibrated Results: The readiness assessment for University of Idaho shows both areas of strength and opportunities for growth

1. Develop the Foundation
   - Define your Aspiration
   - Engage the Campus Community

2. Understand the Challenge
   - Evaluate Past & Present Performance
   - Understand Drivers of Performance & Relevant Institution Activities

3. Plan to Deliver
   - Determine Reform Strategy
   - Draw the Delivery Chain
   - Set Targets & Trajectories

4. Drive Implementation
   - Establish Routines to Drive and Monitor Performance
   - Solve Problems Early and Rigorously

5. Be Student Ready
   - Build Capacity and Sustain Momentum
   - Communicate the Message

Our readiness assessment suggests that the team at University of Idaho might focus on these key areas in the next few months:

- **Thoughtful Implementation**
  - Recent announcements of organizational structure changes in advising provide an opportunity to build consistent processes, documentation procedures, and systems for advising and to provide centralized training. Centralized models tend to be most successful when strong connections are maintained with the academic divisions and departments. It is key that faculty must continue to be strong supporters of the advising process. Assigning liaisons from advising to each academic department and allowing flexibility to customize messaging and outreach activities to different student populations will be important; this will help faculty (and the advisors themselves) realize that both informed and consistent advising can occur in a centralized model.

- **Single Systems with High Adoption**
  - Technology solutions (including VandalStar) can improve efficiencies for processes, communication, student satisfaction and achievement but only if adoption of those technologies is consistent across the university and rises to a level that allows real impact. Participants reported inconsistent use of Blackboard by faculty and instructors and multiple systems for documenting advising/coaching sessions. Strategies to achieve broad adoption and to have common tasks performed in a single system should be pursued aggressively.
Our readiness assessment suggests that the team at University of Idaho might focus on these key areas in the next few months:

**FERPA and Student Success**
FERPA is intended to protect student information while also allowing staff, with an educational need to know, access to student records. We heard from senior leaders down through even students, that the current restrictions on student information don't allow faculty or staff to serve students efficiently or fully. The current operational stance of the institution appears to signal that arguably core work to support students is not formally deemed as a valid educational activity. A wide range of staff including advisors (professional and faculty), athletic coaches, TRIO staff and others can better support students if they have good data on academic progress. We do not intend to act as legal council to the institution on this issue but do suggest that policies at U. Idaho are far more strict than we have seen at other institutions—and are potentially detrimental to supporting student success and achieving the ambitious goals that have been established.

**Data Analysis**
Academic leaders indicated that the format in which they receive data (.pdf files) does not allow them to analyze and adequately segment student cohorts. Publicly available data show attainment gaps for various student populations, and limiting data access and the ability to analyze data hinders the institution’s ability to identify and address these gaps. In response, some colleges and departments have developed their own stand-alone systems to do more detailed analysis. Ensuring adequate access and analysis tools for all appropriate departments will better support student success.

Our readiness assessment suggests that the team at University of Idaho might focus on these key areas in the next few months:

**Closing the Loop on Cascaded Plans**
It was clear that a report will be generated and data used to support the on-going activities and outcomes of the strategic plan at the top level. There was not clear direction on how departments should report on data and outcomes from their own cascaded plans. In some cases that has left the perception that those plans were not integral to the process. To support continuous improvement at all levels, an institution-wide process for reporting on outcome measures, using those to make further improvements, and celebrating successes as appropriate should be implemented.
Thank you

HOBSONS