

News Release

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North Dakota State College of Science honored by NASPA *Grand Silver winner of the 2015 Excellence Awards for student success program*

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Each year, NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, recognizes the outstanding contributions of members who are transforming higher education through exceptional programs, innovative services, and effective administration. The “Making Student Success a Priority” program at North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) was named as the 2015 Grand Silver winner of the NASPA Excellence Awards. The program was selected by a peer review process that was approved by the NASPA Board of Directors during its winter board meeting. Recipients will be honored in March at the 2015 NASPA Annual Conference in New Orleans, La.

Campuses, no matter their mission, size, or student demographics, struggle to ensure that the students who start their academic path persist to graduation. In 2012, the Aspen Institute identified and included NDSCS in the top 10 percent of the most successful Community Colleges in the country. However, their retention rate had fallen from 18 percent from 2008 to 2012. That drop, coupled with an unprecedented workforce shortage in the state and declining state high school graduation rates until 2018, exemplified the need to rethink their approach to supporting our students’ success.

NDSCS is a unique two-year campus in that they have a majority of students living on-campus in college-owned housing. It was clear through student feedback and survey data that the students were not feeling supported in their learning – specifically, they indicated that they were not receiving support to cope with their non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) and the support needed to thrive socially. Based on that information, NDSCS enhanced their acclimation and on-boarding activities, recognizing that literature indicates that the first three weeks on campus are critical to a students’ success.

Improvements were campus-wide through establishing faculty nominated peer- leader team and increasing the students’ acclimation time to the college. Shifting student move-in from Sunday to Saturday allowed additional time and opportunities for students to engage and interact prior to the stress of starting the academic year. The Registration and Orientation process was restructured to be two-part, to provide students and family members crucial information about the expectations and resources available to support them before during and after their time as an NDSCS student.

Another shift was the development of the Wildcat Welcome Team, which afforded current students the opportunity to mentor incoming students – providing crucial peer-to-peer connections for new students. All campus facets were involved in most efforts, from facilities management to the President. This has been accomplished through traditional meetings and

discussions – but also through using technology. Text alerts and heavy use of Facebook, twitter and other social media were also developed to further engage students.

It is through these efforts that NDSCS's retention has increased from 62 percent in 2011-2012 to 71 percent in 2013-2014; student attendance at welcome week has increased 19 percent from fall 2013 to fall 2014; and students living on campus (residence halls, family housing, or apartments) has increased 9.3 percent.

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