#73 Last Five Miles: Coaching Students to Degree Completion - Project Artifacts

Led by Becky Sanchez, Director, Undergraduate Programs Office, School of Business Administration

- Full copy of the report generated by the Degree Complete Specialist (attached; below)
- Response rates from SBA outreach (phone calls, email, social media, etc.)

First round of mailing
- Mailings sent to 201 students
- 59 returned, no new address

Second Round of Mailing
- Mailings sent to 138 students (new group)
- 51 returned, no new address

First Round of E-Mail
- ~200 E-Mails sent
- 79 E-Mails returned, address no longer active

Second Round of E-Mail
- ~125 E-Mails sent
- 44 E-Mails returned, address no longer active
• Number of students who re-enrolled in courses Winter, Spring and Fall 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Tuition Rate</th>
<th>Tuition</th>
<th>Fees</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>MGMT</td>
<td>Winter 2014</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Differential Resident</td>
<td>$2,288</td>
<td>$421</td>
<td>$2,709</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>MKTG</td>
<td>Winter 2014</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Base Resident</td>
<td>$1,160</td>
<td>$353</td>
<td>$1,513</td>
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<td>$166</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>$654</td>
<td>$166</td>
<td>$820</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$1,960.80</td>
<td>$423</td>
<td>$2,383.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$13,146

• Number of students who graduated: 8
Last Five Miles: Results
Nathanial Garrod
Portland State University
Overview

Oregon Governor Kitzhaber created a goal for higher education in the state of Oregon. His goal is that by 2025, all adult Oregonians will have High School Diploma’s, 40% have a Bachelor’s degree and 40% have an Associate’s degree or equivalent. Currently, Oregon is the only state that is talking about education in this way, and legislators recognize that it is an entire system that needs to change, not just pieces at different times.

A report from the Office of the Chancellor of the Oregon University system states that in 2010, 88.9% of Oregonians over 25 held high school diplomas, which means 11.1% do not. At the same time, there were 28.9% of that population who held Bachelor’s degrees and 26.7 that had a 1 year certificate or associates degree (OUS, 2012)

| National graduation rates for students that started as First Time Full Time Freshmen |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Cohort          | Four Year Grad Rate | Five Year Grad Rate | Six Year Grad Rate |
| 2004            | 37.9             | 53.9             | 58.3             |
| 2005            | 28.6             | 54.3             | 58.8             |

Portland State University is an urban public 4-year research institution located in the heart of Portland, Oregon. According to the 2010 census, Portland is the most populated city in Oregon, and the second most populated city in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. According to the Portland State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning, the average undergraduate student at Portland State is 27 years old, the campus is primarily non-residential and enrollment for the Spring 2014 term was 20,313 undergraduate students (PSU OIRP Student Profile, 2014)

The most recent six-year graduation rate for First-Time Full-Time Freshmen at Portland State is from students who began in Fall 2007, which is 39.8 percent of students. This number is less than the most recently reported national graduation rate, which is from the entering class of 2005. According to the United States National Center for Education Statistics, the national six-year graduation rate for First-Time Full-Time Freshmen from that year is 58.8 percent (NCES, 2013).
The national graduation rate is 24 percent higher than the Portland State University graduation rate. Because of the difference in these numbers, Portland State has engaged in a number of programs to increase the graduation rate of our students.

One of these programs is the Last Mile program, which has been a university-wide effort to connect with students who applied for graduation, but for some reason had their graduation application cancelled within their last two terms (Inside, 2013). After connecting with these students, they have been encouraged to return to Portland State to complete whatever requirements are remaining, if any. Support from the relevant academic advisors has been provided for students to progress towards graduation. A small amount of funds are available to provide scholarships, and across campus faculty and staff have collaborated to support this initiative.

The Provost at Portland State proposed a challenge to rethink how the university is run, in light of the changing educational environment. The reTHINK Challenge (Provost, 2013) provides financial support for 24 projects that accelerate, reframe or inspire the way the University serves students. One of these programs is the School of Business Administrations Last Five Miles program. The Last Five Miles picks up where the Last Mile left off. The proposal for the Last Five Miles was to hire a Degree Completion Specialist to conduct outreach to students who are just short of graduating in an effort to get them to return to Portland State to finish their degree.

**Selection of Eligible Students**

Prior to the hiring of the Degree Completion Specialist, a list of students for outreach was created. This list was comprised of Business-degree seeking students who had completed more than 165 credits and stopped out at some point since 1995. A handful of students in this group are
students who started their college coursework as far back as the late 1970s, then stopped out, ended up returning and stopping out again.

The list generated a large number of students. In order to narrow it down to a more manageable group, students that had a Grade Point Average below 2.5 or still required more than a year worth of coursework to graduate with a Business degree were removed from the list. Students who had below a 2.5 GPA were eliminated from the list because a 2.5 GPA is the minimum GPA required to take upper division Business courses at Portland State. Degree Audit Reports (DARS) were run for all students the Project Leads wanted to connect with based on the above criteria. Peer Advisors reviewed about 150 DARS and highlighted coursework that was still required.

**Outreach Process**

The day the Degree Completion Specialist was hired, he was taught how to read the DARS and keep track of coursework required. As the position continued, the Degree Completion Specialist began an ongoing process of better understanding the changes in required coursework over the relevant period of time, as well as relevant and necessary petition processes. Fortunately, the Undergraduate Programs Office has catalogs dating back to the mid-1970s, which made it easier for the Degree Completion Specialist to understand a majority of requirements that had changed for those rare few students who had started before the early 1990s.

The Degree Completion Specialist started the project by individually assessing students’ progress, then reaching out to that student. This method had varied levels of success due to now-invalid addresses (both e-mail and physical) or phone numbers. While the Degree Completion Specialist was able to connect with a couple students right away that simply never applied for graduation despite eligibility, there were also a lot of e-mails that bounced back from non-active e-mail addresses. The Degree Completion Specialist realized that it would be a more effective use of
time to reach out to all students at once, then determined what was required for each one as they chose to respond to outreach.

Initial outreach happened via e-mail\(^1\). Sending an e-mail to all students on the list proved to be immensely useful, because many students do not still use the email account they used in the late 1990s or early 2000s and it allowed for elimination of that as a contact point.

Following the e-mail, a letter was sent to students via physical mail\(^2\). Many of these were returned – some with new addresses. A Facebook and LinkedIn account were set up for outreach. Three students were reached through the Facebook and one student through the LinkedIn account. Once students were e-mailed, and outreach through social media was attempted, the Degree Completion Specialist made phone calls. Much like the e-mail and mailing addresses, many of the phone numbers were no longer active.

The Degree Completion Specialist contacted Amanda Nguyen, the Assistant Director of Student Financial Services who has worked with The Last Mile Project, to access Skip Trace and acquire more current mailing address information for eight students.

**Students Enrolled**

The Degree Completion Specialist has been able to assist four students in the process of re-enrolling in courses towards degree completion. As the end of the Spring 2014 term draws to a close, three students have persisted to or completed their Bachelor’s Degree, and one has enrolled for the upcoming Fall term. One student has enrolled for both the Winter and Spring 2014 terms, but dropped his enrolled courses in the first week of both terms due to incompatibility with his work and personal schedule. This student is only two upper-division credits away from degree completion and should continue to be followed up with. The table below shows student re-enrollment, credits and tuition/fees associated with each student. The total amount of Student

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\(^1\) The text for this e-mail can be found in Appendix A

\(^2\) The text of this letter can be found in Appendix B.
Credit Hours enrolled by Last Five Miles Students is 67, which as of Fall Term 2014 will have generated $13,146 in tuition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Eight students have graduated as a direct result of the efforts of the Degree Completion Specialist under the Last Five Miles program. There are still two students enrolled and working towards graduation. There is also a student that will be eligible to graduate if his Academic Requirements Committee Petition is approved.

One student responded that they had graduated from another institution. It is not unlikely that there are a significant number of students that transferred or otherwise completed their degrees at another institution that did not report this either because they did not feel it was relevant or because we do not have accurate current contact information available for them.

**Total Students Contacted**

The Degree Completion Specialist has been in contact with a total of 26 students, including the above noted students who re-enrolled, graduated, have an application in for graduation or verified that they graduated elsewhere. In addition to these, there are 15 students the Degree
Completion Specialist has been in active contact with who have some course of action they have not pursued, ranging from Academic Requirement Committee petitions, re-enrollment in courses or submission of graduation applications. Students who have not re-enrolled in courses have stated that time and/or money have been barriers in this process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently Enrolled</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Elsewhere</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Action Required</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendations**

**School of Business Administration**

The School of Business Administration should continue to follow up with students who have been contacted, at least once a term. Optimally, it seems like a week before the registration period might be the best time for this. This responsibility might best lie with Academic Advisors, as they are already doing case management for Business majors. Further effort should also be made to get ahold of students that have completed degree requirements (or are within three courses or 10 credits of degree completion) to encourage re-enrollment.

**Other Units at Portland State University**

The success of this project over the course of just one academic year in one academic department proves the significant impact the Last Five Miles could have if implemented on a campus-wide level. Optimally, hiring a three-quarter or full-time staff member to engage this project on a campus-wide basis may have the highest rate of success. Engaging in the same process, using the same criteria is the best way to start. Finding students who have completed at least 165 credits
and been enrolled at any point since 1995 but not active for at least two terms is the criteria used for the School of Business Administration. From there, students who have earned less than a 2.0 Grade Point Average can be eliminated from the list (unless there are specific departmental concerns) as can students who have more than a year of coursework to complete any major. Outreach can be conducted in a similar way. Starting with an email campaign, then moving to a physical mail campaign, social media and phone calls. Skip-Trace may continue to be a valuable resource, as can cross-campus relations – for example, the School of Business Administration Degree Completion Specialist had a strong working relationship with the Degree Certification Specialist in Degree Requirements, who was helpful during the Academic Requirements Committee Petitions, as well as understanding older DARS reports and more.
References


Appendix A: E-Mail Text

Hello,

My name is _________ and I am the Degree Completion Specialist for the School of Business Administration at Portland State University. The university has been making an effort to ensure the graduation of students who have not yet completed their degree and have not been enrolled in classes for a number of terms.

You are receiving this message because you are a few classes short of earning your Bachelor’s degree at Portland State University. I would be happy to help you work towards the completion of your degree. If you are interested in continuing your Bachelor’s degree at Portland State please contact me by responding to this e-mail or giving me a call at ____-____-____.

We recognize the significant volume of work you have put into your degree up to this point. Earning a Bachelor’s degree is an incredible milestone that could help move your career forward. We look forward to celebrating your degree completion with you.

If you have completed your degree at another university or are not interested in continuing at Portland State, please feel free to contact me and let me know.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Degree Completion Specialist
Appendix B: Letter Text

Month Day, Year
Name
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear __________,

Portland State University has been making an effort to ensure the graduation of students who have not yet completed their degree and have not been enrolled in classes for a number of terms. The School of Business Administration wants to help you graduate as soon as possible.

You are receiving this message because you are several classes short of earning your Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration at Portland State University but have not been enrolled for several terms. I would be happy to help you work towards the completion of your degree. In order to complete your degree, you would need to take a few more courses.

If you want to know more about what courses you still need and how quickly we can help you graduate, please contact [Degree Completion Specialist] via email at ____@pdx.edu or by calling our office at ____-____-____ and inquiring about the Last Five Miles program.

We recognize the significant volume of work you have put into your degree up to this point. Earning a Bachelor’s degree is an incredible milestone that could help move your career forward. We look forward to celebrating your degree completion with you.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.

We look forward to talking with you soon about finishing your degree.

Thank you,

Degree Completion Specialist