Katy Oliveira (00:07):

Welcome to Next Practices Data-informed strategies to Shape the future of higher ed. In each episode, you'll hear from transformational higher ed leaders on how they're tackling today's most pressing challenges to make a difference for their students and institutions. I'm your host, Katy Oliveira.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (00:28):

If I'm not hearing from my advisor and I'm getting five emails and I can see on TikTok and a Facebook post that there's, oh my gosh, there's this other school that's making these decisions real quick, maybe I'll reach out to them instead. So it's definitely a buyer's market for a lot of these degrees that's very pragmatic and it sounds very cynical. So if we don't take care of our students and give them that connection there, they can just go somewhere else. It's not an issue. So that is a concern. Now, that's the super practical numbers-based reason. I have much more of a heartfelt reason of we have somebody here, they're one of our students. We want to make sure they feel connected

Katy Oliveira (01:11):

Day on the show. I am delighted to be talking with Dr. Jeffrey Taylor from the University of Texas at Arlington about how that institution is helping nursing students from across the country not only get in the classes that they need, but to be successful in them so that they can persist to graduation. We cover a wide range of topics including how they provide online advising and how they are using analytics to streamline their graduation process, resulting in more students applying for graduation. But before we dive in, if you like the show, be sure to subscribe and share with your colleagues so that they can stay up to date on the latest in data informed student practices. So Jeff, welcome to Next Practices. I'm so happy you're able to join me today.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (02:11):

Yeah, Katy thanks for having me.

Katy Oliveira (02:13):

So let's dive in first just understanding a little bit more about you and your institution. So if you could tell me about University of Texas Arlington College of Nursing and Health Innovation, how it served its mission and your role in it. I think that'd be a great place to start.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (02:30):

I am Jeff Taylor. I am the Director of Academic advising for the College of Nursing and Health Innovation at UT Arlington. And just as a note, that is something that's really hard to type. Every time I have to introduce myself to somebody. It's like two lines we try to get. We're big on acronyms in higher ed, but that's who I am and where we are and the College of Nursing and Health Innovation, which I'm going to go ahead and say CONHI just for the sake of we want this podcast to be under three hours I think. So I'll start saying CONHI. Instead, we serve students that want to go into the field of nursing and also kinesiology. We have undergraduate graduate programs from bachelor's programs all the way up to doctorate level programs that we serve within our college. The advising piece, student services piece is done in one office called the Office of Enrollment and Student Services, and we work with four different student populations here. So really what we're doing in-House is we're trying to hit every possible angle we can for our students and what they need and what their academic and career interests are. It's a lot of variety, a lot of different approaches and a lot of different needs that we're having to take into account.

Katy Oliveira (03:43):

One of the things that I remember from a previous conversation that we had a couple months ago when you were sharing some of the work that you're doing is you're sharing that a large percentage of your population is not necessarily housed on your campus, that you have students from across the country that many students are participating in your program online. Do you mind sharing just a little bit more about that piece of your department?

NP017 (Completed 04/11/24)

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (04:06):

Yeah, absolutely. So we do, I guess this will be, I can give you an nice subtle framework of what we all do, what students we serve and where they are because a lot of the unique circumstances we find ourselves in are based on who our students are, where they are and what they're looking for. Our office handles four different student groups, and I'm just going to kind of run through them a little quick so everyone kind of has an idea of what's here. So our first group is undergraduate students seeking a degree in the field of kinesiology. So these are folks that want to go be teachers, trainers, go on to occupational therapy school, physical therapy school, things of that nature. Public health also falls under that. We have a bachelor's of science and public health program, so for students that are wanting to go into the field of public health and service, they can study through this department to do that.

(04:53):

And we service these folks right here as well. Most of those students are on campus in this population, although our public health program does have an exclusively online component as well that for students in the state of Texas that they can sign up and take there. So we have students across the state in all major metropolitan areas taking those courses. And then we get into our nursing piece, which is where all the fun is. We have our traditional BSN nursing program, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and this is for the students that come in and basically say, I want to go to nursing school. So they don't have any level of experience necessarily as a nurse. They come in, they complete all their courses, they do their clinicals, they get their BSM degree. They go and sit for their licensure to become a registered nurse, so they come out of it with an RN and A BSM degree.

(05:41):

So that's one group. So that also has an online component mainly on campus. We have a significant online portion that's also throughout the state of Texas. Then we have another BSM program for students that already have an RN licensure. So that's interesting is students can go to a college and get their associate's degree in nursing, and that allows them to sit for the RN license exam. So these are practicing RNs that just want to finish that bachelor's degree component, and so they come to us and they can finish that. That one is almost entirely online. We have a small campus population that meets locally on our Fort Worth campus, but for the most part, 98 to 99% of our students are online, and that's across the United States. I think we can operate with RN to BSN. I think there's only a small handful of states that we aren't authorized to work in.

(06:31):

So we have students all the way from California all the way to the East Coast as well, just spread out all around all online. And then we have our graduate nursing programs, which are the masters of Science in nursing for folks that want to go be nurse practitioners, nurse educators, nurse administrators, and we have a doctor of nursing practice program as well, and that can also be nationwide. Our nurse practitioner programs have a little more limitation, but our nurse education nurse admin folks can be in most of the states around as well. We have a substantial team of advisors that are very specialized in each population. We have four different advising teams that work with these students. We have students that come in person and students that are online. So it's a lot of moving pieces there as we're trying to get folks where they need to go. But the online component is something that what I started here was something new for me as well to kind of get exposed to and figure out how to work around and work with.

Katy Oliveira (07:29):

It sounds like you're working with a very broad diverse group of students from all kinds of backgrounds, all kinds of demographic locations in, I assume ages at different places in their professional experience and career. Is that

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (07:45):

Correct? There's folks that are coming in that 18, 19 years old that are just fresh out of high school ready to do their thing, the traditional college student. And then we have folks that married with a couple of kids trying to continue there, further education, and we have folks in their sixties and seventies wanting to still finish a degree or keep moving as well. So it is a veritable cornucopia of demographics that we're working with and it's pretty exciting.

Katy Oliveira (08:11):

You alluded to, or you read my mind of my next question of getting a little bit into how you've structured your advising team to serve such a cornucopia of students and program.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (08:24):

It is, and it's interesting because it's a fun component and it really kind of speaks to what we try to do because every student population has different needs. They have different goals, there's different things going on. Like an undergraduate student that wants to get their BSN that has no nursing experience has very different needs than a student that's been a practicing RN for 25 years trying to get their BSN. And so you have really two different folks that are theoretically taking similar courses to get that exact same degree, but they have very different needs. One of them may be local lives in Dallas who's never lived out of the metroplex, whereas the RN to BSN student may live in southern California and has no intention of ever sitting foot in Texas, and you get folks that just are a little bit different. So figuring out how to build these things up and set our teams accordingly is interesting because we have folks in our office that have the very same job titles that do very different things.

(09:22):

So we have an academic advisor or an admissions advisor on one team handles things a lot differently than another. Some of that is built on the way UT our has specifically set aside admissions processing a little bit or how they identify current students. Not to get too much into the weeds here on this, but as an undergrad, RN and A BSN student, they come in to us as an intended major till we review and confirm that they've meet these certain requirements. But as this intended student, they are considered admitted to the university. And so they're in this weird space between where they're admitted, but not really, but they're considered a current admitted student. So our current advisors on that team are working with these already admitted students to make sure they're processing moving on. Whereas on the graduate side, this is not technical at all.

(10:14):

They come over to us on our side and we have an admissions team that actually goes through and verifies multiple admissions requirements, and then we are actually offering the admission to the graduate students. So those admissions advisors are actually doing the work of admissions, whereas on the other side they are, but the students already admitted it's more of a program admission versus university admission. So being able to line out each thing and our teams are great. I love 'em all. I was hired to oversee originally the graduate advising team, and so then picked up a few other teams here and there, but really they each take on their own unique cultures as well. So we do group full office team meetings, but having those individual squads, for lack of a better term, meeting together, and they take on the importance of the relevance of their student population.

(11:07):

I remember when I first started working here, it's been about six years ago, there'd be conversations for folks that have been here. They'd say, well, this candidate really seems more like an RN and to BSN advisor, this seems more like a grad. And I just was sitting there, what are you talking about? Advising? Is advising. I've done this stuff for over a decade. At that point I was like, I know, but you kind of get in and you realize, oh, okay, yeah, there are certain nuances where a certain personality does fit a little better.

So as we've hired new folks coming in, it's an interesting conversation. We can say that we ask questions about online advising and try to gather people's perspectives and experiences as far as that goes. But really saying some folks really value sitting across the desk from others, that's their bread and butter.

(11:52):

That's what they enjoy doing. That's what they're good at. So we want to make sure we're putting them in a position on a team where they can see that face-to-face every day. And other folks are really just their own different way. They like this right here, I don't mind doing a virtual call. Let's get these things knocked out. So putting people in places to be successful, this is really important for that because again, yeah, every student has their own unique need. Even individual teams, there's different students. Not every student is exactly the same. So being able to tweak things to try to meet as many needs as possible is the ongoing challenge that we've got.

Katy Oliveira (12:27):

Yeah, it's so interesting because the really intelligent, intelligent may not be the right word. It's a really strategic, thoughtful approach, intentional approach to making sure that students who are at different places and in different pathways have the support that makes sense for them in their program and where they're going.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (12:47):

Yeah, it's interesting because you want to put people in the best place to succeed. So just as a note, and now as a director, as more of a manager, I don't get as much direct student facing. I love it. I get the angry students, so I always tell my team my opinions are skewed. A lot of times I get the folks that are particularly upset about a policy or a decision or an error or anything of that nature. So I get to work with a lot of those students, and that's really fun. I love talking to students, but you really want to put them and your teams in a good place to be successful. And so one thing we do, we have an open phone every day. So we have folks that, advisors, that'll just answer the phone. A student, they can make an appointment if they want, but they can just call in and talk to an advisor.

(13:32):

They may have to wait a few minutes if all the lines are occupied, but they can talk to an advisor and get their answers sorted whenever they want. Some do prefer the appointments, but one of the expectations of certain teams is you got to be on call, you got to be available on the phones, and not everybody is as strong on phones. Again, it goes back to playing on people's strengths, and so figuring out what can you do? Where is your value, where is your strength there? Some work is stuff that you're just going to have to do. I'm not going to take you off the phones altogether, we got to answer the phones, but are there certain ways we can measure and put you in places to be successful? Because again, the whole goal is trying to get everybody where they need to go, and that's including our students, that's including our staff, whoever it is.

Katy Oliveira (14:16):

Yeah, I think with such a broad diverse group of students that you're working with, I'm sure there are several different kinds of challenges that they're facing, but I wonder, are there a couple that kind of float to the top, a couple of top student success challenges that you're seeing or patterns that you're seeing that your team is working to solve?

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (14:37):

There's always something, I feel like it's always we want to work ourselves out of a job, but it is kind of a fun little job security. There's always going to be some challenges that arise. And so I think there's a few different ones here. One is just having the student themselves, and it's fairly easy. Our campus-based students, we put a hold on their account every semester. They're required to have an advising appointment, so that's fairly easy to do. They have to come see us before they register. It's a good

conversation piece. It's a good placeholder to get them to figure out where they're going and what they're wanting to do. It's a good check-in our online students because we have literally thousands of them, it's not really feasible to require them to see an advisor before they register. So registration's just kind of open for them, not open in the sense they don't have to see an advisor before they register when it comes up.

(15:28):

So figuring out what that is and making them have that connection with us is really there because again, we don't want them just floating out there in the ether. But for me it's like if somebody's here, they're one of our students, I want to make sure that they feel welcomed and connected. So making sure those online students have that connection is important. So we've done some things over the years to try to do that. And really this kind goes back to a little bit of Alexander asked and a higher ed theorist had the IEO model, the input environment and output. The input is what students bring in that we have no control over. It's just who they are. They're just bringing their personhood to us and the environment is what we provide for them, and the O is the output of what they graduate. They go off and do great things. What can we do on that E level to help them?

(18:00):

And so for us, it's like trying to figure out the key points of development. One of my backgrounds is human development. So looking at seeing a college student's existence as a college student as part of the life. So birth is a key element there. The early childhood as it were. So as a new student coming in, if we don't onboard them, well, if we don't give them anything, any information there, then we're going to be, again, they feel unmoored and then it's creating more work for us on the backend, just as an example. So we did create, it's been right around the time when the pandemic was going on. We created some twice daily live orientation sessions that we do via Zoom or teams or something of that nature. We bounced back and forth on them, but essentially it was every day where because we have rolling enrollments for our students, we have eight dates a year, which our students can begin the program.

(18:55):

So we've always got new students coming in and just trying to get them moving. And so how do you kind of work with those folks? And so for us was like, we need time for them to get FaceTime with an advisor with one of the assistant directors, somebody on a day-to-day basis where they can show up. We go over some basic information for them and allow that little bit of connection to go forth. And so we had each of our online teams were doing these sessions every day. And so then we eventually kind of moved it to just once a day to make it a little more manageable on our end. But make it a long story short, we ran these numbers or had our university analytics run these numbers, and it turned out that that had a positive impact on persistence, just that by itself had a positive impact versus those that did not attend because it wasn't required.

(19:41):

So we've taken that now though and have partnered with the university orientation department, and they're doing a little more now where students can do it at their own pace. But also now they're learning more about UTA as a whole and not just specifically their nursing program because these are UTA students. They may never set foot in Texas, but they are our students. They are mavericks and we want them to be here with us. So little things like that, trying to make sure they're connected and identifying guideposts through the program. Ideally we'll use different programs. We'll use some Civitas programs as well to do some outreach and run some numbers. But identifying the critical points throughout that student's life cycle, roughly halfway through their first course, giving 'em a check-in and a reminder of information. You get information at orientation and your brain is so full of things you don't even know what to ask.

(20:33):

It doesn't make any sense, but let them get their feet wet a little bit and then giving them more information and then picking another class and doing the same thing and reaching out and touching them as many times as we can. What I found was for certain programs, especially students would show up and here's your degree plan, here's your classes, go be great. And that would be it. And so students are emailing, calling back, well, what about this class? How about, and just with multiple questions. So we improved what we were giving 'em at the beginning, giving 'em a FAQ with a lot of information about here's the classes, if you think you transferred this class in, here's how you fix it. Trying to anticipate questions. If you get the same question 12 times, it's annoying. So why don't you do something to try to fix it on the front end? And again, that's super pragmatic, but again, it's like, so you don't know how many questions you've prevented by doing this one thing, but you know that, hey, we're trying to give people as much information as possible. Most of our students are working nurses, they're busy, they've got a lot going on. So just giving it to 'em where they can pull it up on their phone at their convenience and look at it and read it and understand it. And I think that's really been helpful with the challenges.

Katy Oliveira (21:42):

It sounds like you're really intentional about taking a proactive approach to supporting your students, making sure they're connected, making sure that they are part of the larger UTA community, that they have a point person that they can go to for support. But it also sounds like you have a lot of students. So how are you managing that workload and that capacity load for your advising team? What's the ratio of your caseload and how are your teams using different technology systems to manage that big case? What I'm assuming might be a pretty sizable caseload?

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (22:20):

It is. It's substantial. It is above the preferred recommended caseload put forth by NACADA, the National Academic Advising Association. That's a lot of students. We have a lot of advisors fortunately. So we are in the process here of transitioning in a new way on this. So traditionally what we have done is we've done just a straight up group advising model. So the students would have, each advising team has a specific email address. The students would send the email to that and it would go to an advising queue for the whole advising team to answer whoever the first advisor was to get it. They'd handle it, move on and go on with our lives. So worked very well. It worked very nicely, is very efficient. But I have found over time, and I think anybody listening to this, I'm sure this as well, working with people is not an efficient process.

(23:16):

It's just not, you can be super efficient with the person. You could give them everything they need, everything they want, and they could still leave that interaction feeling like they're missing something. They can feel like that there's something that just wasn't quite right that they just felt like you were just, there was nothing there. So trying to figure out what that piece is. I was doing some manual labor one time many, many years ago. This is a real quick side note here. We were repairing a building in Los Angeles and part of it involved painting it, and this building had the bars on the windows to protect everything from people damaging the windows. I was tasked with removing these bars from these windows. Some people could paint because you didn't want to just kind of paint around it. That's not you want to do a good job, but all the screws that were in there were the type of screws that you couldn't unscrew.

(24:05):

Again, makes sense. It's security. They're trying to make sure these bars are staying there. So I was having to work out a way to get these screws out and day by day, I'm taking these little screws out, I'm having to cut little holes and do all these things, and I'm making very slow progress. Two slow progress because we almost got to the last day and three of the windows were still up. So a couple of guys came by with

crowbar and popped 'em out and painted and moved on. Well, the problem was you couldn't put the bars back on because the whole stucco, the whole thing just came out of the wall, so it was ruined. And so I just always thought that as I was working with people, it's messy. It takes a while, it's intricate, but if you go too fast, if you just bowl over them, you're going to ruin something that could work.

(24:51):

I'm all about developing relationships. For me, that's always a piece about working with people is having that relationship. We've looked at some ways forward and we are transitioning to more of a case management model. It's kind of blended with group advising in the sense that every student is going to be assigned one advisor, which is pretty normal to do, but we are also going to have it to where in our system where the advisors at that point, we'll take ownership of that particular group of students. So if it involves outreach, like I mentioned the first class, second class coming up on graduation, the students on probation, whatever's going on of concern that advisor owns, for lack of a better term, the outreach for that student. So that's the way we're going to kind of build that connection there. Send an email with the advisors, do a little video introduction, a picture, things like just build that connection because again, people just see a name in an email and they think, oh, this person, I don't know who this person is, is this even a real person?

(25:50):

Once you know who somebody is, it's a lot easier to work with them and kind of figure out what's going on and find that common ground. So we're doing that part. And now on the other side that we are going to have as a group backup, because again, say you're one of our advisors, Katy, and let's say you're sick for a week, that sounds pretty awful that you're going to come back after feeling miserable and sick for a week, and then you have 200 emails waiting specifically for you to answer. That's not sustainable either. So we've got it set up to where we're going to use our email system that we have, but to where in theory, if you're out, I'm out, whoever is out, then somebody, another team member can step in and assist and help that advisor lessen their load a little bit while they're out kind of helping lift one another up.

(26:35):

And also getting the student the answer because the student doesn't know you're sick. I mean, I'm sure they would care that you're sick, but ultimately they're just looking for an answer for their question or concern. And so if they're still getting the answer, they're going to work with it that way. So trying to build that connection is really what we're working on. Now. There's going to be more nuance to come on this because we've got it kind of set, and you can only work with the resources that you have. We've got good people, we have good students, we have mostly good systems, but we're going to see as we move into this, as it gets certain points, there will be probably some parts of weakness that we're going to look at and have to figure out how do we work around that, given what limitations we've got. And so that'll be interesting to see. So far, it looks like it's going to be a pretty good system and it's worked well so far, but we all know not everything is a hundred percent sustainable and there'll be some tweaks we're going to have to make. That's kind of what we're here for

Katy Oliveira (27:27):

In a case management model. And I think it makes sense that we're centering relationship building with our students, being able to proactively engage with them, but also recognize that we have a significant volume of students. Humans get sick, humans go on vacation, they have meetings, they have all kinds of things in that having group mechanisms for serving students and in different ways, having a mixed model, so to speak, I think makes a whole lot of sense.

Katy Oliveira (28:01):

This podcast is brought to you by Civitas Learning. Civitas Learning empowers colleges and universities to achieve transformative levels of student success to reshape higher education for decades to come. Civitas Learning's student impact platform brings institutional data together for a clearer picture of each student and situation, equipping institutions to take data informed action and lead with a new purpose to impact student success, ready to help students succeed every day. Visit civitaslearning.com to get started.

Katy Oliveira (28:37):

I know as folks transition to more case management based, proactive based model, it can be really challenging to scale those kinds of approaches when you have a high volume of students just because there's only so many hours in a day and humans, like you were saying in your analogy that you want to be, sometimes you have to be more surgical. I don't love using that word, but you need to be precise and you don't want to rip the bars off and take all the stucco with it, and then what are you left with, right? You want to be precise in your interaction. So that being said, I know that it can be tricky as a former advisor coming into my day, and oftentimes I serve the students who were sitting in my lobby crying and who had filled up my inbox, first hand raisers, who made themselves really known, and that those students needed help in the moment, but they weren't necessarily the student who was least likely to persist or who was really struggling secretly and quietly on their own. So how are your advisors, especially in an online environment, we are asked this a lot, gaining visibility into students' needs, making sure that they are connecting with those students who might not be hand raisers, connecting with those students who might be hiding in the corner and saying, look at me. I'm just chucking along here. How are they identifying that? And then managing their caseloads in such a way that they can have the capacity to serve their whole range of needs that come along with having a caseload.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (30:16):

Sure. No, that's my favorite group of people too. They're not skating by, that's not the right word, but they're there, but there is a certain risk. There seems to be a certain lack of engagement maybe. Now, here's interesting, and this is again a little more philosophical here, is not every student wants to be engaged. Some students, I can tell you with some of our students that we have, they're like, just tell me what classes to take. Just make it easy for me to register, get out of my way and let me go get my degree. And you know what? We say, go be great. We're in. We're going to give you exactly what you want to. I think it's trying to find a way to meet the expectations of each student. Happiness is a function of realistic expectations. So it's getting them to say like, oh, because we've all had advising in the past and my undergrad had great advisors.

(31:06):

So I kind of had that context and knew what was going on into grad school. It wasn't as ideal, but it's kind of one of those things. But I knew what I was doing at that point and could advocate for myself and figure out things as we're going along there. So I think really understanding who they are is really important. So for those students, every student reaches out to us eventually, and if they don't, they're usually fine. We usually have some outreach or we definitely outreach, just reach out to students. But at least once a semester, all students and everyone's at least get one from any student in a given semester. I'd say for the most part, except those that are really like boom, boom, boom, I'm good. Just stay out of my way and let me do my thing. So what happens is though, but you have students that can communicate what they need and some they can't and some that are trying to communicate what they need, but they don't have the language or the vocabulary to tell you what they need.

(31:58):

And so as a good example here, this is a common one that comes up is we'll have a student send an email that says, I need to drop my class. And that's really all it says. It's like an email that looks like a text message. I need to drop my class. And let's say the drop deadline passed a week ago, whatever it was

just picking a random idea here. Now as an advisor, as a professional, you could look at that email and say, oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. The deadline drop deadline has passed. Good luck. And you could leave it at that. And you're literally answering the question the student asked. But there's unwritten questions there in that email as well. Why do you need to drop? What's going on with your life? What are some options? There's a whole swath of conversations you could have.

(32:48):

Beyond that, the student may not even know. They can ask, they don't know if they should ask. They may feel embarrassed. And sometimes you just have to be the one to bring those things up, not call it out, but at least just kind draw attention to it. And so getting that out of them and getting some information, some answers works half the time, I'd say We don't get a response on that. They'll just be like, oh, just nevermind. Don't worry about it. I'll be okay. And then we find out a year later that their parent passed away or some significant tragedy. People have different ways of coping with stress and situations like that. So I would say for us, it's doing the touch for everybody, but also when the student is reaching out, make sure we're comprehensively answering what they need and also what they might not need.

(33:31):

So it could be a student that's in their final class, they're asking a question about the final class or registering, but they haven't applied to graduate. Making sure you're hitting all these little points while you're there. Again, you may not get to talk to 'em again. They may not reach out again. So at least giving them a point of reference where they can reach back and do those things because people don't always know to reach out. Some people, it's not even a matter of shame, I think it's just a matter of some people just don't know what to ask always, and in giving them as much information as they can, I think is important. That makes sure you're answering the first question. Always make sure what they're actually wanting to know you're telling them, but giving that extra look to everything and make sure things are there is really important as well. I'd say that's it.

Katy Oliveira (34:17):

Yeah, I think students are interesting, right? Because they don't even always know what help is available, so they don't know to ask because they're asking for the thing that they need and they don't know that there's greater support behind the person they're asking. Potentially.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (34:34):

It gets kind of hypocritical of us too. I may preach here for a second. So it's funny because yeah, they may not know what to ask. They might know the resources. We provide resources. We'll send them these emails with all this information. They'll call and ask a question. It's sounds very much like a faculty. Well, it's in the syllabus, and that's the only response the faculty will provide. It's in the syllabus. Well, it's in our welcome email, it's in this document. Instead of just answering the question again, because I'm like, I've got people here and I'm guilty of it. I've had people ask me, Hey, did you see that email from so-and-So, and I'm like, yeah, I didn't really read it. I saw it, but I kind of skimmed it. And none of us are reading every email as thoroughly as the Bible. We're not getting in here and getting it chapter and verse lined out as we should. So allowing a little grace for our students and just answering the question again is fine for me. It's like there's no deficit in just answering the question again. Maybe you feel like, oh my gosh, you should read this again. That's fine. But answer the question and copy that welcome letter to it again and say, here's your answer, but just in case, missed it, here is where you could find this information moving forward as well. But we all kind of do it. It's not always ideal, but it is a fact of life.

Katy Oliveira (35:46):

Yeah, giving grace, it takes many, many times doing something for it to really sink in too, I think. Well, I know that you team is doing a lot and moving to the case management system, helping your students, helping a large diverse population of students in person and online, especially with your online students,

but also with your in-person students, what kind of technology and processes are you using to do this work? And I know just for context, often different folks that I've talked to over the years around doing this work, there are folks who meet weekly to look at the data and to identify populations that are risk and to triage potential solutions. They're getting everybody on board across the institution, across the department, around a unified philosophy of student success, folks forming committees, implementing technology systems, making sure that they're looking at data regularly. There's a whole slew of different things that folks are doing to help make this work feasible. And I wonder, what does that look like at UT Arlington?

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (36:51):

It's all over the place. We got a little bit of everything going on, and so we specifically, I mean we pull data on a regular basis. So for our rolling start dates, I'll just say this again, going back to the online, you mentioned campus, I'll do some for them too, but for our online students, we get grades every five to six weeks for certain courses depending on when they finish. So as students are successful or not successful in those classes, they're getting outreach at that point as well. They're getting a touch from us with information, and we actually get some, we have them complete a small survey. It's optional. I wish we could just completely require it, but we can't. That allows them to share information about what happened with their grades, where things went awry. The most interesting thing is it's never necessarily about, the course material was too difficult.

(37:42):

It's never really, oh my gosh, the professor was a jerk. The biggest answers are typically there are some family stress going on, some sicknesses, or they're working 40 plus hours a week. Again, these are nurses with crazy hours time poverty is a real thing. They've got not enough time on their plate to do everything that they need to do. And so having that conversation with students is really important. So we run these numbers on a regular basis. Every semester we're pulling academic standing. Our students that are on probation, either with the university or with our departmental policies, we set them apart in a separate learning management software platform, and that's a specific probation advising platform. So we move them over there. They have different modules to complete over the first six weeks of the new semester. It's very mild things. It's more self-reflection, understanding of policy to keep them moving forward before the next registration date opens up.

(38:40):

So moving folks over there and getting 'em involved in that has been super important. We've seen some pretty good conclusions from doing some of that to the point where we are considering doing something large scale for all of our students in an LMS where we have a complete advising structure there of resources, message boards and things for our students, like where they're enrolled in a class with our advisors in there with all the forms, documents, anything they might need as a resource that we could also push announcements and things out because again, they're in there taking their classes. That's another way we can really touch them and get them connected with us. So that's what we're kind of looking at. But number wise, we are using some Civitas programming as well to connect, especially with the case management piece, being able to pull our students by last name by major and these different demographics to make sure that each advisor's reaching out to them, their specific group, they can keep track of them and understand the unique background.

(39:39):

I think that's been the big win is with using that program. Because in the past, it was always the advisors were asking me or another supervisor, could you pull a report about X or something? Can you give us this information? And I can, I'm happy to, it's part of my job. But having it in an accessible format where they can log in and it's just right there in front of them where they can pull it and do their own research, outreach, all those things right there has been a big win. I am something of a new technology, cynic in a

lot of ways where new technologies are brought to me and I'm like, eh, it's kind of cool, but where's it actually going to get benefit from it? And I have found though with this one though, that it has been particularly beneficial because it is the data that you need right there.

(40:26):

Our teams can log in there and look at it and find that information, and I can help them interpret and understand what's going on. And it's a lot of beyond the other processes, we're meeting regularly as individual teams. Some teams meet once a week, some meet every other week with longer meetings, just depending on the needs of what's going on. That's a lot of different processes. And there we're looking at adding some new committees in-house to look at more of the data a little more directly. I've got some trends that we've pulled that we're starting to look at from several years back and moving forward just so we can always kind be ready to see what's going on. The important thing is we, again, I mentioned time poverty. Our students have limited time, and so, and what comes to that is we can come up with a lot of ideas.

(41:09):

We can come up with a lot of things to do. The important thing is we got to see is it actually working? Is it actually doing it? Because it sounds great, we can make up all these ideas, but is it actually work? We're able to get that review done of our orientation data and found that it actually was doing something beneficial. We're starting to collect some more data where we can look back and say, okay, are these other interventions actually working as well? I think they are. I hope they are. But if they're not, you can't be married to any process if it's ultimately not working, if there's something that could work a little bit better, we've always got to be pushing that envelope.

Katy Oliveira (41:43):

Oh, man. I think what you just said is so important. I mean, I'm just going to reinforce that there are so many things we can do. There are a ton of best practices and strategies and tactics and technologies and approaches that any school can implement, but I think it's understanding what's the right combination for our institution and our students that are actually having an impact on them, and then getting visibility into what's actually working can be really tricky and hard to run. How are y'all doing that assessment and that analysis to discern the impact of the program on your student?

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (42:21):

That's a great question. It's not happening yet. And we're in the data collection. We're getting all the historical stuff in place to see what's going on with that. And well, odds are, I mean, we've got a few data savvy folks in office, but we'll probably partner with our analytics department here on campus and let them do the heavy lifting on those things. They're way smarter than we are about all that. Well,

Katy Oliveira (42:43):

You did it with your orientation though, didn't you?

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (42:45):

Yeah, it was through them. They had a special thing

Katy Oliveira (42:47):

Through them. They had

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (42:49):

Their magic, they have their stuff. Yeah, it's like financial aid calculations. It's all magic to me. I could sit and look at it and figure it out, but it's been several years since I've taken stats myself.

Katy Oliveira (43:00):

Well, I do think that having that right combination and insight into that right combination of program programs, initiatives, policies, approaches, and not only what works for all the students, but also sometimes what works for particular kinds of students at different points in their lives, you might find

NP017 (Completed 04/11/24)

differentiation there. Well, we've covered a ton of ground, and so I like to always end by opening up to you if there's any lessons learned or anything that I should have asked you about that I didn't, that you would like to share with others who are doing similar work.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (43:35):

Oh, man. Okay. That's a good one. I feel like there is, in my, I've done this 20 plus years now, and it's fun in a lot of ways. And I feel like going back to the efficiency piece again, as you make policy, as you make procedures over a university or over a system, you want it to be as easy as possible. You want it to be as catchall as you can, but you really can't do that. As far as our approaches, what outcomes, what outreaches are working, even in our department, what's working for our kinesiology team might not necessarily work for our R-N-B-S-N team. So even granularly, you got to have some flexibility there as much as you can. So that's kind one thing. I'm always like, we got to have some understanding of flexibility and customization based on student population needs. But beyond that, really it comes more of a philosophy in this situation in managing, leading with a group like this or anywhere else, you have a tension that you live in all the time, and it is the tension between supporting your team and supporting your students.

(44:42):

And most of the time that's a Venn diagram that hopefully is just overlapping perfectly. That doesn't always. And so you've got to figure out how to live in that tension and do what you can to make sure the students, because again, none of us have a job without the students. The students are our responsibility. They're who we're here to work with. But there is a point where if you fall completely into that, you might start burning out your people if you don't know what's going on. So you got to find a good way to protect both your team, your institution, as well as meeting the students' needs as best as possible. And that tension's going to look different based on your school, based on where you are, based on the day of the week. They could be very different. But being able to comfortably live in that tension, I think is really what's important.

(45:34):

Because again, I feel like people get annoyed with me sometimes in the sense that I'm always going to almost always advocate for whoever's not in the room. So if I'm with some staff or faculty, they're saying things about students, I'm going to tend to advocate for the student and make sure they're getting their voice in there. And if I'm talking to students, I'm going to advocate for the advisor, make sure their voices there just to really make sure everyone's considering it because again, we all have very similar goals, but they might diverge a little bit. So just make sure we can live within this and kind of keep that train moving that one way is really important. So trying to live in that and be comfortable with that, have good people to talk to about that, because again, you could drive yourself crazy a little bit with it if you don't really have those conversations, but I think that's really important.

Katy Oliveira (46:21):

Well, Jeff, thank you so much for coming on Next Practices. I really appreciate your time.

Dr. Jeffery Taylor (46:25):

Oh, thank you so much. It was great.

Katy Oliveira (46:30):

Next practices are produced by Civitas Learning Access More Next Practices and learn about how transformational leaders are moving student success forward by visiting Civitas learning.com. And if you enjoyed this episode, be sure to share it with a friend and subscribe anywhere you listen to podcasts to say up to date on the latest data informed approaches to student success.