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Increasing Success: Strategies to Address Factors Affecting Student Retention from First to Second Year at a Canadian, Undergraduate, Liberal Arts University

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Abstract

As demographics shift, student retention and attrition rates are increasingly becoming of greater concern to the overall viability and longevity of post-secondary institutions. This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) examines some of the challenges faced by a small, liberal arts, faith-based university in Canada which, in recent years, have impacted its enrolment and retention from first to second year. With some of the probable challenges identified, the study provides a strategy for guiding institutional change and possible solutions which may aid in the encouragement and support of continued enrolment from those students who would normally be at risk for withdrawing. Using existing public institutional data on enrolment and student services, as well as data from various federal and provincial government bodies, the case for this institution's declining enrolments and its organizational impact is illustrated. Based on these findings, an examination and application of theories of educational leadership and frameworks for organizational change is discussed. Creating institutional awareness and a sense of urgency of the situation will permit suggestions and potential implementation of an improvement plan which considers best practices and proven methods from other comparable institutions that may positively affect retention at this university.

Key Words: student, retention, first-year, change, improvement, best practices

Executive Summary

This Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) focuses on a small, liberal arts, Catholic university in Canada and provides solutions for a Problem of Practice which focuses on the factors which are negatively affecting student retention from first to second year at this university. A brief organizational context and history is provided in Chapter 1 to introduce the institution and explain changes to the administrative structure which have impacted student services. Using Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames, a clearer understanding of the organizational context is achieved. The Problem of Practice is then examined through two student retention frameworks ("student integration" [Tinto, 1975, 1987], and "student attrition" [Bean & Metzner, 1985]) and literature which focuses on supporting the academic experience—specifically for non-traditional students, a growing population at this institution. Areas identified are faculty interaction, peer mentoring and learning, and academic advising and student affairs. Internal data provided by the institution illustrate the current state of retention from first to second year and the increased usage of student support services, which guide the vision for an improved future state: to be the best educational institution it can for faculty, staff, and students leading to increased student success and retention.

Using both the Change Path Model (Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols, 2016) as well as Kotter's (1996) Eight Stage Model, Chapter 2 blends the two models to outline how to lead the change process for this organizational improvement plan. Nadler and Tushman's Congruence Model (1980) is used to conduct a gap analysis of the organization and diagnose both the internal and external challenges impacting student retention at this university. Four possible solutions for change are identified, and the solution chosen for this OIP—implementing an early identification

system to identify “at-risk” students—is examined in detail. Both Servant and Adaptive Leadership are used by this OIP to move the change plan forward.

Chapter 3 outlines a plan for implementation, evaluation, and communication of this OIP. Managing transitions throughout the plan will be crucial to the success of its implementation, and the change leader will need to consider stakeholder reactions, identify champions, identify required resources, consider potential implementation issues, build momentum, and recognize limitations of the plan. Using the PDSA model as a means of evaluation, the change leader can assess the success of the change plan and adjust the plan as needed. Leadership ethics are critical when working through a change process and Northouse (2016) outlines five principles to consider: respect, service, justice, honest, and community. The plan suggests two separate phases of implementation beginning with an internal focus and then shifting the attention to external stakeholders once the changes have become embedded within the culture and “institutionalized” (Cawsey et al., 2016).

This organizational improvement plan provides a viable solution that can have a positive impact for students “at-risk” of either withdrawal from or failure in their academic studies. If the plan is followed, it is expected that there will be increased numbers of students retained from first to second year at this university.

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Chapter One – Introduction and Problem

Organizational Context

The institution that is the focus of this Organizational Improvement Plan (OIP) is an undergraduate, Catholic, liberal arts university founded in the mid 1950s by a Catholic Diocese in Canada and is affiliated with a large, research intensive university. For the purposes of anonymization, the institution will be referred to throughout this OIP as Liberal Arts University (LAU).

Being identified as Catholic is integral to the identity of LAU and establishes the philosophy about how its students are served. The institutional mission states, “The College strives to foster an environment based on open inquiry, Christian values and service to the larger community” (LAU Mission Statement). These ideals provide the directive through which both colleagues and external partners are treated, but also expresses explicitly how students are both taught and receive service and support. As a Catholic university, the organization focuses on valuing the individual, and understanding the importance of social justice which is reflected in some of the specialized degree program offerings: Social Justice Studies, Social Work, and Disability Studies. With ten academic departments, the university offers a significant amount of choice in traditional liberal arts degree programs led by academically strong and accomplished professors.

Despite its rather short history, the university has seen rapid student enrolment over the last twenty years. Home to 3000 full-time and 500 part-time students, the institution is a supportive and diverse community with approximately 14% of the student body being international, representing approximately thirty countries worldwide. As an internationalized campus, the university not only welcomes international students, but encourages outbound

exchanges and learning opportunities from one of its more than fifty exchange partners for domestic students looking to broaden their studies with a global experience.

Organizational Structure

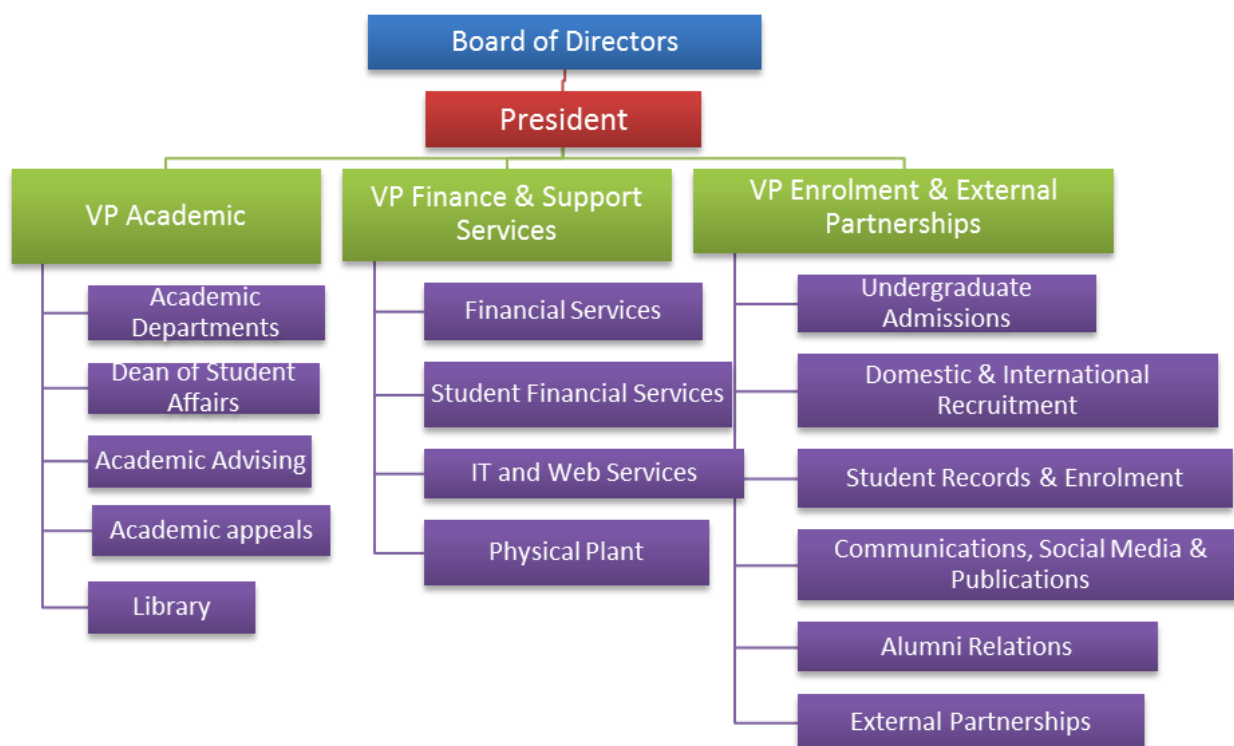
As a Catholic university, the institutional philosophy is embedded in the roots of servant leadership which is described by Northouse (2016) as a style of leadership which “emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them and nurture them. Servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities” (p. 225). In recent years, it became evident that the administrative structure was not keeping pace with the rapid level of institutional growth; consequently, there were challenges around levels of student service and effective departmental functionality.

Approximately three years ago the university, at the recommendation of the President, commissioned an external administrative review. This resulted in an administrative restructuring, the implementation of which came into effect September 2015. Previously, the President had thirteen direct reports—an administrative model which functioned more efficiently when student and employee numbers were half of current figures. However, at the completion of the President’s first term of service, it was undeniable that this model was ineffective and extremely challenging given the speed and breadth of institutional growth. No longer modelling the values of servant leadership, the previous structure led to micromanaging. Following the review, there was a recommendation for the creation of three new vice-president positions; which, since implemented, has led to three separate, high-affinity cluster working groups. Three internal, senior level administrators were recommended and approved by University Council (a governing body of the institution which functions like the University Senate). Taking effect in the fall of 2015, the new upward flow of reporting has been effectively redirected to these new

vice-presidents, providing the President with greater opportunity to focus more on leadership and the higher-level responsibilities of that portfolio.

The intention for these 3 new cluster groups is to empower individual units to work more collaboratively and efficiently on duties, projects, and services which overlap among the departments within each cluster. Given the fiscal constraints on hiring additional administrative support, the institution was attempting to leverage the talents of its existing employees by utilizing staff expertise cross-departmentally. By removing the silos among the departments, the intent was to increase departmental communications and improve service to students. Figure 1.1 illustrates the new administrative structure. It should be noted that there are three additional positions which report to the President not reflected in the chart as they function outside of the three new divisional clusters: Director of Campus Ministry, Director of Human Resources, and Executive Director of the Foundation.

Figure 1.1. New Administrative Structure of LAU, effective September 2015.



Organizational History

To complement an understanding of these new clusters, four frameworks as presented in Bolman and Deal (2013) are an excellent tool in illustrating the organizational context of LAU.

Human resource framework.

From the perspective of the Human Resource frame, the institution is guided by the philosophy of being committed “to provid[ing] an environment that fosters the best employment experience [as well as] a productive, fulfilling, fair and respectful work environment [with] a talent development and mentoring system to enhance the leadership capacity of managers and staff” (LAU Strategic Plan 2010-2014). Fundamentally, this belief adheres to the highest point on Maslow’s hierarchy of need which addresses the issue of self-actualization and, as referenced in Bolman and Deal (2013), “developing one’s fullest and ... ultimate potential” (p. 121). The challenge however, is maintaining this perspective in an era of cut-backs to a publicly funded education system. Like most universities, there are significantly more part-time and contractual faculty than full-time tenure track ones. Additionally, with the appointment of internal candidates to these new vice-president positions, part of the goal of restructuring was to work more efficiently with fewer administrative staff—a way of coping with the increased work-load without adding administrative salaries to the operational budget given that the duties of their previous positions were incorporated within the job expectations for their new positions. Bolman and Deal (2013) argue that “even when [downsizing] works, shedding staff risks trading short-term gains for long-term decay” (p. 131)—something experienced at LAU in the last two years with an increased number of administrative sick and stress leaves.

Political framework.

The Political Framework plays a significant role at the institution. Departments compete for funding and faculty hires based on student enrolment, and administrative units defend their value based on operational need and student services, leaving the President and the Board of Directors “make[ing] decisions and allocate[ing] resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 183). In terms of coalitions (despite their own inter-departmental differences of opinion, especially during salary and benefits negotiations) the faculty unite to defend their resources and academic autonomy if they feel misrepresented by the administration. Bolman and Deal (2013) argue that coalitions form when members need each other, and so by uniting their interests, they have the opportunity to gain greater power. Given their numbers, faculty at LAU hold significant “position power” (p. 197) attributed to their control over academic content, providing them with significant strength and considerable leverage during negotiating opportunities. Contrasting this faculty group is a second, significantly smaller, employee association comprised of mid-level managers and administrators as well as professional officers. As “value creators” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 215) this association depends on influence tactics and developing networks with upper levels of administration and the Board to gain respect and “exercise political influence” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 213) during the same salary negotiation process.

Symbolic framework.

The Symbolic Frame is revealed through the culture of community at LAU which is described in the institutional mission statement. As mentioned previously, the model of servant leadership is one to which the university tries to adhere. By “being attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize[ing] with them, and nurture[ing] them... Servant leaders put followers

first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities” (Northouse, 2016, p. 225). As members of a diverse community, new employees and students learn the culture by engaging in community events, sharing lunch in the cafeteria, and more importantly, by treating others with kindness and respect.

Bolman and Deal (2013) state that “an organization’s culture is revealed and communicated through its symbols” (p. 248). As a Catholic university, symbolism and ritual are prominent. Through the artwork in the buildings, daily mass, and prayer rooms, there are physical reminders of the spiritual element—a foundation for the values of the university community and supportive of Bolman and Deal’s (2013) position that “the values that count are those an organization lives...” (p. 250).

In the next section, against the backdrop of this organizational context, the problem of practice relating to student retention at this university is discussed.

Leadership Problem of Practice

For this OIP, the Problem of Practice (PoP) issue is: what factors are negatively affecting student retention from first to second year at this university? As is the case with many universities across North America (Gottheil & Smith, 2011; Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 2006), student retention is a growing concern at LAU. Over the past five years, approximately 25-30% of the first-year class did not return for their second year of study in their degree program (LAU Annual Institutional Admissions/Enrolment Reports, 2010-2017). There are varied opinions as to why this is occurring; however, this is at best guesswork, since a formal inquiry or comprehensive study on retention from first to second year has never been conducted. With undergraduate recruitment into liberal arts-based Bachelors degrees becoming increasingly difficult to market and justify to students concerned about debt-load, and the concerns about attaining employment following graduation, achieving first-year enrolment targets is becoming

more challenging. Add to this, the increase in student attrition in the upper years, and more urgently, the decline in overall institutional enrolment is concerning when considering the fiscal and programmatic viability of the university. In terms of evidence, as illustrated in Figure 1.2, for the past five years, student retention from Year One to Year Two has consistently varied between 70-77.7%, causing significant concern.

Figure 1.2. LAU Retention by Cohort 2010-2015.

Cohort	Year 1	Year 2
2010	100%	76.3%
2011	100%	73.5%
2012	100%	70.8%
2013	100%	74%
2014	100%	75.3%
2015	100%	77.7%

(Adapted from LAU Admissions and Enrolment Report 2016-2017, Table 17)

From an institutional planning and budgeting perspective, this variance in retention has direct impact on the government grants received by the institution, which ultimately affects LAU's operating budgets. With lower enrolments in the upper years, the demand for courses and numbers of sections are directly impacted, resulting in a freeze on faculty and administrative support hiring—translating to less choice for programmatic timetabling and for delivery of student services.

The university is currently undergoing the revision and creation of a new four-year strategic plan in which retention has become a top priority for the Board of Directors and senior administration. Examining the cohort of students from first to second year who are not persisting is a priority, since understanding the reasons for their lack of completion is important if the university is to make institutional improvements in this area to encourage student persistence. Through the identification of the factors affecting student retention from first to second year at

LAU, this organizational improvement plan (OIP) can be used to create opportunities for improvement and change to those areas identified.

Guiding Questions Emerging from the Problem of Practice

What are some of the main issues resulting from this PoP? Breaking them down, they can be evaluated two-fold: immediate and long-term. As discussed in the previous paragraph, financial issues are the most obvious and the most immediate repercussion the university faces as a result of this decline in enrolment. From an institutional perspective, this affects a multitude of factors ranging from availability of course offerings and new program development, to faculty hiring, as well as investment in comprehensive academic and support services. From a student perspective, LAU needs to revert to the philosophy of servant leadership to determine where the shortfalls are and how is it failing to meet the needs of these students (i.e., financial support, personal/academic/spiritual counselling, faculty and peer mentorship, or program/course offerings). Questions to contemplate as this OIP develops are: What are the critical time-frames in the first year to consider, to create the greatest impact when assisting students? Where is LAU failing to provide the necessary services and supports to help these students transition and successfully complete their degrees?

From a long-range perspective if retention remains an issue, with fewer students graduating there will be less alumni who can contribute to the history and traditions of the university. Without their emotional connection and loyalty to their alma matter, mentorship programming and new student referrals will be directly affected.

Potential Influencing Factors Affecting the Problem of Practice

When thinking about what might be the potential factors which contribute to and /or influence the POP, there are a number of issues to consider. With the changing student

demographic in the province of Ontario, the student population at this university has evolved from a balanced enrolment combining both residential and off-campus students, to a more locally sourced, commuter-student demographic. Throughout much of the literature on student retention, as will become evident in subsequent chapters, the ability to feel connected to the campus environment is a critical factor in achieving academic and social success in the first year of university. When students are not living in residence, but only coming to campus to attend classes, the ability to create this attachment and sense of community is more difficult to achieve. Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfe (1986) confirm this idea of attachment in their research by concluding that “the stronger the individual’s level of social and academic integration, the greater his or her subsequent commitment to the institution and to the goal of college graduation” (pp. 155-156).

Additionally, there are more first-in-family students (also referred to as first-generation) who do not have the benefit of a previous family member having attended a post-secondary school, and who can set an example of the benefits for attending university, as well as help them navigate through the process. Other factors which have been determined throughout the literature to have an impact on student persistence include a student’s academic preparation and ability, motivation to succeed, family responsibilities, financial issues, first generation, and transfer students.

Most people who work at LAU understand the impact of fewer students persisting and graduating; however, until it is felt within their own departments or administrative units, the call to action is weak. If the university chooses to adopt and implement elements of this organizational improvement plan, there will likely be mixed feelings towards some of the recommendations brought forward if connections are not drawn to help illustrate the institutional

impact of this decline in student retention. All departments will need to see the importance of their role in the successful progression and graduation of students if they are to consider implementing this organizational improvement plan. Most especially, the front-line areas such as academic advising, student counselling and support services, student finance, and most importantly, the faculty—who arguably have the greatest influence on student persistence given their amount of contact hours spent with students—will see the direct impact of improvements within their areas. These stakeholders will come to understand that sustaining and nurturing a supportive and welcoming environment will have a positive influence over student persistence, and ultimately benefit the university as a whole.

The next section analyzes some of the dominant theoretical frameworks on student retention. Against this backdrop, the PoP will be examined.

Perspectives on the Problem of Practice

Historical Overview

As discussed in the previous section, LAU has been dealing with lower percentages of student retention from first to second year registration attributed to both internal and external factors. Specifically, a major external influencer affecting student enrolment—both provincially and nationally, over which the university has no control—is shifting demographics. Since the 1960s, Canada has been experiencing a decline in birthrate which is resulting in a challenge to the demographic that sustains student enrolment in post-secondary education. In recent years, population growth in Ontario exists primarily through immigration. However, this trend in growth is not evenly distributed and tends to occur in larger, more metropolitan regions like Toronto, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and Ottawa. It is expected that between now and 2050, new Canadians, and first-generation students will account for the majority of Canadian youth who will be seeking admission into post-secondary (Steele, 2010).

Located in southern Ontario—a region outside of any of the larger, metropolitan areas previously identified—LAU is significantly affected by the change in demographics across the country and, more specifically, in Ontario. For example, for the 2015-2016 admissions cycle, of the total number of applications the university received from Ontario high school students, 31% came from the GTA (including Toronto) when compared to 36% which came from the southern Ontario region. Interestingly, of applications from southern Ontario, 29% came directly from the city in which this university is located. However, the numbers change dramatically when analyzing the number of first-year registrations: 21% from the GTA, 76% from southern Ontario, and 65% from the city in which LAU is located. These registration numbers have nearly replicated themselves for the 2016-2017 admission cycle and are on a similar track for the 2017-2018 admissions intake (LAU Institutional Admissions & Enrolment Reports, 2015-2017). These numbers demonstrate the breadth of choice students may display initially when applying to universities, but the reality of remaining local when they actually commit to registering at university.

Not unique to this institution, this trend aligns with the current provincial data on student enrolment, which demonstrates that a proportionately higher number of students choose to remain in their regional area. Within the GTA—the area in the province with the greatest population growth due to immigration—the percentage of students remaining close to home is the highest. The impact of this finding is that LAU is recruiting a smaller percentage of students from other areas of the province, which reduces the number of residential students and increases the commuter student profile in first year. Consequently, this will affect the kind of first-year experience programming that should be offered to students.

Student Retention Theoretical Frameworks

The Problem of Practice at this institution is not unique. As found consistently throughout the literature on student retention, the risk of student departure is greatest from first to second year. There are a range of theoretical models of student attrition and retention (Astin, 1984; Pascarella and Terenzini (1980); Spady, 1970); however, the two considered by this OIP are Tinto's (1975, 1987) model of "student integration" and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of "student attrition."

Tinto's model of institutional departure.

Tinto's interactionalist model argues that students enter post-secondary with "a range of differing family and community backgrounds, personal attributes, skills, values orientations, and varying types of precollege educational experiences and achievements" (Tinto, 1987, p. 115). These are factors which contribute to the formation of student goals and commitment to one's studies. Once students are enrolled and encounter new opportunities and experiences—including both social and academic events—their initial goals and commitments are affected and adapted, ultimately influencing their persistence and progression into second year (Finnie, Childs & Qiu, 2012).

Tinto's (1975, 1987) model of student retention is based within a sociological framework. Founded in Durkheim's (1951) theory of egotistical suicide—which considers the way in which one can successfully (or not) integrate into and participate within communities—Tinto's (1975) initial model took the stance that "a student stayed in college to the degree to which the student felt academically and socially integrated into the life of the college" (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1997, p. 108). He later revised his theory to consider changes to the "traditional" student profile, realizing that although institutions of higher education were "small societies unto

themselves” (Tinto, 1987, p. 105), they were not communities in which students took up permanent residence. Many campuses were adapting to include more commuter students—ultimately shifting the campus culture to one

where forms of institutional communities are tenuous at best [so] the notions of academic and social integration are not as appropriate in these settings as in four-year residential institutions where those communities are essential elements of individuals’ educational experiences. (Tinto, 1982, p. 693)

Based on new studies in student retention at the time, Tinto (1987) revised his theory to recognize the “impact of wider social and economic forces on the behaviour of students within institutions of higher education” (pp. 87-88).

As Herzog (2005) highlights, much of this research was developed over twenty years ago based on “academically and socio-economically more homogeneous, full-time cohorts” (p. 886). Despite this, Berger and Braxton (1998) claim that these interactionist theories continue to enjoy “near paradigmatic status” (p. 103), even though the profile of a first-year class more commonly draws from first-generation families as well as more low-income, and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Pascarella & Terenzini (1998) suggested that recent research underscores the extent to which changes in student demographic characteristics will influence the effects of different post-secondary experiences:

it is one thing to conduct longitudinal research on an intact cohort of full-time students, living on campus, who have no work or family responsibilities, and who progress through their college years at about the same rate... It is quite another thing, however, to conduct longitudinal research with students who are on campus only part-time, who commute to college, who have major work and/or family responsibilities, and whose rates of educational progress are as varied as the students themselves. (p. 153)

Bean and Metzner’s model of student attrition.

One of the influencing studies that further explored this changing student demographic and challenged the ideas of Tinto’s initial model was conducted by Bean and Metzner (1985).

Their study identified that the on-campus demographic of the “traditional” student (aged 18-24, residential and registered in full-time studies) shifted with the rise of more “non-traditional” students: “older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors” (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489). This model incorporated the pre-existing background characteristics (similar to Tinto’s model) that students bring with them to university, but also examined the impact of external variables (i.e., academic, environmental and psychological) which were determined to influence a student’s ability to persist. In their study, Bean and Metzner (1985) explained, “non-traditional students are distinguished by the lessened intensity and duration of their interaction with the primary agents of socialization (faculty, peers) at the institutions they attend” (p. 488). They stressed that social interaction plays a significantly less important role—a primary difference from Tinto: “While traditional students attend college for both social and academic reasons (Tinto, 1975), for non-traditional students, academic reasons are paramount” (Bean & Metzner, p. 489). Their model demonstrates the non-traditional students will choose to drop out of post-secondary based on four sets of variables: 1) poor academic performance, 2) intent to leave (influenced by both psychological outcomes and academic variables, 3) previous high school performance and educational goals and, 4) environmental (e.g., finances, outside employment, or family responsibilities) (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Through their study, Davidson and Wilson (2013) determined that “Bean and Metzner all but eliminated social integration from their model and consideration, [but] they still maintained a stronger emphasis on the social components of the external and environmental factors related to student retention compared to academic factors” (p. 331).

It could be argued, then, that in both models, the likelihood for student persistence is grounded in both “pre-entry characteristics and post-entry experiences” (Finnie et al., 2012, p. 7). However, for non-traditional students, the variables with the greatest impact come from the academic experience (i.e., faculty interaction, [Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Chaden, 2013; Erikson, Peters & Strommer, 2006; Giaquinto, 2009; Jaeger & Hinz, 2008; Maher & Macallister, 2013; Stevenson, Buchanan & Sharpe, 2006]; peer mentoring and learning communities [Maher & Macallister, 2013; Potts, Schultz & Foust, 2003; Tremblay, P.F., & Rodger, S., 2003], and academic advising and student affairs [Gottheil, S. & Smith, C., 2011; Habley, W.R., Bloom, J.L., & Robbins, S., 2012; Kuh, 2013; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Schroder, 2013; Seifert & Burrow, 2013]). Since the student demographic at LAU has shifted to a more non-traditional profile, examining the positive impact of these variables on student retention from first to second year will be examined in greater detail in the *Possible Solutions* section of this OIP.

PESTE Analysis

To better understand this organization, an analysis of key factors was undertaken. A PESTE analysis revealed four factors bearing the greatest impact: political, economic, social, and technological. These will require greater focus and consideration when making suggestions for change and organizational improvement for student retention.

Political factors.

Politically, there are a few considerations to analyze. With impending changes to the existing government funding model, the way in which universities receive government grants will potentially affect the revenue stream of LAU. A report from the Council of Ontario Universities (2016), explained that over a five-year period, from 2010-2015, the greatest revenue sources for universities were grants and tuition, accounting for 82% of the total budget. When

students fail to persist and graduate, the loss of student registration means a loss in revenue, so there is a financial incentive to retain students across all years, but most especially from first to second year where the greatest student attrition occurs. With the election of the Liberal party in Ontario in 2016, the government announced changes to the Ontario Student Grant which promised free tuition beginning in September 2017-2018 to families earning \$50,000 or less annually (Government of Ontario, 2016). This change has the potential of significantly increasing access to post-secondary education for students who were tentative or afraid of incurring the cost of a student loan through the current Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). Ideally, this announcement will promote access to higher education and may reduce the pressure for students to be employed to support the cost of their education. While increased access may improve the numbers of students attending post-secondary, there is also discussion by the government that grants paid to the universities will be based on the number of graduates as opposed to the number of students entering. This change will place increased accountability on the public colleges and universities which rely on government funding for their operating costs. This proposed model will require universities to focus more on retention and graduation success, ensuring the financial stability of the institution. Given the unstable and unknown variables of this new potential reality, this factor plays a very important role when considering student retention at LAU.

Economic factors.

From an economic perspective, the commitment to a comprehensive student retention plan will require a financial commitment from the institution which is another critical factor. For consideration are purchases such as software to assist in identifying and servicing at-risk students, as well as a “customer relationship management” (CRM) system which integrates

student services such as admission, residence, academic advising, personal, and financial counselling. Given the total enrolment at this university, the student population is at a critical mass where manual management of records is now becoming difficult. Swail (2004) advocates for an effective student monitoring system, classifying it as a critical component of a campus-wide retention program, since it is a resource that supports the linkage of student data and campus components or services. New technologies like these software assist in facilitating a more seamless experience and better service for the student, leading to a more positive overall experience and ultimately greater student retention.

Another economic consideration is the reduction to the total overall operating budget the university has been experiencing over the past five years with the decline in student enrolment. With fewer students, there is less tuition and government grant money—essentially freezing the overall budget and preventing the opportunity for new faculty or administrative hiring to support new and strategic student retention initiatives. The question then becomes: how do you redistribute the workload to effectively support student retention among a work force that is already feeling pressure? In providing better care and access for students, the university will need to ensure that it has sufficient staffing in place to support new initiatives.

Finally, there is the cost to students. Increased tuition costs, while theoretically being covered in greater part by the Ontario government through the proposed new Grant Program, still requires students to work and contribute earnings. Since LAU is located in an area of Ontario with relatively high unemployment inside and outside of the city in which the university is located, many students do not have the financial means to travel far from home, so the economic impact of pursuing post-secondary education can be very challenging. International recruitment 10-15 years ago was a sure way to add revenue to the institutional budget through full

international tuition fees. Many of the traditional international markets, however, are either experiencing their own financial difficulties—which prevents families from sending their children overseas—or alternatively, the country’s post-secondary education systems are experiencing major growth and expansion, attracting more students to stay in their country of origin. A further consideration is that with fluctuating exchange rates, the cost of international recruitment has also increased, requiring a more strategic plan for investing in international student recruitment, which also means there is greater institutional priority for retaining them.

Social factors.

The greatest impact on student retention from a social perspective, as discussed previously, is the change in student demographics in Ontario and specifically within the region of this university. With more commuter students from the local area, there are fewer students living on campus in residence for first-year, making those important social connections that are so valued by Tinto’s (1975, 1987) theory. The commitment to one’s studies at university is not reduced; however, the opportunity for creating community, and engaging with faculty and peer groups requires significantly more effort from a “non-traditional” student group, which is becoming the reality at LAU.

Technological factors.

Finally, rounding out the PESTE analysis, are the technological considerations which LAU must contemplate. With the change in student demographics, course delivery will be impacted given the more non-traditional student profile. LAU will need to investigate the possibility of on-line and blended learning opportunities to appeal to and accommodate a more diverse student body with more complex life circumstances. With competing demands on their time, students need to feel confident that they will be able to access their courses though

alternative delivery methods. Such initiatives may increase engagement and commitment to LAU, and ultimately to graduation.

Analysis of Internal and External Data

As referenced in Figure 1.2, the retention rates from year 1 to year 2 at LAU ranged from 70.8% - 77.7% over a five-year period. In examining other external data for comparison with a region bearing a number of similarly sized institutions with related liberal arts programs, the Maritime universities show a similar, but somewhat stronger level of retention. In a five-year period from 2007 – 2011, the retention rate for students entering second year at their universities ranged from 78.8% - 79.7% (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2015). These data comparison is interesting considering that it measures the average among first year returners in all of the eastern region of Canada—a comparison that does not seem to be replicated in other parts of the country given the limited amount of Canadian research on student retention. As a practice, retention numbers appear to be collected by individual institutions, but there is little evidence of collaborative efforts to examine and synthesis the data across the country. When sifting through the data on post-secondary institutions in Canada as collected by Statistics Canada, the common data sets record enrolment information (e.g., program type, credential type, age groups, registration status and sex) as well as graduation information (e.g., program type, credential type, age groups and sex); however, there is a distinct absence of national student retention data. These data would prove useful from an institutional planning perspective since understanding trends in enrolment across the country is affected by demographic shifts related to birth rates, immigration rates and communities with aging populations. LAU, like many smaller institutions in Ontario not within the greater Toronto area, is not experiencing enrolment growth due to the affects of declining demographics in the region. To be able to compare this

information against national data collected from other provinces would aid in establishing context and best practices within a Canadian context. In contrast, the Consortium for Student Retention and Data Exchange (CSRDE) housed at the University of Oklahoma, functions as a national hub for student retention data across the United States and now includes an increasing number of Canadian institutions. The challenge with comparing Canadian universities with their American counterparts however, is that typically, the U.S. schools examine student characteristics in much greater detail when dissecting the data (i.e., race, gender, public vs. private, ACT or SAT scores)—a practice not adhered to within the Canadian context.

As noted, the shifting demographic student population has consequently forced institutions to rethink student engagement to promote student retention and success. Students are coming to post-secondary institutions with very different intentions than twenty or thirty years ago when the prospect of finding full-time employment in a rewarding career was not as daunting as the present day. It has been identified in recent data from Ontario that there are

clear tendencies among new Canadian, and first-generation Canadian applicants to Ontario universities: they are twice as interested in commuting to campus and living with their parents than living in residence, they are less interested in college and more influenced by their parents, and they are almost twice as interested in fields like science, commerce, engineering and mathematics, and far less interested in the arts, humanities, social sciences and education, fine arts or music. (UCAS 2005)

In light of this shift in student profile and programs of interest, Pascarella & Terenzini (1998) highlight that universities have had to reconsider educational outcomes that were “traditionally valued by an academic community committed to the ideal of a liberal education in a residential setting (e.g., intellectual values, critical thinking, tolerance, intellectual flexibility, and liberalization of social attitudes)” (p. 154). This increased concern in securing a career following graduation has been reflected in the rise of students seeking assistance in career counselling at LAU as demonstrated by Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3. LAU Career Services Demographics (2010-2015).

LAU Career Services Demographics					
	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Total # of Students	208	249	216	183	151

Adapted from: LAU's Annual Principal's Report 2014-2015.

In 2015-2016, that number increased yet again to 386. Delivering skill sets that establish more concrete and measurable learning outcomes has come into greater focus for universities, since students expect to learn the skills and knowledge required to equip them for social and economic success in the 21st century.

This is the challenge faced by LAU. The institutional enrolment data (as seen previously in Figure 1.2) clearly demonstrates a stagnation in student retention from first to second year over the past five years. In addition to the population shift, LAU is receiving students who are accessing certain areas of student services in greater numbers. As seen in Figure 1.4, 2010-2015 saw a rise in the total number of students seen annually for students with disabilities. In 2015-2016, the total number rose 10% to 452, indicating a continued upward trajectory for accommodations needed.

Figure 1.4. Total Number and Profile of Students Accessing Services for Students with Disabilities at LAU (2015-2016)

Services for Students with Disabilities Usage Demographics					
	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Total # of Students	410	373	358	348	335
Male	157 (38%)	130 (34.9%)	130 (36.3%)	112 (32%)	128 (38%)
Female	252 (62%)	243 (65.1%)	228 (63.7%)	236 (68%)	207 (62%)
Under 25	284 (69%)	260 (69.7%)	240 (67%)	220 (63%)	211 (63%)
Over 25	125 (31%)	113 (30.3%)	116 (32.4%)	128 (37%)	124 (37%)
Full-Time	312 (76%)	274 (73.5%)	248 (69.3%)	246 (71%)	242 (72%)
Part-Time	94 (23%)	89 (23.9%)	78 (21.8%)	76 (22%)	82 (25%)
Special Student	3 (.73%)	10 (2.7%)	30 (8.4%)	26 (7.5%)	11 (3.3%)

International	7 (2%)	4 (1.1%)	4 (1.1%)	3 (1%)	3 (1%)
First Nations	5 (1.2%)	8 (2.1%)	4 (1.1%)	6 (2%)	6 (2%)
First Generation	22 (5%)	73 (19.6%)	43 (12%)	28 (8%)	9 (3%)

Adapted from: LAU's Annual Principal's Report 2014-2015.

A similar pattern is seen in Figure 1.5 with the increase in usage of personal counselling services for students at LAU, which has again seen an increase of 13% to 277 total appointments for 2015-2016.

Figure 1.5. Total Number of Students Accessing Personal Counselling at LAU (2010-2015).

Personal Counselling Usage: Total Student by Year	
Year	Number of Students
2014-2015	245
2013-2014	232
2012-2013	213
2011-2012	231
2010-2011	179

Adapted from: LAU's Annual Principal's Report 2014-2015.

Given that the demands of the first-year class at LAU have changed significantly, it is imperative to find better ways of supporting students by offering degree programs in which they are interested, providing academic, financial, and personal support, and creating social opportunities for students to connect and mentor one another while they are on campus. Possible solutions to some of these issues are addressed in Chapter 2.

Leadership Focused Vision for Change

The Existing Gap Between the Present and Future State

Referring to the organizational context of this university as viewed through Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames, there is an understood and implied goal that the university strives to be the best educational institution it can for both its staff and students. Through the institutional mission statement, the university commits itself to being a place of community, strong

academics, and Christian values, and providing service to the larger community. The good news is that the future state is not very far removed from the present, but there are still improvements to be made. Where the current gap exists is due to the insufficient infrastructural planning that has been impacted by the overall growth of the institution over the past 10-15 years. For most of the history of the institution, enrolments were matched by administrative and faculty numbers, providing more personal support for students. In the last decade or so, there was an increase in overall student numbers which out-paced proportionate administrative hiring, ultimately affecting workloads and service. The Administrative Review, which was conducted in 2014, highlighted and addressed some of the operational deficiencies the university was experiencing. However, the recommendations from the report have not been applied to the next layers of employment—middle management and the front lines—which has impacted the way employees are able to deliver service to students. By investing in the areas that will best support students, the culture of servant leadership can return to the forefront of the institutional culture and how LAU serves its students.

Priorities for Change

LAU has been operating without a Strategic Plan since the previous one expired in 2014. There are a number of factors that have influenced this delay. However, the Planning Committee is finalizing a new strategic plan. Given the awareness of its regional demographics in Ontario, and the fact that most of the incoming first-year class is drawn from the local catchment area, the university has placed significant attention on, and concern about, reaching annual enrolment targets to ensure the institution's sustainability. Retention has moved to the forefront as a priority strategy that will need to be more comprehensively developed, nurtured, and maintained with the greater goal of successfully graduating students. The work completed throughout this

OIP process is being reported back to Senior Administration continually, and elements of it have already been implemented via the creation and implementation of the Strategic Enrolment Council (SEC) which was approved in April 2016.

Envisioned Future State

Through the new Strategic Enrolment Council, LAU will be able to create sub-committees or working groups that are targeted to the interests of its members (i.e., faculty and teaching/pedagogy, as well as student support services). Faculty and administrators will be able to participate and work collaboratively in the creative planning around student engagement and persistence, and hopefully see the benefits of increased enrolments within their departments. With increased enrolment, there is the potential to strengthen program quality by diversifying course offerings, possibly contributing to enhanced institutional academic reputation, and ultimately benefitting faculty by attracting an increased number of qualified students. Administrative units will see the benefits of long-term cost savings associated with retaining a student, and the Alumni and Foundation department will be able to reap the benefits of a stronger alumni base, as well as provide support for future recruitment initiatives. Finally, students will experience an increased sense of support and engagement, and feel more committed and involved with the university community, ultimately leading to their greater persistence and graduation from the institution.

Organizational Change Readiness

The Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols (2016) Change Path Model is a comprehensive tool in examining change readiness. The model manages to encompass both “process and prescription” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 53) when diagnosing and leading organizational change. In working through the four processes which are Awakening, Mobilization, Acceleration, and Institutionalization, the model lays out a clear process for leading change without seeming

dogmatic. Beginning with the Awakening process, organizations must be sensitive to the external forces which can stimulate an organizational shift such as LAU is experiencing with the challenges of student retention from first to second year. As Cawsey et al. (2016) suggest, these external factors “make environmental shifts...challenging for organizations to respond effectively” (p. 53), which emphasizes the importance for institutions to be self-aware and know what is occurring internally. Following the Awakening process is Mobilization, which identifies what needs to change specifically within the organization by identifying the challenges, analysing the problem through a gap analysis, and creating a vision of a future state. To build a shared understanding of the problem, and to create support for the change, the change leader may need to do some convincing in certain departments or with certain employees who feel that the change is not necessary, and that it is better to “stay the course until conditions improve” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 53). Once mobilized, change leaders need to move into the next phase of Acceleration which involves “action planning and implementation” (Cawsey et al., 2016) based on the collective work of employees involved in both the diagnostic and design for change. Engaging creativity and imagination with employees creates ownership of the problem, encourages everyone to contribute in finding the solution, helps implement the changes needed, and maintains momentum to see the changes through to the end. Finally, Institutionalization is the last step of the process in which the change becomes woven into the fabric of the institutional philosophy and practice. Through occasional measurement, organizations can ensure that the new state is maintained, and the new processes are working efficiently to create the desired outcomes.

Internal and External Forces that Shape Change

Internal and external forces are at play throughout the change process. From an internal perspective, when relating these four stages of the Change Path Model to the PoP of student retention, it will be important to engage faculty and administration if LAU is to be successful in situating retention as an institutional priority moving forward with development of the new Strategic Plan. Cawsey et al. (2016) argue that “When an organization’s environment shifts, so must its diagnosis, in order to identify the changes needed to effectively realign its people, formal systems and processes, tasks and culture to that environment and produce the desired outcomes” (p. 72). This is the biggest internal challenge. People must “awaken” to the new idea that student retention is everyone’s responsibility at the university since it has always been thought to be the mandate solely of the Registrar’s office. If, through the Change Path Model it can be demonstrated to faculty, administration, staff, and students that everyone has a role to play in student retention, then it is more likely to become an institutional reality.

Diagnosing change: Change path model.

Because of its comprehensiveness, the Change Path Model is an ideal tool as a means of mobilizing constituents across departments and among faculty at the institution; however, this tool is proposed knowing that each of these areas come bearing their own agenda and self-interests. With multiple frames at play (political, structural, symbolic), there are varied perspectives across the institution, and although the various stakeholders may understand the realities of the university’s enrolment issues (both current and projected), it may be difficult to achieve actual active involvement and participation. Eckel, Green, Hill and Mallon (1999) suggest that “if change strategies violate an institution’s cultural norms and standards, they will be seen as illegitimate and inappropriate and in the end, they will be ineffective” and so to effectively create change, strategies must “change its culture in ways that are congruent with its

culture” (p. 21). Working within the parameters of an academic institution, it is not typical to function with a “top-down” mentality. By its very nature, the university culture and its operation has historically been rooted in autonomous and independent processes, and often, as suggested by Eckel et al. (1999), “decision-making is diffused” across academic and administrative departments. Despite this culture, it is still possible to identify key stakeholders who are viewed by colleagues as change leaders, and who are willing to stand behind and champion any overall changes required by an institution. By connecting with influential faculty members, well-respected administrators, as well as engaged student leaders who are visionaries and can see the benefits of the changes, this unity may assist in shifting the university culture, and the practices required to effectively generate improvements in student retention. By providing institutional data to indicate the financial challenges and ultimate viability the university is facing if no action is taken, all stakeholders will be able to better understand the importance of their contributions in the brainstorming, decision-making, and implementation of a master plan in achieving the future state of student retention. If student retention is to gain significance as an institutional priority and strategic long-term goal, then it will be crucial to have buy-in and participation from all levels within the organization.

Diagnosing change: Kotter’s eight stage model.

Kotter’s Eight Stage Model (1996) is a complimentary model to the Change Path Model in that it is also a highly prescriptive framework that requires each phase be executed in sequence, and lays out a more detailed plan of action than the Change Path Model. The eight stages are (1) establish a sense of urgency, (2) create a guiding coalition, (3) develop a vision and strategy, (4) communicate the vision, (5) empower employees, (6) generate short-term wins, (7) consolidate gains and produce more change and finally, (8) anchor new approaches in the

culture. While similar in outcome to the Change Path Model, these stages are intentionally more abrupt from the outset. Kotter's (1996) model is an effective tool in addressing the external factors that affect student retention because of the prescriptive nature in how to deal with these external issues. Instead of gently "awakening" members of the institution to the need for change, Kotter proposes the value of creating a sense of urgency around an issue in generating a more responsive result to the call for action. For example, the proposed changes to the funding formula by the Ontario government is an external factor over which the university has no control, but to which it must respond (Council of Ontario Universities, 2015). Under the new proposal, the government is suggesting that funding be provided through three means: a Performance-based Differentiation fund (to create incentives for quality and to support differentiation), a Priorities fund (for certain student profile types i.e., Aboriginal, disabilities, or first-generation) and a University Mission-based fund (supporting core missions of universities: teaching, research and, service) (Council of Ontario Universities, 2015). Given this radical shift in perspective on funding and performance outcomes, there is a definite sense of urgency in developing student supports and programming which will ensure student persistence and graduation success. To accomplish this goal, it is critical to involve key stakeholders from both faculty and administration who can act as champions for the new organizational changes that need to be implemented to survive in the new fiscal reality.

Cawsey et al. (2016) explain that often in older, more established organizations, a sense of complacency can set in, and that in order to mobilize people for change, institutional threats and vulnerabilities need to be clearly illustrated. Within an academic context, and in support of this PoP, Eckel et al. (1999) describe this kind of change as being either in the "rapids" or at the "edge of the waterfall", suggesting that if the institution does not respond immediately to the

unstable or potentially catastrophic environment, the future of the organization is at risk (p.13). Student retention at LAU falls into this category. Complacency about the consistent declining enrolment of students exist in a significant number of departments, not affecting members of the organization outside of the Office of the Registrar until suddenly, it becomes noticeable that departmental enrolments are down affecting departmental budgets, ability to hire, to offer courses, and the delivery of student services, to name a few. By creating a sense of urgency as described by Kotter (1996), the level of engagement across the institution will likely increase when people understand how this problem of student attrition affects them directly.

Plan to Communicate the Need for Change

Summary of Plan and Communication Strategies

Communicating the need for organizational change is the first major step in the process of mobilizing the stakeholders at the university. This will be imperative to gain and maintain engagement and buy-in from all departments and academic units. Taking direction from Kotter's (1996) eight stage model, the newly formed Strategic Enrolment Council (SEC) will need to meet to establish the vision and strategy for student retention. This would likely involve identifying priorities, setting immediate institutional goals, and developing staggered three-and five-year plans. It would also consider the role of all members of the university—faculty, administration, staff and students. Once those goals and priorities are set and the initial framework is established, it becomes easier to communicate a retention plan, because members of both faculty and administration are responsible for the creative thinking behind the SEC's strategic plan.

In the next phase of communication, Kotter's (1996) step of "communicating the vision" can be achieved through an inaugural report from the SEC at a University Council meeting. As the guiding forum through which all university plans are passed, the University's overarching

retention plans can be released campus-wide, and strategies to achieve these plans can be discussed with open dialogue among the larger campus community. It will be important at this first meeting of University Council to frame the issues using data from LAU's annual Admissions and Enrolment report. The reality is that most members of the university community are unaware of the official numbers—despite the fact that the report is a public document. Unless they are members of the committee, work in the Registrar's office, the Academic Dean's office, or are a department Chair, there is little reason or incentive to regularly read these reports. Having a better understanding of the raw data will put much needed perspective on the issue of student retention from first to second year, and contextualize the problem as it affects the entire university.

Ideally, this information and awareness will move constituents to the fifth stage in Kotter's Model (1996) which "empowers employees" to volunteer to participate in the subcommittee work of the SEC or represent their individual units as change leaders in keeping student retention issues "top-of-mind" as part of overall service to students. When reporting back to the SEC, successful stories from departmental units, as well as significant accomplishments within the mandate of each of the subcommittees (faculty and pedagogy; student support services; peer learning groups etc.), short-term and long-term wins can be measured. As part of an integrated communication plan, these successes would be shared among the community via monthly reports to University Council, employee group meetings, web portal updates, and annual statistical analysis as a means of incentivizing further creativity and development of initiatives to support student persistence at the first-year level. Ultimately, if the work of the SEC and its subcommittees is effective, there will be a culture shift in the

organization, which recognizes student retention in first year as the responsibility of all members of the university, and is the final step of both Kotter's model and the Change Path Model.

Conclusion

Issues of student retention and attrition are not new as illustrated by the ample research and literature on the topic. In its relatively short history, the issue of student retention from first to second year at LAU has been non-existent. However, in the past five years, with the change in student demographics and population growth in Ontario, it has become a much greater concern to the long-term viability and development of this institution. In the next chapter, the planning and development phase of the organizational change required to positively affect student retention at this university is discussed.

Chapter 2 – Planning and Development

Overview of Chapter

Chapter 1 of this organizational improvement plan (OIP) introduced the organization and its problem of practice (PoP). The intention of this chapter is to analyze the logistics of how and what to change within the organization by exploring various frameworks to assist in leading the change process. Models to understand existing gaps which can be addressed to move to an improved future state of student retention are introduced. The leadership approaches to change which are identified will be critical in facilitating success with the proposed solutions.

Frameworks for Leading the Change Process

Two relevant models for organizational change are the Change Path Model (Cawsey et al., 2016) and Kotter's (1996) Eight Stage Model. Both effectively assess an organization's receptivity to change and evaluate processes that change agents must consider when attempting to shift the cultural perspectives of the organization from its present state. Cawsey et al.'s Change Path Model is less instructive than Kotter's Eight Stage Model; however, despite the twenty-year span between the two models, the commonalities are evident. On its own, Kotter's model has been identified as having too rigid an approach, and that some steps are not relevant in certain contexts of change management (Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, & Shafiq, 2012). It has also been suggested that the model can be difficult to monitor given the challenges of implementing all eight of the prescribed steps (Penrod & Harbor, 1998; Sidorko, 2008). Since no one model can adequately cover all aspects of change for an organization, it is wise to consider more than one model of transformational change which potentially can be implemented. Figure 2.1 illustrates how these two models can be overlaid to work together.

Figure 2.1. Blended model of Cawsey et al. Change Path Model and Kotter Eight Stage Model

Change Path Model (2016)	Kotter's Eight Stage Model (1996)
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Awakening</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the need for change • Gap analysis • Vision for change • Communicate the vision 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishing a sense of urgency 3. Developing a vision and strategy
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mobilization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sense of change through formal systems and structures • Assess power and cultural dynamics • Communicate the need for change • Leverage change agent personalities, knowledge, skills etc. for benefit of the change vision 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Creating the Guiding Coalition 4. Communicating the Change Vision
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Acceleration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematically engage and empower others in support, planning and implementation of change • Use appropriate tools to build momentum, accelerate and consolidate progress • Manage the transition and celebrate small wins 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Empowering Broad-Based Action 6. Generating Short-Term Wins 7. Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Institutionalization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track changes periodically to gauge progress and make changes where needed • Develop and deploy new structures, systems and knowledge to bring life to the change and new stability to the transformed organization 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Adapted from: Cawsey, T., Deszca, G., & Ingols, C. (2016). *Organizational change*. (3rd ed). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE and Kotter, J. P. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

As shown, the Change Path Model can function as an overarching “pathway to planned change” within which Kotter’s more prescriptive stages can be carried out to achieve organizational

change. How the two are interwoven within the context of student retention will be applied in the following section.

“Awakening” or Kotter’s Stages 1 and 3

Through the “Awakening” stage of the Change Path Model, as well as creating a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996), the problem of student retention is revealed, and the reasons “why” the organization should change are clearly addressed. Common to both stages is overcoming the feeling of complacency that plagues both individuals and the organization in order to create that critical sense of urgency needed to create movement towards change. This “awakening” can be difficult to achieve when there have been limited outside threats to an organization: people embrace the status quo and turn inward, focusing less on external pressures and more on their known current situation. Kotter (2008) cautions, however, that when organizations are too busy looking inward, they miss new opportunities as well as threats from competitors or other peripheral factors. Often it takes an external point of view to reveal shortcomings and to help develop the sense of urgency needed in the first step of organizational change: “A real sense of urgency is a highly positive and highly focused force...it naturally directs you to be truly alert to what is really happening” (Kotter, 2008, p. 8). By creating a sense of urgency as Kotter suggests, the level of engagement across the institution will likely increase when people begin to understand how the problem of student attrition affects them directly.

Having identified the external and internal challenges of the institution, change agents then need to introduce a planned vision for change to move the organization from its present to future state. A strong vision for change clarifies the road ahead, and when rooted in the culture of the organization, will allow change makers to triumph over resistance while keeping the necessary change in focus. Developing a strong vision “is an exercise of both the head and the

heart, take[ing] time and always involve[ing] a group of people” (Kotter, 1996, p. 79). Cawsey et al. (2016) argue that when organizational vision is connected to mission, it “informs the core philosophy and values of the institution” (p. 121). When constructed well, it will force people within the organization to move from their inertia, encouraging more productivity and making efficient use of resources.

These initial stages of the two change models will undoubtedly be challenged by deeply embedded/entrenched cultures that exist within LAU. Schein (1992) refers to organizational culture as “various espoused values, norms and rules of behaviour that members of the culture use as a way of depicting the culture” as well as deeply embedded, unconscious basic assumptions which he defines as “the essence of culture” (p. 16). Difficulties arise when change strategists attempt to introduce a new vision or institutional direction without considering the impact of existing cultural artifacts, (i.e., the stories, symbols, rituals and beliefs) of the organization (Schein, 1992). To be effective in conveying reasons for change and creating a sense of urgency, change agents need to be aware of informal dynamics in their organizations—including culture.

“Mobilization” or Kotter’s Stages 2 and 4

In this stage, the assessment of the vision for change must delve deeper into existing organizational structures and systems to determine the deficiencies affecting student retention. It is critical for a change strategist to understand these processes as a means of influencing the prescribed change, since they largely affect whether any new change process will evolve or succeed (Cawsey et al., 2016). Because of this, the Mobilization phase is extremely important, since it is the time in which you need to establish a “guiding coalition” who will help to influence stakeholders, participate in the new institutional vision, and help to bring others within

the organization on board (Kotter, 1996, p. 52). Cawsey et al. (2016) suggest that during this process, it is critical to “engage others in discussions concerning what needs to change and nurture their participation in the change process” (p. 53). The structure of the guiding coalition should represent a diverse set of skills within the organization:

- incorporating people with positions of power who can make things happen;
- those with specific expertise in areas that need to address the change in response to the PoP;
- members with a good reputation and credibility so that the change is taken seriously from other employees; and finally,
- people defined as leaders—from all levels within the organization who others believe in and who can help to drive the change process. (Kotter 1996).

To create effectiveness from this guiding coalition, trust needs to be instituted at the outset.

Applying this thinking to this OIP, the guiding coalition should include:

- the President and/or another senior member of administration at LAU (i.e., Vice-President Enrolment), who can give the focus on increasing student retention greater value within the overall strategic vision of LAU;
- the Dean of Student Affairs, Academic Dean, and Registrar who can implement strategies for change within their departments to increase the focus on and direct the execution of some possible solutions for change; and
- faculty members who already incorporate student focused tendencies within their teaching practices to set an example for their colleagues for best practices in classroom engagement leading to increased retention in their programs.

Once the common vision is established, and organizational goals have been set, it is imperative to communicate the vision to the rest of the institution. This step will ensure there is a shared understanding about the future state of the organization if everyone is motivated and driven by the same end goal: successfully retaining students from first to second year at LAU. Difficulties emerge when communication becomes overcomplicated or insufficient. Cawsey et al. (2016) explain the importance of two-way communication within the Change Path Model:

“when coupled with transparency, authenticity and minimal levels of executive defensiveness ... [a variety of] communication approaches advance recipient engagement and adaptation to change” (p. 242). These methods include reporting monthly updates on the progress of the change plan at meetings (e.g., University Council, Faculty Council, employee associations); conducting focus groups and town halls; and providing an internal website for employees (for updates, and to provide feedback).

To be able to move into the Acceleration stage of the model, communication is critical to ensuring the vision of the future state is understood clearly so members can work collectively to achieve the desired change. Cawsey et al. (2016) emphasize that “good communication plans are essential to minimize the effects of rumours, to mobilize support for the change, and to sustain enthusiasm and commitment” (p. 320). If people do not understand or accept the vision, then ultimately any attempt at change will fail.

“Acceleration” or Kotter’s Stages 5-7

When employees have a clear vision of the planned change and are empowered to implement the changes or actions required, it is critical to create optimal circumstances to allow for that change to happen. If any obstacles are present (i.e., in the case of LAU: lack of employee empowerment to act, siloed communication, lack of financial resources, insufficient human resources to impact student retention), then success is hindered and employees feel discouraged about the process. This would set the change vision back and potentially allow it to fail.

Highlighting short-term wins is essential to organizational transformation. When success is visible and related to the new vision, then the intent of the change plan is reinforced, members of the organization feel validated, and arguments of the resisters are destabilized (Kotter, 1996).

Short-term wins also help to gauge the process to achieve the overall vision. Such success ultimately builds further momentum to see the organizational transformation through—an essential element when change processes are carried out over a longer period. By empowering employees to manage and lead from the middle and below, there is a shared sense of mission which will help to drive the change.

“Institutionalization” or Kotter’s Stage 8

The final step of the Change Path Model measures change, and determines success. By assessing institutional data, processes and strategies can be analyzed for their effectiveness and overall progress towards the organizational goal. Through a collection of quantitative data and qualitative feedback from internal departments, decisions can be made regarding the overall success of the change plan. New structures and processes can be developed to permanently embed the change into the transformed organization.

Here, Kotter (1996) circles back to the beginning of the change model to re-visit the importance of institutional culture. He explains that there is always the potential for reversion to previous practices when new processes resulting from a transformational change are not implemented and made compatible with the existing organizational culture. Schein (2009) reinforces this thinking by explaining that culture changes need to be considered across all workgroups and departments and not just with individual champions, since once they return to their work-units it is possible that they might revert to the group norms. He also suggests the importance of determining if the new way of thinking can be standardized as new institutional practice, and if so, then clear examples of the new behaviour, and possible role models, should be provided to assist in ensuring the new change is embedded. Finally, he asserts that there will be some level of anxiety with the employees, but that it will be imperative to provide

“psychological safety” (Schein, 2009, p. 122) for the learners as they adopt and institutionalize the change.

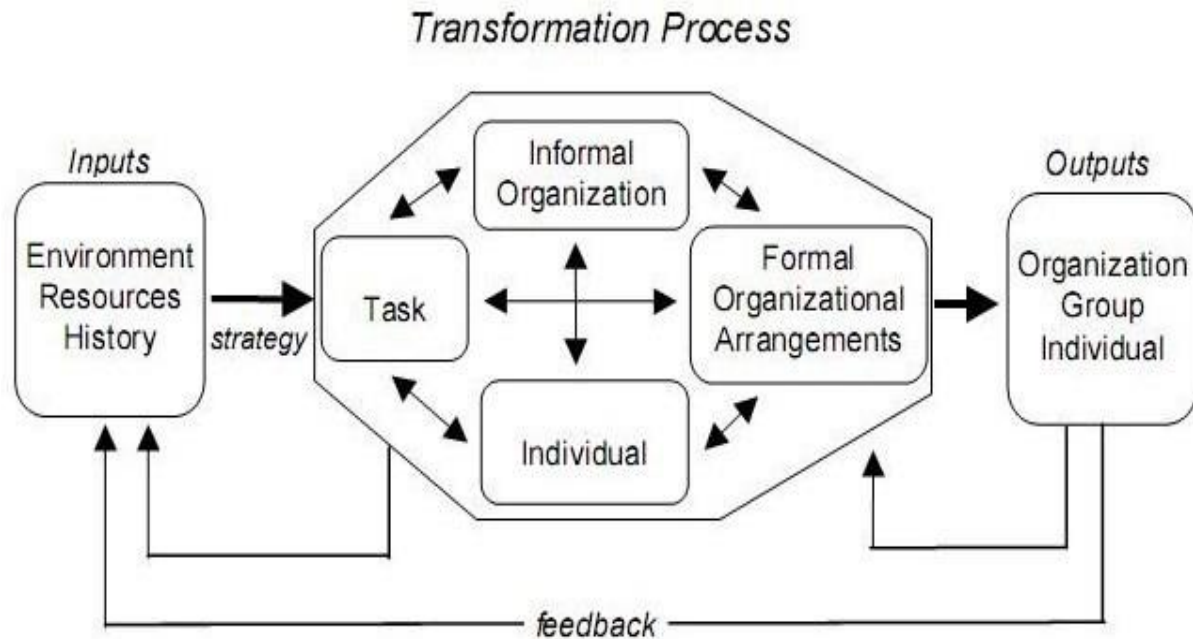
Moving forward, it will be important for the Strategic Enrolment Council to consider how to normalize successful student retention practices as part of the new culture of LAU. Change agents and transformational plans need to recognize and respect the existing organizational culture. Kotter (1996) states “Culture is not something you manipulate easily” (p. 156) and explains that anchoring change within a culture is usually the last phase of a change process once people’s behaviours have been altered and the change has been proven to be successful.

Critical Organizational Analysis (What to Change?)

Knowing what to change is a critical piece of the puzzle when working through an organizational change. Anecdotal or “gut feelings” are not enough to create sufficient evidence in supporting a change management plan. For an organization to receive buy-in from its constituents, it must convincingly present gaps within the current organizational state. Universities are complex institutions. Leading within these organizations is immensely challenging because tough decisions relating to cutting budgets, freezing pay raises, or eliminating degree programs exist.

Given such climate, how organizational change is framed is critical to its success. Through Nadler and Tushman’s 1980 Congruence Model (see Figure 2.2), a gap analysis can be conducted considering the issue of student retention at LAU.

Figure 2.2. Congruence Model for Organizational Analysis



Source: Nadler, D. A., & Tushman, M. L. (1980). A model for diagnosing organizational behavior. *Organizational Dynamics*, 9(2), p. 47.

As can be seen in the figure, an organization's transformation process is impacted by the inputs (i.e., external environmental factors, resources of the institution, and the organization's historical context). Within the transformation process itself, the model identifies four factors as the components which support the organization and drive its performance: tasks, people, formal organization, and informal organization (institutional culture) (Nadler & Tushman, 1980).

By examining the congruence of the LAU environment, current enrolment strategies, and internal organizational components (the inputs), it will become evident where the current challenges related to student retention exist. Nadler and Tushman (1989) explain that the

model emphasizes that there is no one best way to organize. Rather, the most effective way of organizing is determined by the nature of the strategy as well as the work, the individuals who are members of the organization, and the informal processes and structures (including culture) that have grown up over time. (p. 194)

The overarching hypothesis of this model is that

the greater the total degree of congruence or fit between the various components, the more effective will be the organization-effectiveness being defined as the degree to which actual organization outputs at individual, group, and organizational levels are similar to expected outputs, as specified by strategy. (Nadler & Tushman, 1980, p. 45)

In other words, the more that strategies impacting student retention at LAU align with the values, mission, internal realities, and external pressures (the transformation process), the greater the chance for success at increasing student retention from first to second year and permanently embedding these new strategies as part of LAU's overall ethos regarding student persistence and success (the outputs).

The congruence model is not only a comprehensive method of considering organizational dynamics, but also an effective tool in developing a framework to assist with identifying the root causes of performance gaps within an organization. Cameron and Green (2009) describe that “the heart of the model is the opportunity it offers to analyse the transformation process in a way that does not give prescriptive answers, but instead stimulates thoughts on what needs to happen in a specific organizational context.” (p. 119). Within the academic context of this OIP, the more organic the solutions are, and the more collaborative the change process is supporting student persistence initiatives, the greater the likelihood for increased student retention at LAU.

Inputs

Nadler and Tushman (1980) describe four categories that generate inputs into the congruence model:

- 1) environment: everything outside of the organization;
- 2) resources: assets to which the organization has access;
- 3) history: the patterns of past behaviour and activities of the organization which may affect the current functioning of the organization; and
- 4) strategy: the stream of decisions about how organizational resources will be used to meet demands, and what strategies are used to support organizational mission.

When first established in the mid 1950s, LAU primarily focused on recruiting students from similar family or educational backgrounds both locally and from and the greater Toronto area. Historically, enrolments were fairly stable, and the majority of the student population came from a Catholic family background. However, in the last twenty years, the student demographic has shifted significantly such that the campus has more than tripled its enrolment, and the student profile represents a greater range of religious or secular backgrounds. As noted earlier, the more diverse first-year profile of students now attracted to this university requires more wide-ranging services and supports.

Thinking of resources as part of the inputs, and situating the recent administrative restructuring of LAU within this section of the congruence model, demonstrates the intention of better utilizing the organization's resources. By opening lines of communication and breaking down silos between departments, the institutional objective is to create better opportunities for more efficient and comprehensive student services. Ideally, this restructuring should leverage costs and human resources to create a more desirable environment to foster student success.

The Transformation Process

To determine which strategies an organization should implement to drive change, Nadler and Tushman's (1980) model assists change leaders by examining the current state to determine internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization affected by external threats and opportunities (Cawsey et al., 2016). Moving from the input stage to the transformation process of the Congruency Model (1980) and applying the four components of the model to the issue of student retention at LAU will help to identify the gaps within the current state.

The tasks or work of the university is primarily focused on student success. However, as evidenced by LAU's Annual Institutional Admissions and Enrolment Reports (2010-2017), over

the past five years, consistently, approximately 25-30% of the first-year class did not return for their second year of study. Through the examination of a PESTE analysis initially introduced in Chapter 1, four distinct areas were identified as bearing the greatest impact on this PoP.

Political impacts.

From the political perspective, changes to the government funding model and increased accountability have placed greater pressure on universities to retain the students they recruit. The provincial government of Ontario prophesizes the downfall of some institutions based on the existing funding model: “The current funding model will make institutions with declining enrolments vulnerable” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2015, p. 42). A potential challenge with this change in government funding is the fear of neo-liberal influence where metrics and measurement become the tools of accountability. The government report claims that “Measuring and assessing undergraduate learning outcomes has the potential to add considerable value to the sector, helping ... governments to understand what skills are being generated, and universities to drive continuous improvement” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2015, p. 44). The neo-liberal language of how universities are positioned to strengthen a market society is what Giroux (2014) cautions against:

education is often reduced to a set of corporate strategies and skills to use in order to teach pre-specified subject matter, one that defines the citizen as a consumer, schooling as an act of consumption, faculty as entrepreneurs, and students as customers.

In constructing this OIP, working through the tensions of the ideals of a traditional liberal arts university and the pragmatic realities of budgetary costs will be a challenge to navigate carefully given the ideological differences each perspective presents.

Economic impacts.

Economically, the university is impacted by increased operating costs—many of which directly impact service to students. Finding better ways to streamline and share resources among departments is a method that has been working for the institution in recent years. But as costs continue to increase, and current technologies and software systems decline, the cost to the university to provide support to students in a comprehensive way will become an increasing challenge. Additionally, operationalizing some of the high impact practices which have been proven to positively affect student retention comes with a price tag, requiring LAU to consider how it will need to responsibly create budget projections that will effectively fund student support programming. With rising tuition expenses, and even taking into consideration changes to create further access to provincial loans programs, more financial responsibility is placed on the students. From a student retention perspective, to help mitigate fear of the high price tag incurred for post-secondary education, the university will need to continue to offer a competitive scholarship and bursary program as well as extensive on-campus employment opportunities through the student Work/Study program.

Social impacts.

From the social perspective of the PESTE analysis, one of the biggest challenges the institution is facing is the shift to a more localized, commuter student demographic, impacting the level of student engagement on campus. With fewer students in residence, co-curricular and extra-curricular programming for the institution will need to be re-imagined with the intent on engaging and encouraging students to remain on campus. An undeniable strength of LAU is its strong sense of community which, as the literature suggests, is critical in the first year for supporting academic progress, achievement, and social acceptance (Astin, 1999; Davidson &

Wilson, 2013-2014; DeNeui, 2003; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow & Salomone, 2002-2003).

With average first year class sizes between 50-60 students, and a faculty/student ratio approximately 25:1, the access to professors and an intimate classroom experience is undoubtedly a strength of the university. Many young faculty members have been hired in the last 3-5 years, and so the opportunity to engage these professors in new modalities of teaching—which include proven strategies for student engagement and success—is a sure path to increasing student retention into the second year based on examining best practices at other, small, liberal arts universities with similar characteristics to LAU. While the university is already beginning to introduce some of these high impact practices in some of the senior classes via experiential learning, there remains significant opportunity to explore additional innovations in teaching and pedagogy for all first-year courses within all departments.

There is another perspective to the social element of the PESTE discussion to consider. As a liberal arts university, it can sometimes be challenging for students to understand how to articulate the skills and experiences they earned within their undergraduate degree into meaningful and relevant real-world experience. From an academic advising perspective, students should be considering not just their major, but potential graduate school or career pathways. The model for academic advising at LAU, while comprehensive in its academic scope, is somewhat disconnected from the long-term planning aspect for students. Additionally, with the relatively rapid enrolment growth of the institution over the past fifteen years, the administrative structure of the academic advising office has become more transactional and is unable to provide as much of a coaching model. The number of students being seen by full-time advisors has outpaced the administrative hiring such that the current advisors work many hours of overtime to keep up with paperwork and correspondence, intentionally keeping daytime hours

available for student appointments. Of concern is employee fatigue and low morale—a result of not being able to provide the kind of comprehensive support advisors would like for students.

A perceived challenge of the existing model is that students are not assigned a specific counsellor for the duration of their studies who can work with them to assist in achieving their academic goals, as well as mentoring them into their professional goals. This is a challenge for first-year students given the overwhelming amount of information they receive, and the steep learning curve they must navigate in successfully building a degree program, planning for the long-term, and ultimately graduating. By increasing the number of advisors, there is greater potential to have a closer, more meaningful relationship where an advisor is able to provide coaching and support for students throughout their studies. Also, given that the changing demographics of the student population is such that students have competing priorities, the model of traditional office hours should be examined to consider more flexible hours in the evening and/or weekend to accommodate those students who are only able to make it to campus at that time.

Technological impacts.

In line with the Economic considerations regarding the cost of implementing new software, the lack of an institutional system which can collate and analyse university data significantly impacts the level of informed decision-making that needs to support student success and retention. Fathi and Wilson (2009) warn that universities which “fail to meet the demands of today’s society and technologically driven constituents will quickly find themselves left behind and suffering from decreased enrollment” (p. 95). LAU will need to give substantial consideration of the importance of such a significant investment in software if it is to make

meaning out of the data it collects, and by extension, responsible decision-making that will have direct impact on student success.

Finally, in terms of technological considerations, the university, since its inception, has primarily functioned within an in-class setting. Given that most students are comfortable and adept at functioning within a technological environment, a wider range of course delivery (i.e., on-line or blended) could be introduced on campus to accommodate the diversity of students and their circumstances. Drouin (2008) examined this factor of student engagement and retention by researching the impact of deep learning strategies within online courses and their effect on post-secondary retention rates. He concluded that there were two distinct elements of online learning that directly impacted student satisfaction and success: social construction of knowledge, and social presence and community. Given the complexity of students' lives (more of them living off campus, and most having to balance other commitments with school), the importance of how they studied and the communities of support they received were determined to be critical to their success.

From a revenue perspective, with course offerings being determined primarily by student enrolments, universities are limited by the number and demographic of students who attend classes within a traditional classroom setting. With increasing numbers of non-traditional student enrollments, offering more online courses and degrees makes financial sense to this university (van Hunnik, 2015).

SWOT analysis.

Within the transformation process of the Congruence Model (1980), a SWOT analysis reveals that the strengths of this university are significant—an important consideration as a change process is introduced within the organization.

In terms of its strengths, LAU has a welcoming and vibrant campus community with the majority of students, faculty, and staff believing strongly in the values of respect and care for others—a critical element when implementing plans supporting student retention. With comprehensive student services ranging from personal to spiritual counselling, as well as an effective academic peer mentoring program targeted to first and second year students, LAU is well positioned to build on a strong psychosocial and academic foundation. Financially, the university has also recognized the fiscal challenge in attending post-secondary by creating a lucrative guaranteed entrance scholarships program for incoming year-one students, as well as an extensive Work/Study program to help mitigate the costs of rising tuition.

There are some weaknesses that LAU would be well-advised to consider moving forward in its mission to retain more students. As noted in the PESTE analysis, a glaring gap is the lack of cohesion in data gathering. (Lingrell, 2012) states “The successful enrollment management enterprise must be able to produce good data (or extract it from good sources), analyze it, and turn it into information that can be used to make viable decisions” (p. 157). Most departments at LAU collect statistical information relating to their focus of service; however, these data are not easily accessible in that there is not a system in place to create a comparative environment. Consequently, identifying institutional or student trends becomes more difficult when it is not readily available. Wallace-Hulecki (2010) suggests that “research and data provide actionable intelligence at the operational level” (p. 81) and when it is being collected across departments, but not widely known to people outside of the department, obstacles are created when determining the scope of what can be compared. This difficulty in collating university data presents a challenge for making informed institutional decisions—an important issue when

responsible spending is a priority given reduced organizational operating costs and student lives/issues are involved.

Another weakness that has been identified is the lack of a structured, early-warning system to help identify at-risk students. Such a system would assist with intervention in the critical, first 4-6 weeks of a student's first year which has been identified as the most tenuous for student persistence. By monitoring class attendance, academic performance through a low-risk assessment, and other behavioural concerns, these early-warning systems can assist in greater student retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005).

Another area of weakness was identified by an external survey conducted by a firm commissioned to determine reasons why students who receive offers of admission from LAU ultimately declined the offer. Of the key decision factors reported, program issues were among the top five (Academica ADS survey, 2014). Factors listed included a lack of co-op or placement opportunities, or the fact that their program of first choice either was not offered, or was not exactly what they were interested in. With degree program offerings distinguished as the primary reason that students chose not to attend LAU directly as a first-year student, it could be argued that programmatic reasons were also a factor in student retention from first to second year.

Knowing this, LAU may extend the same reasoning when evaluating why they may be losing students—either directly in first-year or potentially as a retention issue when students transfer to other institutions in second year. Here are where the opportunities exist. In response to the programmatic deficiencies identified through the Academica survey, exploring high impact practices (HIP) in the classroom to enhance the learning for students will be a critical place to begin. In addition to investigating new learning modalities, LAU should conduct

comparisons of its primary competing institutions to determine gaps in its current program offerings/delivery, and examine how co-op or internships may be incorporated.

Additionally, with the changes in access to government loans for low and middle-income families through the new Ontario Student Grant (OSG) (Government of Ontario, 2016), LAU has the potential to increase student retention through promotion of this grant to a demographic of students that has traditionally struggled with financial commitment and capabilities.

Finally, “threats to the organization” which will need to be monitored are the diminishing demographics in the section of Ontario in which the university is located—an area identified as the primary catchment area for recruitment of students to LAU. Anticipating declines in enrolment from this region will require continued and increased external focus to more diversified markets, widening the applicant profile with the intention of bringing more students back into the residence environment in their first-year. Ultimately, this will help increase the sense of community which is so important when fostering student commitment and retention.

A final threat to consider is academic innovation at neighbouring university and community college campuses—which are now introducing applied degrees and online programs in greater numbers. LAU will need to continually monitor these if they are to address the programmatic challenges which have been identified as a possible impediment to student retention.

Outputs

Nadler and Tushman (1980) identify three factors of successful organizational performance: 1) goal attainment; 2) resource utilization; and 3) adaptability. Having identified some of the external challenges the university faces, as well as applying a SWOT analysis, there is now some direction for LAU to focus on to reach its new future state. Ultimately, LAU’s

institutional goal is to have students successfully navigate their first year, actively engage on campus and make meaningful connections, finally persisting through to graduation. How this is achieved requires responsible use of institutional resources ranging from student services, academic and career advising, program innovation, and financial support. With no drastic infusion of increased tuition income, or growth in government grants to LAU's operational budget, it will be critical to be creative and collaborative in how resources are used to support possible solutions proposed to support student retention.

How various stakeholders within LAU adapt to this performance goal requires cultural sensitivity from change leaders within the organization. Schein (2009) asserts that "it is only when cultural assumptions get in the way that the issue of culture change arises" (p. 335). As in institutions of higher education and learning, there is an implied underlying culture which values education and yet, even with a shared culture, those who either attend as students, teach, or work at LAU will bring with them their own values and assumptions about higher education. According to Manning (2013), adaptation to organizational change within the higher educational context involves the recognition of diverse "expressions of values, assumptions, messages, and meanings" and she argues that these "lend strength to higher education organizations, which have always existed in turbulent environments" (pp. 94-95). Multiple value perspectives enable members within the organization to move among the varied set of beliefs or values depending on the circumstances. Having diversity in the values and beliefs among stakeholders at LAU will create opportunity for increased adaptability as the institution adjusts its culture and becomes more strategic in its focus on student persistence and retention.

Possible Solutions to Address the Problem of Practice

Considering the models, and areas identified as challenges for the university, some possible solutions are suggested. Based on best practices and examples from similar institutions

experiencing retention issues from first to second year, the four following suggestions are offered as potential solutions:

- 1) create a Strategic Enrolment Council (SEC) tasked with shepherding retention efforts;
- 2) focus on the importance of high impact practices (HIP) as a means of supporting student persistence;
- 3) improve the integration, consistency, quality and effectiveness of institutional student services through a one-stop-model; and
- 4) implement early identification assessments which would assist at-risk students earlier, and provide more effective intervention programming.

Solution One—Create a Strategic Enrolment Council

It will be important to include a range of people with a variety of expertise when building the Strategic Enrolment Council (SEC). Essentially, the formation of this council is akin to Step 2 in Kotter's Model (1996)—Create a Guiding Coalition. Incorporating membership from across administrative departments and faculty, as well as students and higher levels of administrative leadership, the change process will be well represented, and ensure a range of voices in a complex organization will be heard:

a fully realized Strategic Enrolment Plan (SEP) engages the entire mission, vision and values of an institution, aligning academic and co-curricular programming with the student life-cycle...this level of interconnectedness ensures each functional unit is integrated so the academic, co-curricular and enrolment plans, in effect, become a united whole.
(Hundrieser, 2016, pp. 18-19)

Through the creation of a SEC, there is the opportunity for stakeholders to see how critical student retention is to the longevity of their units (i.e., financial and academic), and the importance that their individual and/or departmental role plays in student persistence.

Resources needed.

Financial resources. The creation of the SEC will not require any financial resources initially; however, as strategies and processes are developed through the working groups and

committees established through this council, LAU will need to consider creating a specific budget for retention initiatives that are approved by the council and implemented within the university.

Time resources. Especially in its initial stages, there will likely be more meetings of the SEC as it begins to establish an understanding of the current state of the institution and develops plans that will move LAU towards its goal of increased student retention from first to second year. These additional meetings will require members of the council to take time away from their regular responsibilities, likely resulting in increased time for completion of other projects or potential accumulation of overtime hours.

Human resources. The most important resource for the creation of the SEC will be the human resources required from a wide range of stakeholders at the university. The council will not require new hiring, but will need champions of student success from all departments and levels of responsibility. For student retention to become embedded within the culture of LAU, it will need to be supported by all units, and by having ambassadors from across the university endorse the future state, there will be greater buy-in and increased potential for success.

Technological resources. There will not be a need for many technical resources. At most, the SEC will use the existing intranet to post minutes, create forums for committee work, and maintain resources supporting student retention for reference of best practices.

Benefits and consequences.

The most distinct benefit for this solution will be the strategic focus on student retention at LAU. Through the creation of this council, along with the endorsement and support of the President, and by having all stakeholders represented, there will be a greater likelihood for culture change concerning student persistence and retention initiatives. Conversely, there may

be some initial resistance from members of the institution who may feel that the creation of the SEC is just another “top-down” administrative tactic to drive a specific agenda.

Solution Two—High Impact Practices (HIPs)

HIPs, as instructional strategies, have already begun to be integrated into the courses at LAU, and in many cases, owing to the smaller classes, are well supported. However, this teaching orientation is not prevalent across all academic departments, and yet some small changes could make a huge difference for the continued or increased enrolment for some degree programs. Examples of HIPs include first-year seminars, experiential or service learning opportunities, learning communities, co-op/internships, and undergraduate research and capstone projects (Kuh, 2013). Through his research, Kuh found that “students who have participated in at least one HIP report more frequent deep learning behaviors and benefit to a greater degree on various self-reported outcomes, such as personal-social development and practical competencies” (2013, p. 87). Faculty play an instrumental role in student success given that students who reported greater interaction with their professors have higher levels of persistence (Tinto, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 1, Tinto advocates for the positive effects of social integration theory on student retention:

For most institutions, especially those that are non-residential, the classroom is the one place, perhaps the only place, where students meet each other and the faculty engage in formal learning activities. For the great majority of students, success in college is most directly shaped by their experiences in the classroom. (2012, p. 114)

HIP examples such as learning communities create faculty and peer support for students that extend beyond the classroom, which supports collaborative learning and assists in building community, an important factor especially for the commuter student population which is growing at LAU. Learning communities thematically tie courses together to create greater meaning—a concept that is an important factor for a liberal arts-based education. Tinto argues

that the benefit of constructing courses in this way is “to engender a coherent interdisciplinary or cross-subject learning that is not easily attainable through enrollment in unrelated, stand-alone courses” (1999, p. 5).

Resources needed.

Financial resources. Depending on the HIPs implemented, there may be some financial investment required. Learning communities for example, would require minimal cost since it is basically grouping existing courses together in common thematic clusters to better support and integrate student learning. The same would be true for capstone research projects which could be implemented in existing course work. Other initiatives, however, (i.e., experiential learning, co-op/internships and service learning) would likely have a greater financial commitment owing to the need for coordination of outgoing student opportunities as listed.

Time resources. The greatest time resources which would be required would be faculty efforts to develop, organize, coordinate, and mark capstone projects or conducting research work with students. There would also be a greater outlay of time required for the coordination of the learning communities as they are established as well as the coordination required to accommodate external learning opportunities with external stakeholders (e.g., experiential, co-op/internship).

Human resources. Faculty would be most affected by the increased contact hours with the students to create relevant and meaningful learning opportunities when leveraging HIPs into their curriculum. Additionally, LAU would need to consider hiring a coordinator position that would be responsible for organizing co-op/internship and/or service learning opportunities for students.

Technological resources. Depending on the HIPs being implemented, there may be need for new software or hardware in the classroom. If a new position is created to support the

external HIPs, then office space and new IT requirements will be needed to carry out the duties of the role.

Benefits and consequences.

As evidenced by the literature, HIPs create greater opportunities for deeper student engagement within their degree programs, ultimately leading to increased persistence and success. LAU's total first-year student enrolment creates a learning environment which is optimal for incorporating HIPs within the curriculum of all first-year courses. The challenge, however, will be convincing faculty who are not as familiar (or perhaps as confident) in executing the kinds of extended learning opportunities which HIPs can provide.

Solution Three—Improve Integration of Student Services

The student experience is a critical aspect of success and retention. Students can succeed more easily when they can navigate the counselling, academic advising, and financial support services in a more integrated manner. Like many institutions, LAU is challenged by a number of factors: certain processes are segregated, not all systems are integrated, horizontal communication across departments can be limited at times since it often has to move vertically first, and not all administrative functions are aligned (Schroeder, 2013). Challenges such as bottlenecks, bureaucratic business processes, and frustrations with scheduling could be eliminated or at least reduced with better integration of services resulting in a more efficient and cost-effective use of resources as well as less frustrated students. Schroeder emphasizes the importance of campus-wide service excellence as a direct factor contributing to student retention and success: “schools with high levels of student satisfaction enjoy much higher graduation and alumni giving rates” (2013, p. 73).

This problem, however, is not unique to LAU. Many other universities are structured similarly, and it has only been in recent years that a “one stop shop” model has been introduced within student services units as a way to initially triage a student’s inquiries, and more efficiently guide him/her to the appropriate department. Schroeder (2013) examines the benefits of improving the consistency, quality, and effectiveness of institutional services. He suggests that when these areas are running synergistically, the student is happier and more successful since his/her interaction with the multitude of student services provided by the institution (i.e., personal and academic counselling, financial aid, and registration) has been streamlined, and is ultimately less confusing and overwhelming. When student services are integrated, the service and communication with the student becomes clearer and more responsive, leading to greater satisfaction and retention.

Resources needed.

Financial resources. The greatest cost to LAU in implementing a “one-stop-shop” model would be creating the physical space to house the highest affinity departments supporting student services. Even if whole departments do not move, but only have a person available in the dedicated space who can represent their area, there will still be renovation costs to create an office that could function as a “hub” for the staff required to initially triage student inquiries.

Time resources. Ideally, there would not be much demand for extra time since the inquiries would be dealt with more efficiently—beginning in a space with multiple expertise where they could either be taken care of quickly, or moved along to the appropriate department for more detailed attention.

Human resources. With this model, there is the potential for requiring additional staff; however, if certain duties were redistributed, it might be possible to work within the existing

staffing framework—at least initially until it became evident where there was the greatest need to increase support as a result of the creation of the “one-stop-shop”.

Technological resource. The technical resources which will be required to support a “one-stop-shop” would involve additional IT support of computer and telephone systems, and possibly in the future, a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system which could integrate the files of multiple departments, offering better tools to assist the front-line staff when servicing this new student support model.

Benefits and consequences.

The obvious benefit of this solution is to the student with the opportunity to create seamless service. Additionally, employees within the support areas that would be impacted would reap the benefit of working more collaboratively with colleagues, reducing time to get to the core of the issue for students they serve. Conversely, there may be potential push-back from those employees who are comfortable with the status quo and the comfort of working within their own silo. There may be uncertainty or lack of confidence in knowing how to integrate with other units which may cause resistance.

Solution Four—Use of Early Alert System for “At-Risk” Students

Academic preparedness from secondary school is often a good indicator of student success in post-secondary education. Admitting students to university who meet the academic standards will allow for greater student success and graduation; however, there are always the outliers. At times, even when a student is academically prepared, there are circumstances beyond his/her control which may affect academic performance in the first-year. Identifying students who may be at risk academically within the first four to six weeks is a critical strategy to increase student persistence and success (Habley, Bloom and Robbins, 2012). This requires

people within the campus community (i.e., faculty, residence staff, financial aid counsellors etc.) who have direct contact with students to flag those who present qualities which may lead to academic difficulty. There are many varieties of early alert systems, however, they all share the same principle: “treatment of student needs and problems should occur as early as possible in the student career and should be approached in an integrated fashion” (Tinto, 2012, p. 171). When academic or personal issues are plaguing a student in the earliest part of university studies, the sooner the issues are resolved, the greater the likelihood of retention.

Resources needed.

Financial resources. There is potential for spending a lot of money on “at-risk” student software given the breadth of choices available. From some of the best-practices revealed in the literature, however, there are effective ways to off-set the costs associated with identifying “at-risk” students, such as by working closely with faculty who are asked to take attendance in first-year classes, identifying students with two or more failed assignments, and requiring low-risk assignments to provide early academic feed-back to students within the first 4-6 weeks of class.

Time resources. The techniques listed previously to identify “at-risk” students will definitely require more time on the part of faculty members at the start of each class, as well as both developing and grading a low-risk assessment within the first month of term. For those students identified, there will also be additional time required of academic advisors and potentially other areas (i.e., personal or financial counselling) to work through any issues students are experiencing with their transition to first year.

Human resources. Additional human resources will be used only if more students have been identified than support services can effectively manage. Traditionally (according to the proposed time line of 4-6 weeks), there has not been a significant number of students seeking

assistance at LAU, so proactively reaching out to them earlier may help to mitigate the increase in student inquiries and consultations that generally materializes following midterms or first-term final exams.

Technological resources. Extensive technological resources can be avoided—at least in the initial stages of implementation—given the size of LAU and the ease of receiving referrals from faculty, directly to the person or department that the student should see to receive the appropriate support.

Benefits and consequences.

Students at risk of not successfully completing their academic year receive the primary benefit of this “early alert” intervention. Institutionally, the benefit is experienced through increased student persistence leading to more stabilized enrolment. The potential consequence of early identification is the heavy reliance on faculty who may feel it is not their responsibility to monitor student absences, believing that students are adults, they have paid to attend LAU, and are ultimately responsible for themselves.

Solution Selected

The solution chosen to move forward with this OIP is the fourth one: the implementation of an early alert system to identify “at-risk” students. Of the solutions suggested, it has the greatest potential to have the most impact on increasing student retention from first to second year in the shortest amount of time and with the least amount of financial investment. Over the time that this author has been working on this OIP, the creation of a Strategic Enrolment Council has already been approved and established by LAU, and is now in the beginning stages of developing working groups comprised of a variety of stakeholders to address student retention.

HIPs, while validated as effective tools in creating student engagement and persistence, are extremely broad in their offerings. Narrowing the scope to a manageable requirement for all first-year courses may be more of a challenge—both politically, and economically—than LAU is willing to manage as a launching point for institutionally changing the culture on student retention.

Finally, the “one-stop-shop” model undoubtedly has been proven to be successful in providing a seamless student experience; however, the logistics, and potential costs involved with creating a collaborative environment such as this are onerous. This would be a good option for the SEC to consider once student retention becomes more firmly embedded within the culture of LAU.

Leadership Approaches to Change

Any new change initiative requires committed and consistent leadership to help members of an organization adjust to and manage a transition. Depending on the type of change required, or the organization in which the change needs to be implemented, multiple leadership frames could be utilized. In the case of this PoP of student retention from first to second year, specifically within the context of a faith-based university, two leadership approaches to change will be discussed: servant and adaptive.

Servant Leadership

Simply defined, in his seminal essay, Robert Greenleaf (1970) explains that servant leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (p. 15). He believed in the importance of empowering followers to make decisions, shifting the authority and power from the institution and traditional leaders. Community plays a critical role in servant leadership, creating opportunities for interdependence, respect, trust, and personal growth (Greenleaf, 1970). Hallmark characteristics

of servant leadership in practice include willingness to empower and encourage personal growth, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, ability to provide effective direction, and stewardship (van Dierendonck, 2011).

The theory of servant leadership functions well as a primary leadership framework for supporting the proposed solution of early identification of “at-risk” students given the institutional context of LAU. Servant leadership allows for power to be shared laterally, and more equally—a reflection of the culture of the university environment. As an organization, the university does not follow traditional hierarchies of power and leadership, often distributing it in multiple ways. Thus, historically, much of the major decision-making at LAU is conducted through committee work, then brought forward for approval to the University Council which includes membership from all stakeholders at LAU: faculty, administration, staff, and students. This collaborative method encompasses the characteristics of servant leadership because it shifts the decision-making from the top-down approach, encouraging followers from all levels within the university to participate in creative problem-solving and encouraging new initiatives.

Identifying “at-risk” students involves many levels of responsibility—from the point of admission, to advising into first-year classes, and to the faculty teaching first-year courses. It could also involve residence staff, off-campus peer mentors, financial aid counsellors, as well as any other learning or support services a student may seek. Even student peers can be engaged to recognize others needing help or support. Given that servant leadership is concerned with taking care of the “highest priority needs” of others, this characteristic is directly in response to the needs of “at-risk” students to ensure that optimal circumstances are in place to best support him/her for academic success (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 15). Through the development and implementation of an early alert system, LAU will become more effectual in offering

intervention for struggling students who need help managing multiple and/or conflicting responsibilities, are grappling with mental health issues, or who are receiving mentorship with learning skills. Since many students who fall into “at-risk” status can be classified as non-traditional (i.e., first-generation, Indigenous, students with disabilities), the servant leadership approach is ideal given that the role of social responsibility is critical to this approach. Graham (1991) explains that servant leaders are concerned with the “have nots” and those with less privilege. In many circumstances, non-traditional students lack champions to support their academic journey, or come from family circumstances with little or no experience with a post-secondary environment, and consequently are left on their own to navigate. This is all the more reason why encouraging servant leadership within a first-year student’s experience is so crucial. As empathetic leaders and good listeners, servant leaders are able to identify with those they are leading and will be able to advocate for the changes required (Northouse, 2016). Stakeholders who will be involved with the design and development of an early alert system at LAU will possess both the foresight and conceptualization of the goal for increased student retention based on their personal experience and expertise with students who have struggled with this transition. Drawing on their own familiarity with common challenges witnessed in the first-year, these change leaders, who are committed to the service and growth of others (students) as well as to building community, will be well-positioned to develop interventions, and create learning opportunities to assist students with their academic and psycho-social transition in the first-year.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership aligns with servant leadership in that they both strive to create collaborative opportunities to elevate their constituents as a means of building consensus: “Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive”

(Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009, p.14). Northouse (2016) suggests that adaptive leadership is more follower-centred in that “it focuses primarily on how leaders help others do the work they need to do in order to adapt to the challenges they face” (p. 258). The model of adaptive leadership fits well in relation to the proposed solution to address student retention. Adaptive leaders at LAU will need to consider retention challenges of the organization from a macro perspective. They will need to respond in a way that will help to organically create change for the institution by enabling stakeholders to identify issues and initiate suggestions (specifically about how to develop and integrate an early alert system to identify students “at-risk”) to create a better future state.

One of the unique characteristics of working within a university environment is the model of shared governance which creates the opportunity for members across the organization to be involved within the decision-making process. Unlike corporate models, higher education willfully seeks out the opinions and input of constituents across the campus when making large-scale decisions for the institution. Consequently, without buy-in from the majority, any attempt at transformational change within the organization will be destined to fail. Randall (2012) explains: “Change in higher education can only take place if the faculty are committed to participate and in some instances, actually lead the change initiative” (p. 4). Given that in the initial stages of the change process at LAU, much of the identification of “at-risk” students will need to happen in the classroom through the taking of attendance, and by the administering of an early, low-grade assessment for student feedback, the buy-in from faculty for this proposed solution towards addressing first-year student retention will be crucial. Since class sizes at LAU are manageable, and the faculty to student ratio is quite low, the opportunity for faculty to build community within the classroom is a very realistic possibility.

Heifetz et al. (2009) explain that the process of leadership involves diagnoses of the problem then following up with appropriate actions to create change for a better future state. The most important part of any change effort is the diagnosis stage in which data are evaluated, questions are asked, and patterns are determined. To create a strong vision for change in which a leader will be able to mobilize constituents to act, adaptive leaders need to take their time within the diagnosis stage—reflecting on the challenges to the current state of the organization. To successfully achieve this perspective, a leader is required to “get up on the balcony” to reflect on the bigger picture and get a better sense of what is really going on within his/her organization (Heifetz et al., 2009). Much of this work will be done through the work of the Strategic Enrolment Council (SEC), who have been tasked by the institution to identify the enrolment and retention challenges at LAU. As issues are identified, the SEC will develop working groups (comprised of appropriate stakeholders) who can address concerns related to “at-risk” students at the micro level, and specific to their own departments with finding solutions.

This stage of adaptive leadership aligns with the Awakening stage of the Change Path Model (Cawsey et al., 2016) and stages 1 and 3 of Kotter’s Eight Stage Model (1996), in which a need for change is identified through a gap analysis and the sense of urgency is created within the organization. By getting on the balcony, an adaptive leader is able to gain a new perspective on the issue, and remove him/herself from the day to day operational issues that may cloud the problem. Once the problem has been identified—in the case of LAU, retaining students from first to second year—adaptive leaders need to work with others to determine factors contributing to the challenges.

Culture and adaptive leaders.

Culture is again a consideration for adaptive leaders to contemplate when introducing and managing institutional change—understanding which aspects facilitate change and which aspects create obstacles. The higher education environment is both diverse and complex, often embedding subcultures, in addition to an over-arching culture, encompassing institutional mission and vision. As Schein (1992) outlines, existing values and underlying assumptions within an organization cannot be overlooked throughout the change process, but true “leadership is the ability to step outside of existing culture to see what evolutionary change needs to take place and create more adaptive processes” (p. 2). Heifetz et al., (2009) echo this perspective, arguing that adaptive leaders are challenged with engaging constituents to be critical in the change process: what organizational characteristics or processes are essential to preserve and what is dispensable? They caution that “adaptive leadership requires persistence. Significant change is the product of incremental experiments that build up over time. And culture changes slowly” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 17).

Conclusion

Creating a climate of change within a traditional organization of higher education is no easy feat; however, when applying frameworks and change models which respect the culture and goals of the institution, and by incorporating leadership approaches to change which honour the mission and values of the university, it is possible to move to an improved future state. Through an analysis of the external factors and internal processes which affect retention at this university, a change model for early identification of “at risk” students can be implemented through a collaborative process given the culture and history of the institution. In the next chapter, a change implementation plan and methods of communicating the changes as well as a process for monitoring and evaluation are discussed.

Chapter 3 – Implementation, Evaluation, and Communication

This chapter presents the design of a Change Implementation Plan which includes methodology for monitoring and evaluating the success of proposed changes. The development of a comprehensive change process communication plan and ethical considerations of the transformational change are examined since both are critical to the overall success of the change implementation plan and this OIP.

Change Implementation Plan

For successful change strategy, Kotter and Cohen (2002) advise that less emphasis should be on “data gathering, analysis, report writing and presentations” (p. 8) and more focus should be from a creative perspective which stimulates “feelings that motivate useful action” (p. 8). Using the revised model of organizational change introduced in Chapter 2 which overlaid Kotter’s Eight Stage Model (1996) with the Cawsey et al. (2016) Change Path Model provides guidance in developing a useful Change Implementation Plan.

In deliberating about a strategy for change at this university, a summary of the goals and priorities for this planned change include the following.

1. With the development of a new institutional Strategic Plan, identifying the need to increase student retention from first to second year must be a priority for LAU given the decline in provincial demographics within the 18-24 age group—especially regionally—the area which provides the greatest number of applications.
2. LAU is finalizing both a new Academic Plan and a Strategic Plan, creating an institutional vision which will guide the university over the next four years.

Consequently, incorporating a detailed proposal for student retention that will involve both goal/plans will be critical in maintaining enrolments across all years, and will increase the stability of outcome-based provincial funding—a significant portion of the university’s operating budget. Since changes to the proposed new provincial funding formula direct more focus on student outcomes as opposed to incoming student enrolments, universities will need to adjust

accountability and will experience pressure to retain students throughout the entire student lifecycle. Through the creation of a Strategic Enrolment Council (SEC) at LAU (which is tasked with creating an overarching strategic plan regarding student enrolment), the focus on developing programming to sustain student retention from first to second year and through to graduation becomes elevated to a more strategic endeavour.

Increasing student retention from first to second year is also an ethical responsibility to the students whom LAU commits to support when they register and attend. Creating a supportive and caring academic, social, and spiritual environment supports a holistic perspective of student growth, academic persistence, and success. As a Catholic institution, educating the “whole” person is part of LAU’s academic mission. Within the *Possible Solutions* section of Chapter 2, three of the four suggestions to assist with increasing student retention from first-year are specifically focused on student support (e.g., High Impact Practices, a “one-stop-shop”, and an early alert system to identify “at-risk” students). Moving this change implementation plan forward with the solution of introducing an early alert system, the goal for achieving increased student success and retention can be realized. By assisting students who either are or may potentially be “at-risk” (e.g., mental health issues, financial issues, learning skills, and time management) will lead to improved persistence and retention.

Implementing the Plan and Managing Transition

Stakeholder reactions.

Keeping in mind the priorities and purposes outlined, this Change Implementation Plan will need to consider the reactions of stakeholders affected by the proposal. In the initial Awakening stage of the model, the urgency of the situation has been communicated and employees within the organization have been made aware of the need for change. Having

developed a vision for change—increasing first-year student retention—an action plan and effective communication strategies now need to be developed to execute the plan. It is within this phase that Cawsey et al. (2016) explain that stakeholders can react positively, negatively, or feel ambivalent about a change initiative, and that how a change agent responds will determine if the plan can be successfully implemented. They further state that “For successful change management and implementation, there needs to be engagement and open conversation, especially in the face of resistance” (Cawsey et al., 2016, p. 228). At the risk of the change initiative failing, it is also important for change agents to consider the human, political, and symbolic elements of an organization, and not to rely mostly on reason and structure caution Bolman and Deal (2013). Understanding reasons for employee resistance is a critical step to work through when developing a transformation plan, and change agents need to be respectful when countering such resistance. It is in this particular stage of the plan that institutional leaders who are the change agents for this initiative will need to employ techniques of adaptive leadership. Northouse (2016) explains that “the goal of adaptive leadership is to encourage people to change and learn new ways of living so that they may do well and grow” (p. 258). The members of the SEC at LAU will need to encourage faculty and employees to focus on the problems and challenges of student persistence and find new behaviours and practices to affect positive change in retention from first to second year.

For example, some faculty may be unwilling to support an early alert initiative by indicating that it is not their responsibility to take attendance and report on multiple student absences, believing that if a student has paid tuition, it is his/her prerogative to attend class or not. Alternatively, some faculty who have long-established syllabi for their courses may be opposed to restructuring their course to include a low-risk assessment in the first 4-6 weeks to

provide early feedback for students. In either case, it will be important to emphasize through the SEC the importance of the intervention as a means to support student retention within the larger frameworks of LAU's Academic Plan and the Strategic Plan.

Moving into the Mobilization phase of the Change Path Model (Cawsey et al., 2016), it will be critical to assess existing power and cultural dynamics, and create a guiding coalition of influential people from within the university, and from all levels of the organization to help mentor others through the change process. Student retention requires multi-stakeholder involvement—it is not only the responsibility of the Registrar's Office. The working groups established by the SEC will be composed of a cross-section of stakeholders relevant to the focus of the committee which will be responsible for monitoring external best practices, and for surveying and collecting internal feedback on ways to support students while best representing their respective departments throughout the change process.

Identify champions.

While the goal of the SEC is to maintain a vision of the future state of the institution that is aligned with the overall Strategic Plan, the success of this Change Implementation Plan will require influential people from all levels of the university to champion the goal for increased student retention from first to second year. As Hutson and Skinkle (2010) state, for the purposes of promoting success and maintaining proactive and sustainable retention efforts, “the primary role of the chief executive is to create this culture” (p. 126). Endorsement from the Office of the President through to the Student Council President needs to be apparent so that the culture shift towards supporting student retention becomes the new university culture, and eventually the standard across all departments at the institution.

Additionally, key leaders need to be identified from individual administrative student support units (e.g., Registrar's Office, Academic Advising, Student Financial Services, and Personal Counselling) and from existing working groups (e.g., Student Intervention Team, Student Peer Mentorship Program, International Peer Mentoring Program, Residence Dons). Ideally, these people will have a strong reputation for assisting students and be well-respected influencers among their colleagues. Within the change literature of successful implementation plans in the context of higher education, the use of Networked Improvement Communities (NIC) are referred to and would prove useful at LAU although they are not currently in use. Since, by definition, they "enable individuals from many different contexts to participate according to their interests and expertise while sustaining collective attention on progress toward common goals" (Bryk, Gomez & Grunow, 2010, p. 6), they create a space to develop "shared, precise and measurable targets" (Bryk et al., 2010, p.11) regarding student retention initiatives. Identifying key mentors who can advocate for first-year students will demonstrate the ease with which integrated supports reduce the stress in navigating the myriad of services—an experience which may initially seem overwhelming to students in their first-year who may not be accustomed to advocating for themselves. NICs are an excellent example of servant leadership in practice given that authority is shifted from the upper administration to the front-line employees (followers) themselves. Northouse (2016) explains that servant leadership "values community because it provides a face-to-face opportunity for individuals to experience interdependence, respect, trust and individual growth" (p. 227). By setting examples of how best to respond to students experiencing difficulties (whether self-identified or not) these "retention ambassadors" will demonstrate for others the best practices for actively engaging with the institutional culture change to collectively increase student retention after the first-year.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC), while implemented to a greater degree in K-12 environments, could be targeted more specifically to faculty given their “promise for capacity building for sustainable improvement” (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006, p. 221). This would be a distinct shift in the current approach to teaching at LAU, since most faculty with PhDs have extensive expertise in research and their specific discipline, but have little or no formal teacher training, professional development of best practices in the classroom, or counselling knowledge. PLCs provide a forum for faculty to share and learn from each other; critically interrogate their teaching in a reflective, collaborative, and on-going way; and to evaluate best practices at other similar institutions. Servant leadership is an integral part of this process. Hu and Liden (2011) team effectiveness was enhanced through the influence of servant leadership by increasing employee confidence and creating greater group effectiveness by enhanced group process and clarity. For example, given the rise in “non-traditional” learners in post-secondary education, faculty are having to adjust their expectation to a more multifaceted student who brings more complexity to a university experience. Finding new ways to support students who have other factors affecting their learning (e.g., disabilities, first-generation, English as a Second Language [ESL], financial issues) is a topic which can be discussed among faculty colleagues and effective teaching/support solutions can be shared. It will be critical for servant leaders of the SEC to recognize the importance of stepping back to empower faculty to evaluate the issues of student retention at LAU and make decisions about how to impact change. Northouse (2016) suggests that by sharing power with followers, servant leaders allow them to have their own control, build confidence and provide the “freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best” (p. 235). Exploring successful techniques will demonstrate how the

learning is deeper and engagement with the course content is more intense, potentially leading to future student interest in declaring a minor or major in the discipline.

Identify required resources.

As the Change Implementation Plan moves into the Acceleration stage, it will be important to ensure sufficient resources are in place to support an early alert program. The success of a change initiative is based on the extent to which it becomes reflected in the budget of the institution (Eckel et al., 1999). At LAU, there is no existing framework that integrates retention as part of the institutional Strategic Plan, and currently there is no financial budget from which to operate targeted support programming or new initiatives. Moving forward with this OIP, it would be advisable for the SEC to recommend either shifting or assigning new money to a retention budget line which would allocate resources towards pilot projects in support of student retention (e.g., “at-risk” student early alert systems). In addition to the extra workload for faculty with the previous suggestions regarding their involvement in helping to identify and support students “at-risk,” there will also be other stakeholders affected by this potential solution. Referrals from faculty to various student support services will hopefully happen earlier within the academic year which will affect an increase in use. In anticipation of an expected rise, departments should be prepared with the human resources necessary to efficiently respond to increased student inquiries, manage growing attendance at learning skills workshops, and provide additional academic advising or personal counselling sessions. It will be important to monitor where the escalation in service occurs to determine if additional funding needs to be provided for either overtime hours, or—in the long-term—with the hiring of additional staff.

Given cost restraints, and requests for budget reductions at LAU, the likelihood of hiring new staff to specifically manage student retention is not a current reality. As such, existing staff,

administration, and faculty will be asked to increase their responsibilities in early projects defined by the SEC. Eckel et al. (1999) explain that

change is an add-on, requiring that good campus citizens find the extra time to serve on committees and task forces...but at some point, the add-on approach ceases to be useful. People become tired of the extra load and move on to other priorities. (p. 45)

Whether LAU chooses to explore course release time, overtime, or time in lieu, deliberate thought must be given to what kind of compensation may be necessary for the short-term. As strategic retention planning evolves and moves into the final stage of Institutionalization of the Change Path Model where it will become embedded within the culture of the university, consideration for permanent redistribution of responsibilities (reflected in new job descriptions) and hiring may need to occur in certain units.

As part of longer term planning for managing an early-alert system and following a student's journey throughout post-secondary education, LAU will also need to consider allocating budget for technology upgrades—either to existing systems, or potentially investing in new software that has been customized as a client relationship management (CRM) system. These have become standard operating tools which many post-secondary institutions now use to maintain integrated information about their students from admission through to graduation. At the university, there are many separate programs being utilized across departments which do not always “speak” to each other easily, making it difficult to obtain instant and comprehensive information about students. Ideally, LAU would set aside, or plan to invest in one of these CRM systems to remove the current silos, and create increased flow of student information (i.e., enrolment data, financial information, flagging at-risk students based on academics, etc.).

Potential implementation issues.

Within the Awakening phase, initially, there may be some resistance from people who are more comfortable with the status quo, which is why it will be critical to establish the sense of urgency that Kotter describes as the first essential step when creating change initiatives within organizations. When departments begin to feel the direct impact of reduced budgets due to declining enrolment (e.g., reduced course sections or cancelled classes, restricted faculty hiring, less money for teaching assistants or marking), then the urgency to retain more students will become increasingly important to them. As noted, creating awareness about the benefit and value of retention to faculty within in their own degree programs will have greater impact on their engagement with first-year students in introductory courses.

A second area that may be a challenge in the initial stages of implementation will be the coordination of communication efforts—especially when an “at-risk” student has been identified and requires the services of multiple departments. Given that currently many departments work in silos and do not share a common data system for student records, there may be some additional work required to ensure the student has been taken care of by the appropriate departments, and gaps have not occurred, or that there has not been unnecessary overlap in services.

Building momentum.

Gladwell (2002) explains his concept of “The Tipping Point” by highlighting that when certain things occur at the right moment, little things can have big consequences. If a critical mass catches on and momentum builds, then this is when a tipping point can occur. This concept is also part of the Acceleration stage within the Change Path Model. In the revised change model as identified in Chapter 2, Kotter’s sixth step to “generate short term wins” overlays with

the Change Path Model under Acceleration. This stage will be critical in benchmarking the progress so that stakeholders can see the initial successes, ensuring momentum is maintained in subsequent stages. For example, the current rate of retention from first to second year at LAU is approximately 75%; consequently, setting a goal to increase that to 80% in the first year of the Change Implementation Plan, 85% in the second year and 90% in the third year, provides a long-term benchmark that can realistically be achieved.

Another way to benchmark progress (from a short-term perspective) is by measuring the number of students in the first-year class who willingly choose to sign up for the peer mentoring program which is about 20% (or approximately 160 students). One goal for the SEC may be to increase the participation rate of this program by 10% (an additional 80 students) through more active promotion during the summer academic orientation (SAO) program when students arrive on campus to register for first-year courses. As a method to off-set some of the transitional challenges experienced by many non-traditional students who may be “at-risk” in the early stage of the academic year, the peer mentoring program can potentially be a preventative tool to assist these students. Monitoring the increase in students who sign up for the program and tracking their admission profile to compare students who choose a mentor versus those that do not may help LAU determine where gaps continue to exist.

Limitations of the plan.

Student retention is a vast issue which covers a wide range of strategies. As a catalyst for change at LAU, this organizational change plan intends to bring greater awareness to the issue of student retention and attrition from first to second year. However, realistically it only considers a few possible solutions for change, which may not have immediate results, and which may take much longer to realize. The scope of this OIP is narrow, so issues of student intervention that

may also affect student retention at LAU (e.g., assessment/course placement; academic advising, student transition programming, and developmental education initiatives) need to be left for another research project. Additionally, as introduced under changing demographics in Chapter 1, the diversity of students at LAU has shifted significantly given the increase in non-traditional students in higher education (e.g., Indigenous, first generation, students with disabilities, and increased transfer and commuter students). As part of the implementation plan moving forward, it is strongly suggested to create a robust, exit-interview tool which will capture data in a more consistent and meaningful way, allowing for development of interventions earlier on for future students.

Change Process Monitoring and Evaluation

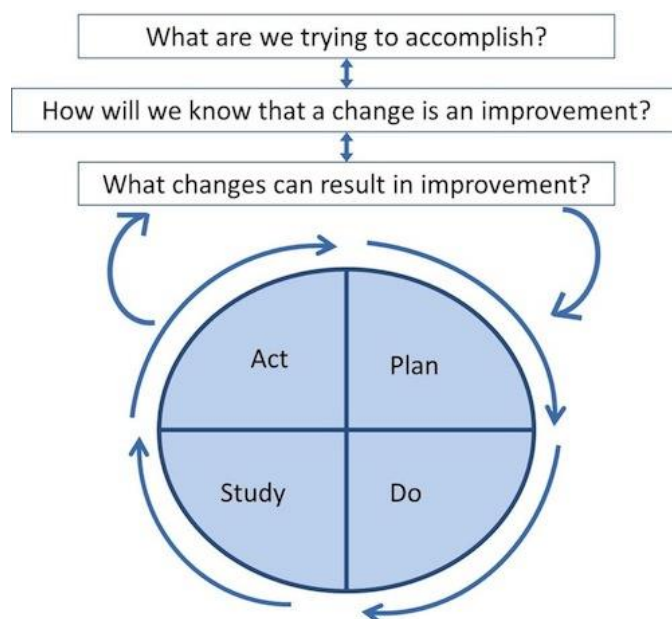
By gauging the progress on this initial change proposal, and adjusting or re-focusing as needed, a monitoring process will actively support the creation of new structures, and establish stability in LAU's plan for student success—anchoring student retention planning into the overall strategic planning of the institution. Providing evidence of effective and successful change will be essential in sustaining continued commitment from all stakeholders within the university.

An interesting thread woven throughout the literature on educational change management is that continuous improvement is a constant state, requiring reflection and evaluation. This is certainly true in higher education, which is impacted by external factors beyond their control (e.g., demographics and government funding). As such, constant evaluation on how to improve is imperative to the vitality and longevity of these institutions.

Applying the Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) Model

The Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) model (as seen in Figure 3.1) is a tool commonly used to implement a continuous improvement process. Three questions frame the problem, and initiate the planning of strategies to reach organizational goals and measure success.

Figure 3.1. The PDSA Model for Improvement



Source: <https://irb.research.chop.edu/quality-improvement-vs-research>

The strength of this model is that it presents a cyclical trial-and-learning approach that provides quick feedback and enables rapid testing of ideas for change. This allows for reflection of the process, as well as for deciding whether to discard or institutionalize the results. It is most commonly used for learning—ultimately to develop, test, and implement changes without extensive analysis (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman & Provost, 2009). There are five categories when collecting data to monitor a change initiative through the PDSA cycle for this OIP:

1. *continuous measurement* that marks a consistent quantitative number (i.e., annual retention numbers from year-one to year-two or by degree programs over an extended period of time);

2. *count or classification of observations* (i.e., the total number of first-year students who request a peer mentor, or the total number of classes a student misses in a course);
3. *what people think or how they feel about something* (i.e., student interviews about knowledge of, or access to, learning skills workshops; how approachable they find faculty to be in first-year courses);
4. *ratings* (i.e., standing of LAU in national or international rankings of student engagement like Maclean's magazine or the National Survey for Student Engagement [NSSE]); and finally,
5. *rankings* (i.e., compare LAU against other comparable institutions for first-year retention rate as well as four and six-year graduation rates through the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange [CSRDE]).

While the PDSA is an excellent model to collect data and monitor change, Eckel et al. (1999) suggest four questions—specific to transformational change within higher education—for consideration when demonstrating improvement resulting from a change initiative:

1. How much improvement has occurred?
2. What is different on campus?
3. What strategies have produced improvements?
4. What have been the consequences, intended and unintended, of the changes? (p. 51).

When combined with the PDSA cycle, these questions will assist in targeting the results of the planned changes on campus, and help to objectively evaluate the areas of success and the areas for improvement within the proposed early alert system. As seen in Figure 3.2, Eckel et al. (1999) suggest the following framework for collecting and evaluating evidence which can supplement the PDSA cycle within the context of higher education:

Figure 3.2. General Framework for Determining Evidence.

General Framework for Determining Evidence			
	Progress	Success of Strategies	Results
Activities	What activities are different?	What strategies help change activities?	What are the results of these changed activities?
Outcomes	What changes have occurred in select areas (e.g., retention, graduation rates, learning outcomes, student attitudes)?	What strategies led to changes in key outcomes?	What effect have the changed outcomes created?
Processes	What processes are different?	What strategies were effective in altering processes?	What are the consequences of these changed processes? Which were intentional? Which were unintentional?
Structures	In what ways have defined roles, relationships, or institutional structures changed?	What strategies were used successfully to bring this about?	What are the effects and implications of these changes for daily work and long-term institutional health?
Experiences	In what ways has the institutional climate changed?	Through what strategies was climate changed?	What are the effects of the new climate on faculty, students, staff, and administrators? On external constituencies?
Language and Symbols	In what ways has the language about the topic of initiative changed?	What strategies worked and did not work to change this language?	What are the implications of these changes?

Adapted from: Eckel, P., Green, M., Hill, B. & Mallon, W. (1999) *On Change III: Taking Charge of Change: A Primer for Colleges and Universities*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education. p. 52.

This framework is extremely comprehensive in its scope. Answering the guided questions posed for each of the six categories (activities, outcomes, processes, structures, experiences, and language and symbols), will measure the effectiveness of the possible solution

suggested for this OIP by providing qualitative analysis on the success of the strategies introduced and implemented for the early alert system proposed at LAU.

Especially within an academic environment, data driven results create buy-in and add accountability to a change initiative by supporting the vision for change, and providing context around specific change goals. This is done by demonstrating improvements through statistics, or by the stories told through qualitative analysis. In the context of this improvement plan, reflection on these questions within the Network Improvement Communities (NIC), as suggested in the previous section, would be based on “shared, precise and measurable targets” (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 11) that reflect the goals of the student retention improvement plan at LAU. When members of NICs agree to establish new targets based on what is learned from achieving the first set of goals, the community remains focused on what is important to the collective will of the institution, and further progress towards specific targets supporting the change initiative can be made (Bryk et al., 2010).

Overall, the PDSA—especially when paired with the framework presented by Eckel et al. (1999)—provides an important component of this organizational change that functions as an effective model to gauge the validity of an early alert system in helping students persist beyond their first year at LAU.

Leadership Ethics and Organizational Change

Organizational ethics and values are an important consideration for this OIP. Guided primarily by its Catholic mission and values, how success is supported and students persist are at the forefront of LAU’s priorities. With core beliefs in the dignity and empowerment of all humans, LAU should incorporate ethical leadership as it undertakes this, or any change process. As Bolman and Deal (2013) explain “ethics and soul are essential for living a good life as well as managing a fulfilling organization” (p. 399).

When leading with either servant or adaptive leadership (discussed in Chapter 2), both styles need to be guided by high moral and ethical standards, and should “fit” with the values and goals of stakeholders at the university (i.e., students, faculty, staff, and administration). Northouse (2016) explains that “servant leaders do not compromise their ethical principals in order to achieve success” (p. 235). Considering LAU’s mission, the importance of ethics is paramount in how leadership at all levels is realized. Since the primary purpose of the institution is to educate students, ensuring the best possible circumstances are in place to achieve student retention and success is critical. Illustrating this, Swail (2014) states “When an institution accepts the registration of a student, they are, in effect, entering a moral, ethical, and legal contract with the student to do whatever they can to help that student succeed.” (p. 23). The solution of an early alert system to help identify and support students “at-risk” lends itself to this ethical notion of student success by creating optimal conditions to assist students as needed, allowing them to successfully persist and ultimately graduate.

Fundamentally, at the core of this change initiative, is the academic success of students, and although this goal is altruistic, the university will undeniably benefit from a more strategic plan for student retention in first to second year. LAU will be able to stabilize overall enrolment and develop greater financial strength against future budgetary challenges. These are undoubtedly difficult times for post-secondary institutions as they learn to pivot in response to changing demographics and restructured government funding. Nevertheless, it is critical for ethical leadership to guide the change so that decision-making and plan implementation is conducted by “principled individuals who make fair and balanced decisions” (Brown & Trevino, 2006, p. 597). Ehrich, Harris, Klenowski, Smeed and Spina (2015) assert that ethical leadership within an educational setting must be concerned with conflicting priorities. That is, they must

ensure “high-quality and high-equity teaching and learning” within the context of “competing accountabilities” (i.e., moral, professional, and contractual) (p. 199). Since LAU is guided by a strong set of morals, values, and social justice, it will be imperative to use these principles when introducing and implementing the changes to operationalize an early alert system since it will have direct impact on staff and students alike. Northouse (2016) highlights five principles of ethical leadership: respect, service, justice, honesty, and community. Keeping these ideals in mind will be critical when balancing ethical tensions throughout the change initiative.

Respect

Respect is important when identifying or monitoring first-year students. Those who may present factors that indicate that they either are or have the potential of encountering academic difficulty may fear the stigma of being singled out by a professor, or feel that they somehow do not measure up. Other students they may feel they are “losing face” by not being able to cope, or are letting their parents/families down. Those members of the university community who will work closest with these students with accessing resources to encourage their persistence, will need to remember that as leaders, they will need to “show respect [and] treat others as worthy human beings” (Northouse, 2016, p. 342). Since many of the students identified will potentially be non-traditional students, they are already coming to university with reservations and uncertainty about their academic ability, or their worthiness and confidence to be successful as a student.

Service

Creating a culture of service is another important characteristic of ethical leadership. Helping students to overcome the barriers which create obstacles to their academic success is not only respectful, but also an example of how ethical leaders at LAU (e.g., faculty, fellow students,

administrative support) can “contribute to the greater good of others” (Northhouse, 2016, p. 343). This idea of serving others also applies to the ways in which departments and faculty work with each other. Keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is to create an optimal learning environment leading to student retention, it will be important throughout this change implementation plan to remember that service to each other as colleagues—as a means of increased collaboration towards the common goal of student retention—is equally as important to the culture of service and respect to students.

Justice

As noted earlier, LAU is primarily a regional university, providing opportunities for post-secondary education for a growing commuter student population. With more students choosing to stay close to home to complete their post-secondary studies, LAU has a responsibility to the local community to consider students for admission through a lens of “justice.” Northhouse (2016) explains that ethical leaders need to consider issues of justice when making decisions and emphasizes that “no one should receive special treatment or special consideration except when his or her particular situation demands it” (p. 344). That said, the local demographic who apply to LAU are representing more non-traditional backgrounds. Although they may not meet the final admission average, there may have been extenuating circumstances which contributed to their slightly lower average and should be taken into consideration when making the admissions decision. As students who possibly have no other choice but to remain local for family or other personal circumstances, LAU has the ethical responsibility to make “just” admissions decisions when the academic potential of a student is evident. The university must also follow up with appropriate support services to create ideal circumstances for students who are more likely to fall into the “at-risk” category by the middle of the first semester. Ensuring that LAU admits

students who can perform well academically is the first step in successfully retaining students at the end of their first year. However, as Erich et al. (2015) assert, it is imperative for ethical leaders to “promote the achievement of all students, especially those who are least advantaged and marginalized” (p. 199). Given the disproportionately high number of students who apply and choose to attend LAU who come from a non-traditional background, it is the ethical responsibility of the institution, administration, support staff, faculty, and senior students to create a community that is compassionate, caring, and concerned about their persistence and academic success.

Bolman and Deal (2013) also consider issues of justice when examining ethical leadership. They assert that ethical leaders are guided by justice in that they need to represent sub-dominant groups, ensuring equal access to decision-making, services, and an authentic cross-representation of all stakeholders. At LAU, this issue not only addresses non-traditional students, but also considers the number of part-time faculty who are teaching across degree programs, and who often do not have the time, or dedicated office space, to properly mentor first-year students. This may affect the student’s impression that faculty are not approachable. When considering faculty involvement in mentoring, or assisting with “at-risk” programs, it is important to consider the “terms and conditions” of part-time faculty contracts to ensure these faculty members are not being asked or pressured into doing more.

This idea of justice also extends to the issue of sustainability, which directly affects LAU when considering budgetary implications and current operational practices. The viability and longevity of the institution rests on increasing student retention within the new financial framework being proposed by the government. This issue of sustainability is also concerned with the current delivery of student services at LAU, which are bursting from student demand.

Hiring for professional and support positions has not kept pace with faculty hiring, and consequently many units are dealing with fatigue, longer processing or wait times for students and reduced morale. If student retention is going to be embedded as a long-term priority within LAU's Strategic Plan, then the issue of whether the current operating plan within these departments is sustainable for the well-being of existing employees must be addressed.

Honesty

Delivering on what is marketed to students is a critical factor in maintaining honesty and credibility as an institution. When students ultimately choose to attend LAU, they do so on the basis of what the university has promised to deliver. Since LAU's primary demographic comes from the regional area, the institution depends upon the recommendation of school guidance counsellors with whom they have built strong community relationships. A growing alumni network is promoting the benefits of attending LAU to their families and friends, increasing the importance of honest messaging about what level of student support is possible (i.e., for first-generation, financial support, Indigenous, or students with disabilities). To maintain positive relationships and future recruiting opportunities, it is critical to be honest about how LAU will be able to support students who may be at risk of encountering academic difficulties or other barriers to success.

Community

Symbolically, Bolman and Deal (2013) refer to the metaphor of the Temple—a monument to the faith in what is humanly possible. The university, much like a temple, is a “gathering place for a community of people with shared traditions, values and beliefs... where people believe that the organization is doing something worth doing—a calling that adds something of value to the world” (p. 404). Generally, when students apply to university, they

are excited by the possibility of being challenged academically in a program of choice and interest, with the prospect of a rewarding and meaningful career. When first-year students meet with structural or academic road-blocks or challenges to their success, the motivation and will to persist may dwindle, and—especially in the case of “at-risk” students—disengagement or disillusionment may lead to withdrawal or course/program failure. If there is a shared belief among the faculty, administration, staff, and upper-year students that LAU is indeed a community of shared values, then mentoring and retaining first-year students becomes both a focus and a calling for all stakeholders. It becomes more than just the numbers: it becomes embedded in the motivation to help others succeed in their academic journey—that servant leadership ethos.

In general, LAU embodies ethical practices in all its activities. Embracing student persistence and retention as primary concerns for change efforts is one way of manifesting these ethical values.

Change Process Communication Plan

Developing a strong communications plan will be critical in engaging stakeholders with the change process and implementation plan for this OIP. The communication plan should be executed in two phases: internally and then externally. Since student retention directly affects all members of the university, focusing on an internal communications plan will be most relevant in the initial implementation phase. As the early alert system becomes common practice among faculty and student support services, and the culture of student persistence and success becomes institutionalized, it will become possible to then move to phase two of the communication plan, which would involve informing and engaging external stakeholders (e.g., alumni, guidance counsellors, agents and English as a Second Language [ESL] partners for international student recruitment, prospective students).

Phase One

From an internal perspective, the primary stakeholders in phase one include senior administration, faculty, staff, and current students. Creating a plan that resonates with these segments will meet with greater success if it aligns with the institutional mission. By anchoring an internal communications plan within the mission and values of the institution, buy-in for the change plan is increased, since, ideally, those that choose to work and live at a Catholic institution believe in the basic philosophy. In aligning with the emotions and presumed values of the internal stakeholders, this plan will communicate the importance of student retention from first to second year as not only pragmatic and necessary for the good of the institution, but also as a necessary means for educating students as “whole persons.” It will be called The Whole Person Campaign.

Phase one of this plan must live in one place at the university (i.e., the institution’s intranet). It is from this vantage point that consistent messaging will reach all members of the organization. There will be an interactive, dedicated site or webpage within the intranet explaining the new change initiative endorsed by the President and executed by the SEC and its working groups. It will provide information about how this organizational change will be implemented and provide an area to ask questions or provide feedback. Since LAU is a relatively small institution, it has retained its oral culture, which values face-to-face communication—a method which will facilitate the change process. At the beginning, it will be critical to meet with the various operating councils of the institution (e.g., University Council, Faculty Council, Education Planning Committee, and employee association meetings) to create conversations about the need for the change and why it will benefit the university. An essential part of this process will be to have print materials available to explain the early alert system, how

various people or departments will be involved, and outline the process for student referrals. This change will support the “whole person” campaign of student retention at LAU, so that after the initial meetings, people will have materials in print and digital formats, allowing them to reference and read at their leisure. The intranet website will also serve as a resource of where to find additional materials about the campaign and the change plan.

The next step will be to listen—the first characteristics of servant leadership. Members from the SEC and from the working teams assigned by the SEC will conduct meetings and interviews to ensure all voices and perspectives are heard regarding the current state of student retention as it affects individuals and departments. Through focus groups, town halls, interviews, and surveys, members of the SEC and its working teams will be receptive to the realities of each department and consequently better situated in understanding the current situation. This is a critical process, and information gleaned from these sessions will be integrated with the implementation plan, creating a more successful process of transformational change.

Introducing targeted messages to internal stakeholders will appeal to specific concerns. In the case of senior administration, their primary interest will be operational and reputational—meeting the needs of students to ensure success as well as guaranteeing that government funding awarded on student outcomes is based on the proposed funding formula. Faculty want to be assured that by increasing student retention in the first year, the university increases its overall persistence and graduation rate, thereby contributing to increased enrolments in courses and degree programs. From a student perspective, the concern is how the institution plans to foster an environment of growth and optimal support for their academic success.

Maintaining progress updates through the campus intranet and using testimonials from all stakeholders to affirm that the change process is evolving successfully will assist in maintaining morale and momentum during the transformation process. Monthly electronic newsletters will be generated summarizing campus-wide developments that demonstrate both implementation and success of new strategies supporting student retention. Through annual institutional reporting (e.g., Admissions and Enrolment Report), quantitative measurements will be monitored to determine progress on the annual objectives in increasing student retention, which will be shared with the larger internal community. Qualitative assessments will be conducted annually with first-year students who complete their intent-to-register forms indicating their plan of study when they return for second year. Through these measurement tools, strategies employed for the change process will be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness, and adapted as necessary.

Phase Two

As phase one gains momentum, and internal constituents adopt the new culture of employing an early alert system to supporting “at-risk” students, LAU will execute plans for the second phase, which is targeted to external stakeholders of the institution.

Communicating the importance of student success and retention will be a key external message of the university—especially as it concerns student recruitment (e.g., #wehaveyourback as part of an external social media campaign). With more students self-identifying a personal, academic, or unnamed issue or challenge and seeking accommodation, promoting a program to assist and support as part of the student support services offered by LAU will be an attractive factor for student well-being and retention. Given the challenge of declining demographics, the pressure to retain students that LAU recruits will be critical to the university’s sustainability. Through marketing, LAU will be positioned as a small, engaged academic community that cares

deeply about student success. An early alert system—while potentially being perceived by students negatively—will become one of LAU’s greatest strengths in providing intensive, “wrap-around” care when assisting students through their transition into and through first year.

The early alert system aligns with both the mission and values of the institution, which then becomes a “value-added” proposition, appealing to guidance counsellors and families of prospective students as an intentional method that LAU implements to support student well-being and persistence. When LAU demonstrates its commitment to student success through its first-year retention rates and graduation numbers, there is concrete evidence to support a student’s decision to attend this university. Communicating these success rates to high-school guidance counsellors, community college pathway partners, international agents, alumni, and prospective applicants and their families, will ensure greater confidence in the university’s ability to support students personally and academically. Since many of these external partners are critical in promoting and recommending the benefits of attending LAU, this communication will secure greater stability in maintaining the applicant pool at a time of declining enrolments.

In summary, creating a successful Change Implementation Plan and an effective communication plan is essential in moving this OIP from its theoretical position into a viable plan for increasing student retention from first to second year at LAU. Ensuring systematic methods of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of an early alert system to identify “at-risk” students, and taking into consideration the ethical implications of leadership for change will foster a sense of optimism and renewed growth. Optimal conditions have been established for collaborative, productive, and successful change initiatives which facilitate support in retaining students from first to second year at this university.

OIP Conclusion: Next Steps and Future Considerations

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the topic of student retention spans over forty years of research and literature. The purpose of this OIP is to elevate the issue of student retention across all years, but most specifically, from first to second year at LAU, enabling the university to modify its culture to include student retention as a strategic initiative of the institution. In terms of next steps, with the Strategic Enrolment Council already in place, the work of determining the feasibility of establishing and implementing early identification protocols for students identified as “at-risk” has begun.

The scope remains narrow given the single possible solution carried forward for this organizational improvement plan, which leaves ample opportunity to explore some of the other suggested solutions in a more qualitative and deliberate way. As well, it would be interesting to learn more about the specific applicant types who have been classified as non-traditional (i.e., first-generation, transfer students, Indigenous etc.) and who are applying to LAU in increasing numbers given the shift to a more commuter-based campus. Additionally, other issues of student retention should be investigated which may affect student success and retention at LAU (e.g., assessment/course placement, academic advising, and student transition programming).

Through the development of an integrated early alert system to identify students encountering personal or academic difficulty in the initial weeks of the first semester, and who may be classified as “at-risk,” it is expected that there will be increased numbers of students retained from first to second year at this university. The ultimate goal will be greater success of LAU’s mission to educate “the whole person”—through to graduation—and thus to enhance their future lives, their family, community, and society.

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