

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST:

Strategies for Increasing Retention and Graduation at the University of Kentucky with Consideration of the Boyer 2030 Commission Report


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The UK-PURPOSE: The Strategic Plan to Advance Kentucky

In 2021, University of Kentucky unveiled the **UK-PURPOSE, a Strategic Plan to Advance Kentucky**. The first principle of the **UK-PURPOSE** is **Putting Students First**. University of Kentucky has exemplified this core tenant by reaching significant milestones for enrollment, retention, and graduation over the past decade.



ENROLLMENT:

NEARLY **6,500** 
FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS
enrolled at the University of Kentucky
for the Fall 2023 term, up from just over
4,300 FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS
in Fall 2010.

NEARLY **25%** of our
FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT UK
are first-generation students
That's an increase in both number and percentage compared to Fall 2022.

NEARLY **19%** is an UNDERREPRESENTED
of UK's first-year population MINORITY, also an increase in
number and percentage
compared to Fall 2022.



RETENTION:

SECOND FALL
retention
reached a
RECORD
87%



GRADUATION:

For the first time in UK's history, we marked a six-year
graduation rate of 70% – a number that places UK
among the top 100 public institutions – and top 20% –
in the country, based on the most recent data.

SINCE FALL 2006:

FOUR-YEAR
GRADUATION RATES 
HAVE INCREASED **27%**
by 27 PERCENTAGE POINTS.

FIVE-YEAR
GRADUATION RATES 
HAVE INCREASED **17%**
by 17 PERCENTAGE POINTS.

SIX-YEAR
GRADUATION RATES 
HAVE INCREASED **12%**
by more than
12 PERCENTAGE POINTS.

Based on preliminary figures for Fall 2023

Enrollment growth at University of Kentucky has produced an opportunity to retain and graduate more students, including more first generation and underrepresented minority students.

With consideration of the Boyer 2030 Commission Report, two strategies that have been key to UK's retention and graduation success are:

- Weekly Retention Meetings, addressing Assessment and Accountability
- UK LEADS (Leveraging Economic Affordability for Developing Success), addressing Access and Affordability

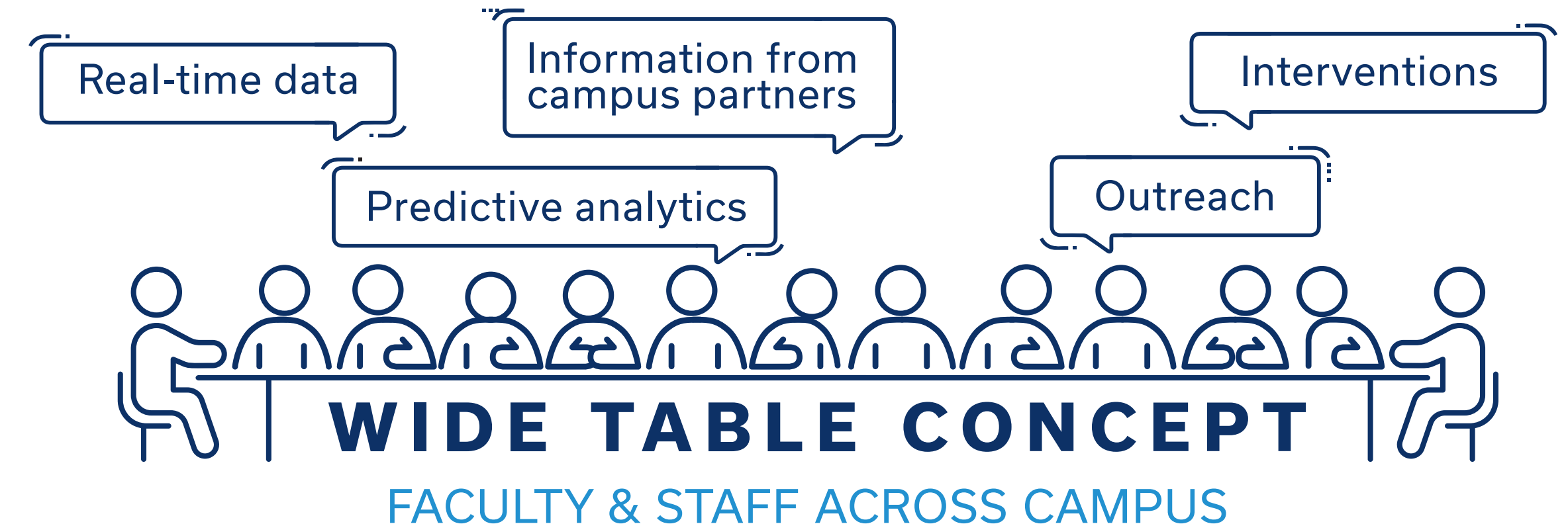
Weekly Retention Meetings

Each Friday, approximately 80 partners – including senior leadership, advisers, associate deans, enrollment management staff, student service personnel, and financial aid – from across the University of Kentucky campus meet to read and react to first-year student retention data. The goal of this meeting is to ensure data alignment with campus partners and operations, provide actionable business intelligence, and ultimately focus on Putting Students First. From this weekly meeting, campus partners identify populations of students needing additional support and implement interventions to support these students.

Weekly Retention Meetings put the idea of **Assessment and Accountability** into action. Each week, Institutional Research, Analytics & Decision Support (IRADS) provides actionable business intelligence and begins the Retention Meeting with data related to first-year student retention.

ASSESSMENT

ACCOUNTABILITY



UK Leads

In 2016, University of Kentucky began UK LEADS (Leveraging Economic Affordability for Developing Success) To address **Access and Affordability** for this population of students, UK LEADS was created to provide one time persistence grants to students who were selected based on retention indicators including:

- Unmet need of \$5k or more
- First income quartile
- Financial hold and/or account balance at the university
- High school GPA and/or standardized test scores
- First Generation
- Living off campus

The **Fall 2016** through **Fall 2021**
first-year cohorts
receiving LEADS
were retained at
78.9%,
UP NEARLY **12%** FROM PREDICTION.