Some of you may be wondering what “retention” is and what is a retention specialist? What do they really do and why????

And, most importantly, what difference do they make in the academic lives of your sons and daughters?

Quite simply, we are advisors, teachers, coaches and sometimes “cheerleaders” providing needed words of support and encouragement. As Dr. McMillan says “…we do everything that we can to ensure student success and achievement”. Sometimes, outside forces unrelated to campus life, can create stress and problems that make studying all but impossible. Some students respond to stress by dropping out or losing focus in their work. Often, capable students are lost in the maze of difficulty that comes with succeeding in college. Sometimes, just having someone to “coach” them through a difficult time can mean the difference between failing or passing; “dropping out” or persisting to graduation.

One semester, I advised a young lady who started out well, but found by mid-term that some of her courses were more difficult than she had expected. Then, there was a death in her family and she was ready to leave Morgan. She said she just could not focus. We sat and talked about her family, her priorities, and her career aspirations. I encouraged her to stay. Although it was not easy for her to continue, after a brief absence, she came back that same semester. With the help of her professors and advisors, she was successful! She left me a note one day saying, “I don’t think I could have made it through without having someone to consult with. I truly am thankful…” She is now a senior who will graduate this year.

That’s what we do!

Morgan has an excellent reputation for offering a nurturing environment to students. In recent years, the University has increased its efforts to retain students, who may have been lost in the past. The Office of Student Retention (OSR) ensures improvement in student retention and increased persistence to graduation by focusing on academic success and achievement through early intervention and systematic tracking of all undergraduate students.

The OSR collaborates with the Office of Financial Aid to reduce attrition related to students’ ability to pay for college and maintain their funding. This is a serious issue, considering that 95% of Morgan’s students receive some type of financial assistance. The OSR also sponsors and coordinates various campus-wide programs and works in collaboration with the six academic units of the university: the College of Liberal Arts; School of Engineering: School of Computer, Mathematical and Natural Sciences: School of Business and Management; School of Education and Urban Studies; and, Institute of Architecture and Planning. The schools’ retention programs are coordinated centrally to ensure that campus-wide goals are met. But, beyond that, each school develops unique retention strategies. Some of those programs and strategies are discussed in this issue.

In this first issue of 2006, we are highlighting some of the retention activities and programs sponsored by the Office of Student Retention and the retention staff in the various colleges and schools across campus. These activities are designed to improve your student’s academic performance and keep your son or daughter on track to graduation.

Our staff: Dr. Tiffany Beth McMillan, Director, Sarah D. Adams, Retention Specialist, Dr. Destine Fowler, Retention Specialist, Diane Wise, Administrative Assistant, and the retention specialists in each of the schools and colleges are committed to providing you with the information that you need to support and assist your matriculating student. In a recent interview, Dr. McMillan reiterated our mantra “…at Morgan, we love our students, and we do everything that we can to ensure student success and achievement”. Sometimes, just having someone to “coach” them through a difficult time can mean the difference between failing or passing; “dropping out” or persisting to graduation.

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According to Michael James, SEUS Retention Coordinator, “Basically, we do everything we can to help students discover their career passion and to follow it successfully.” The retention staff here at Morgan are here ‘to meet and solve’ not just ‘to meet and dialogue’ again our mantra, “We do everything we can to ensure student success and achievement…..SEUS CARES”

THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS IS ALL “E.A.R.S.”

The College of Liberal Arts, Office of Student Development and Retention (OSDR) is comprised of three highly motivated individuals – Retention Coordinator- Keith R. Hicks and two Retention Counselors, Ivori V. Lipscomb-Warren and Romulus McNeill. A significant portion of their time is devoted to serving “at-risk” students (students performing below a 2.0 or “C” grade point average) who are referred to them by faculty through the Early Alert and Response System (E.A.R.S.). The College of Liberal Arts, which has one of the largest student populations on campus, initiated this system which has subsequently been incorporated into the campus-wide Retention Program.

The Early Alert and Response System is designed to assist faculty with intervention for students who are performing below expectations in an effort to prevent the students from earning grades of “D” or “F.” The College of Liberal Arts faculty issues early warnings to the students, their Department Chairpersons, and OSDR when students show signs of academic difficulty like failing to turn in assignments, failing to attend classes, or failing to take scheduled quizzes or exams. A collaborative effort is then made to provide the student with the advisement, tutoring or other resources needed to improve performance and assist your son or daughter in being successful.

The OSDR offers three workshops each semester - “Learning Styles & Strategies”, “Memory & Concentration Skills”, and “Preparing for and Taking Final Exams”. The Retention Counselors visit freshman classes to explain these workshops and help students register for them.

The OSDR has provided a significant academic effort to prevent the students from dropping out of school. The College of Liberal Arts strongly encourages all liberal arts majors to visit their offices (Holmes Hall - rooms 229 and G-18) to take advantage of the many resources available to them.