May 17, 2019

Dear Dr. Morrison,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to visit campus and work with your team on May 6-7th, 2019. We were impressed and inspired by the faculty and staff at SAUT, who are so clearly committed to supporting students. We also greatly appreciated the time you spent with us to help get to know you and your vision better (Go Rockets!). As you know, the opportunity assessment allows us to identify strengths to leverage and opportunities to pursue as SAUT continues with its HSS work. It was a very informative day and we appreciate the time that everyone at SAUT dedicated to our visit. Please review this letter of information and reflections from our visit.

In the attachments to this email, you will find:
1. "SAUT Final Report," is the findings report PowerPoint we generated based on our group session and focus groups on May 6th. This report was presented on day 2 and includes the slides on the principles of strategy execution and an action planning slide with next steps.
2. "SAUT Stakeholder Reflections" is a compilation of verbal feedback collected during the stakeholder group presentation on May 6th.
3. "Focus Group Summary Notes SAUT" is a summary of all the focus group discussions from May 6th.
4. "Southern Arkansas University Tech Wildest Dream Activity" is a compilation of the written feedback gathered after the stakeholder report out session on May 7th.
5. ATD's Process Mapping Guide which will help SAUT begin planning to map the current student experience.

Strengths

The focus of SAUT's HSS work is to create an academic, career and financial plan for every student. Additionally, the creation of an intake survey and redesigning new student orientation to improve student onboarding and connect students to resources early are primary objectives. We were encouraged to see that there is a great deal of excellent work already underway on the student intake survey and this June you will have data on student needs and risk factors earlier than ever before. Utilization of this data will allow staff to connect with both internal and external resources to support students around academic and financial concerns.

We heard a deep commitment across many stakeholders to support students and a desire to see students succeed. It was clear from our conversations with stakeholders that shared responsibility around student success is understood and attitudinal change will not be a challenge. It was also very encouraging to see the collaborative approach to leading this work at SAUT. Dr. Wilson and Mr. McLeane collaborate in a way that is not observed on all college campuses and should not be taken for granted. This cooperation will provide momentum to the work and ensure that the approach is holistic and provides both academic and non-

academic supports to students. Lastly, SAUT has impressive retention and graduation data comparatively and are starting this work from a good place with the ability to be great.

Recommendations to Advance SAUT's Holistic Student Success Efforts

Recommendation #1: Develop a Systematic Design of the Student Experience

A system view of Holistic Student Support requires institutions to thoroughly understand how their processes and practices impact the student experience. It was clear from our discussion with campus stakeholders that good practices around student support exist at SAUT. However, these are not yet scaled in an intentional way at the college and as a result are not consistent for all students at SAUT. Additionally, it will also be important to identify strategies for supporting part-time and online students at SAUT. Developing supports for both populations will help all students in their pursuit of a credential. To successfully redesign college's structures and processes that impact the experience of all students, it is important to know your students, their goals, and their academic and non-academic needs. It is also helpful to understand both the current student experience and the ideal experience that the college would like to create for the student. Any gaps between the current and the ideal experience are areas of improvement for the college. The Student-Centered Design Process (see ATD HSS Toolkit, Appendix C) provides an approach using "design thinking" methodology to build a student-centered experience that fills the gaps and provides SAUT students with an impactful experience.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Create a vision focused around the Holistic Student Support work at SAUT
2. Complete a process map of the current experience with input from all stakeholders, including students
3. Determine what root problem will be addressed - Analyze data at each step, if possible
4. Create an ideal framework for the student experience

Recommendation #2: Establish Purposeful Communication Strategies

It was clear from our conversations that communication was an area of opportunity at SAUT. While the college has a great variety of support for students, some faculty and staff were unaware of what was available or how to access it. We also heard that there was no standard or consistent practice to documenting student contacts. Essentially, without documentation, students may have to tell their story more than once and staff may not know what has been done to support a student in the past. Data collection and evaluation of student services after contact will be difficult when documentation is inconsistent. Lastly, we heard from the guiding team that there is likely a lack of clarity around the HSS work at SAUT and how the college is engaging in transformative student success work with this project.

ATD believes that clear communication builds momentum and buy-in amongst key stakeholders. Being intentional as an institution to systemically advertise services on campus and how students can access them would support everyone. Also, leveraging current technology to identify functionality that could support student documentation would create accountability and allow IR staff to measure effectiveness of services. In addition, it would allow all necessary faculty and staff to see the previous connections with students and their

utilization of supports at SAUT. Finally, a strong communication plan related to Holistic Student Supports builds institutional capacity and establishes urgency for the entire college community to prioritize work and align together with mission and vision.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Create consistent processes for capturing and sharing information during student interactions
2. Evaluate current technology for functionality that strengthens/diversifies communication
3. Create a communication plan/audit for student and internal communication
4. Build a campaign to feature available student support services

Recommendation #3: Increased Faculty Role in Student Success Work

One thing that came through clearly when speaking with the faculty focus group was the investment SAUT faculty feel in their students. It was evident that faculty are highly engaged in helping their students be ready for both classroom expectations as well as the work force. In fact, they expressed a strong desire to be more involved in the academic advising and mentoring of their students. Considering the heavy caseloads of advisors, faculty feel as though they can help bridge the gap for students and provide more industry and program specific support to students.

To be more effective, SAUT could more clearly define the faculty role and expectations around advising and student support work. Faculty could also benefit from more professional development focused on services available to students, consistent usage of the early alert system, and access to information about students that can inform their approach. Research demonstrates the impact of building relationships with students, and faculty are in a unique position since they spend more time with students than anyone else on campus. While relationship building is critical, so is identifying students who need extra support as early in courses as possible. SAUT has an early alert system, but staff report usage that is inconsistent and therefore ineffective. Establishing standard protocols, alert workflows, and expectations for faculty would create alignment around this important best practice. Lastly, establishing training for part-time faculty and giving faculty access to student communications would allow for a broader wraparound approach to supporting students.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Determine the ideal student experience including what you want students to know, when they should know it, who delivers it, and how it will be assessed
2. Clarify roles and identify training needs
3. Create consistent processes around early alert
4. Evaluate the current mentoring program for PT faculty and expand if effective

Recommendation #4: Be Intentional with Business Practices/Processes

Intentional processes create a more consistent experience that reaches more students and helps employees feel confident about the expectations of their roles. While on campus we heard that the college has excellent services to offer students, but this activity is not currently being documented. The student story is then lost,

and each service provider must ask for students to tell their story multiple times. Additionally, there is an opportunity to develop some standardized structure to help students establish a career, academic, and financial plan. Students with plans can connect their actions to their goals and generally will feel less anxiety about career direction or financing college. Finally, without intentional design and workflows of the early alert process, faculty can't see the loop being closed by services when they raise a concern about a student. This leads to a lack of trust in the system/colleagues and ultimately the practice becomes devalued. All of these intentional processes, when addressed, can lead to less departmental siloes and a strategic, prioritized approach to holistic support.

Intentionality is important because, once the vision is finalized, the current state is understood, and the ideal student experience is designed, the college can begin to create structures and processes that will fill the gaps and address barriers to student success. Using student-centered design thinking can help create structures and processes that will better prepare the college to serve the students that they have. Additionally, creating more structured practices allows for those practices to be improved and assessed. Ensuring that all employees have the information they need and feel empowered to support a student helps to create relationships that allow students to persist at the college.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Use vision, ideal student experience and results from process mapping to identify practices to be improved
2. Include current and available data to identify practices to be improved
3. Gather and incorporate input from stakeholders
4. Revisit best practices around early alert to inform redesign

Recommended Action Steps

It was apparent during our visit that process mapping the current and ideal student experience would be the next best step for SAUT. Deep assessment of these student experiences can help identify core institutional issues that need to be addressed in the HSS work. Subsequently communicating that new, shared vision effectively will help all faculty and staff work toward transformative change more transparently and efficiently. To build on the foundations of the ATD assessment work at SAUT, we encourage the guiding team to begin with the following next steps:

- Create a vision focused around the Holistic Student Support work at SAUT
- Complete a process map of the current experience with input from all stakeholders, including students
- Determine what root problem will be addressed - Analyze data at each step, if possible
- Create an ideal framework for the student experience

Concluding Thoughts

Thank you for the thoughtful hospitality during our visit. We enjoyed getting to briefly tour the beautiful campus, spending some time with two SAUT students, and really getting to know key stakeholders through the focus groups. SAUT is starting this work with a strong foundation that includes excellent people with a high level of dedication to student success. We are excited about the work that SAUT has started and are looking forward to being a part of the SAUT student success journey.

Through our collective work with the *Arkansas Community Colleges Holistic Student Support Intensive Coaching Project*, SAUT has access to up to two hours per month of virtual consulting with ATD. You may use those consulting hours to help you plan, implement, and/or evaluate your student success reforms. You may engage us in any one of the roles below or in a variety of the roles below based on your strategic goals.

Connector
Connect to best practices, peer institutions, and colleges examples

Trainer
Provide professional develop and capacity building training on topics such as change leadership, process mapping, communication audit, technology analysis, case management advising, etc.

Project Manager
Co-create the structures and processes needed for strategy execution and keep guiding team accountable for next steps

Critical Friend
Offer meaningful and detailed feedback on project plans, activities, and reports

Facilitator
Deliver intentional and structured working sessions during site visits or via scheduled virtual working sessions

We thank you again for warm hospitality and encourage you to reach out to us with any questions.

Sincerely,

John Grant and Laurie Fladd