The Never-Ending Onion: Peeling back the Layers of Academic Actions

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Partnership with all campuses in UW System to offer:

- Traditional online (collaborative)
- Online competency-based (CBE) degree programs (UW Flexible Option)
- Independent Learning courses
- University Learning Store
- UW College Courses Online
- And more…
## UW Flexible Option

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Project Overview

● UW Flexible Option at 5 years: “Flex 2.0”

● Retention, Retention, Retention
  ○ What is our retention?
  ○ Where can we improve?
  ○ Who can we focus on?

● Goal: to build a robust coaching model that would increase the retention of our students on an academic action (probation, suspension)
Academic Actions are like onions...
Today’s Learning Outcomes

1. Review the layers of our project - where we started, what we accomplished, where we are at, and what’s next.

2. Apply plain language techniques to reiterate policy.

3. Discuss strategies for reframing academic actions at your institution.
Layer 1: What do these academic actions mean?

Review each of our campus partner’s academic action policy:

- How do they apply to our students? (Semester vs. Subscription period)
- What do all these definitions mean?
- What are our processes?
Layer 2: Let’s look at the data!? 

How many students are on academic probation? Academic suspension?

- Over five years of data from multiple institutions
- Limited access to reporting functions in SIS
- No clean tracking mechanisms in our CRM
- Data we did have was overwhelming and confusing
Layer 3: Identifying and tracking students

How can we improve the way we identify & track students on academic actions?

- Partnered with our IT team - how can we leverage our CRM?
- Needed buy-in cross-functionally - how will other departments use data?
- Reportable data allows us to tailor outreach to students
Layer 4: What do our communications say?

What is communicated to students about their academic standing?

- Is it clear?
- Is it accurate?
- Is it compassionate?

Who informs the students and when?

What are the students’ next steps?
Layer 5: What does our website say?

How is the policy being communicated? Is it clear? Accurate?

- Verified (and triple checked) with Registrar, Admissions, and Program Management teams
- Removed clutter and inaccurate information
- Separated coaching from policy
- Thoughtfully crafted (consistent) messaging
Layer 6: Reinstatement (an onion within an onion)

Reinstatement is program-specific vs. institution-wide.

- Who owns the appeal process?
- What is the appeal process?
- What are the students' next steps, if accepted, or options, if denied?
What is Plain Language?

“What is Plain Language? Communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it.”

www.plainlanguage.gov

“Writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.”

Plain Writing Act of 2010

Why might Plain Language be important when communicating academic policies with students?
Let’s reframe our discussions!

What challenges do you face regarding students on academic probation? Academic suspension?

How do you currently support these students? What is working? What is not?

How might you reframe the conversations at your campus to improve the student experience? Where (or with who) could you start?
What a journey! Where to now?

Layers 7, 8, and counting...

- Coaching model
- Student support resources
- Technology advances
- Reporting and assessment
Embrace the Onion

- Don’t go halfway when the recipe calls for a full onion.
  - Comprehensive process improvement takes time! Don’t cut corners - bring all the stakeholders to the table.

- Wear appropriate eyewear (to avoid tears).
  - Look at your communications and policies through the eyes of your students.

- Sharpen your knife - be precise.
  - Be clear and concise with your language to clarify students’ expectations.

- Don’t be afraid of the onion.
  - Ask questions and dig deep to examine all layers.
Questions?
Thank you!

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