The Academic Affairs Success Framework

The Central Office Workbook

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A Four-Pillar Model for Institutional Effectiveness in Higher Education

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Strategic Goals & KPIs Tracker

Strategic goals translate the Academic Affairs division and the institution's mission and vision into actionable commitments. KPIs, in turn, serve as accountability metrics, indicating whether those commitments are being achieved.

A **Strategic Goals & KPIs Tracker** is more than a reporting tool; it is the backbone of accountability for the academic affairs division. Without it, priorities become diffuse, progress is difficult to measure, and resources are often consistently misallocated. Tracking goals with defined baselines, year-over-year targets, and measurable outcomes ensures consistent demonstration of value to internal stakeholders and external accreditors. Institutions that neglect this step often find themselves scrambling to justify their actions rather than shaping them proactively. By committing to disciplined tracking, the Central Office signals a culture of evidence-based decision-making and positions the division as a driver of institutional credibility and success.

Before engaging with each domain, it is essential to capture the institution's current strategic goals and corresponding key performance indicators (KPIs). This serves as the baseline against which all refinements are measured. Clearly defined, measurable objectives ensure that every initiative within the fifteen domains aligns with institutional priorities and produces evidence of impact.

This template is designed to support the development, monitoring, and reporting of strategic goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). Record the goals, performance measures, and responsible units that define your **current strategic direction**.

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS GOALS

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STRATEGIC CHECKPOINT:

How were these goals determined (data, accreditation, leadership vision, etc.)?

How do these goals align with the academic affairs division mission, vision and values?

Are these goals realistic and achievable with current resources?

Which goals are cross-divisional or require shared accountability?

Which KPIs best reflect student success, mission alignment, and institutional sustainability?

> 🔖 **QUICK TIP**
>
> Adjust the academic goals if needed after this strategic checkpoint.

STRATEGIC GOALS & KPI TRACKER WORKSHEET

COMPLETE ONE SHEET PER GOAL

Strategic Goal:

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Baseline	Target Value	Data Source	Status

KPI Definitions:

Responsible Office/Owner:

Key Initiatives:

Timeline/Milestones:

Progress Summary/Achievement Level:

Notes/Follow-up Actions:

TEMPLATE GUIDE:

Goal / Initiative: A clearly defined strategic priority or action designed to advance institutional mission, vision, and objectives. Each goal should be specific, measurable, and aligned with broader organizational strategies. **Clearly state what is to be achieved.**

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Quantitative or qualitative metrics used to assess progress toward achieving a goal or initiative. Each goal should include at least three KPIs that reflect outcomes, effectiveness, and impact over time.

Baseline (Current Value): The current performance level or the starting point from which progress is measured. Establishing a baseline provides context for understanding growth and improvement.

Target Value (Year 1, Year 3, Year 5): The specific, measurable performance levels expected to be achieved within defined timeframes. Targets should be ambitious yet attainable. Targets must also reflect both short-term progress and long-term strategic outcomes.

Data Source (IR, Finance, Registrar, etc.): The unit or system responsible for collecting and verifying the data used to measure KPIs (e.g., Institutional Research, Finance, Registrar, Human Resources). Identifying the data source ensures consistency and accuracy in reporting.

Status (On Track, Delayed, Completed): A real-time indicator of progress toward completion.
- **On Track:** The goal or initiative is progressing as planned.
- **Delayed:** The goal or milestone is behind schedule or facing obstacles.
- **Completed:** The goal or initiative has been fully achieved or implemented.

KPI Definition: Clearly state the meaning of the performance indicator to ensure clarity of meaning by all stakeholders.

Responsible Owner (Provost, Dean, Director): The individual or office accountable for leading, monitoring, and reporting on the progress of the goal or initiative. Ownership promotes accountability and ensures active management of results.

Key Initiatives: State what specific tasks must be completed to achieve the stated goal.

Timeline / Milestones: A defined schedule outlining key actions, deliverables, and checkpoints necessary to achieve the goal. Milestones help track incremental progress and identify potential delays or adjustments needed.

Progress Summary/Achievement Level: How much of the work to be completed, to achieve the goal, has been accomplished.

Notes/Follow-up Actions: Important reminders and actions critical to achieve the goal.

STRATEGIC GOALS & KPI TRACKER WORKSHEET: EXAMPLE

Strategic Goal 1: *Enhance student retention and graduation rates*
Strengthen institutional support systems, engagement initiatives, and data-driven interventions to increase first-year retention and overall graduation rates across all undergraduate programs.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Baseline	Target Value	Data Source	Status
First-year retention rate	68%	Year 1: 70% Year 3: 75% Year 5: 80%	Institutional Research, Registrar	On track
4-year graduation rate	45%	Year 1: 48% Year 3: 55% Year 5: 60%	Institutional Research, Registrar	On track
Student Satisfaction Index	72%	Year 1: 75% Year 3: 80% Year 5:85%	Office of Student Engagement	On track
Course Completion Rate	81%	Year 1: 83% Year 3: 87% Year 5: 90%	Registrar Institutional Research,	On track

KPI Definitions:
- First-Year Retention Rate: Percentage of first-time, full-time students returning for their second year.
- Graduation Rate (6-Year, Undergraduate): Percentage of students completing their degree within 150% of program time.
- Student Satisfaction Index: Overall satisfaction derived from annual student surveys (e.g., NSSE, internal climate survey).
- Course Completion Rate: Percentage of enrolled courses completed successfully with passing grades.

Responsible Office/Owner:
Dean of Student Success supported by Institutional Research, Registrar, and Student Engagement.

Key Initiatives:
Year 1 (Foundation & Early Impact)
- Implement Early Alert System: Train faculty and advisors on risk identification and case management protocols.
- Launch Retention Task Force: Include cross-functional representation from Academic Affairs, Student Success, and Institutional Research.
- Develop Student Success Data Dashboard: Provide real-time analytics on attendance, grades, and engagement patterns.
- Pilot Peer Mentorship Program: Pair upper-level students with first-year cohorts to support transition and belonging.
- Review Academic Advising Policies: Audit advising loads, training, and communication processes.

Year 3 (Expansion & Data Integration)
- Scale Predictive Analytics: Use retention data to design targeted academic interventions.
- Integrate Academic and Co-Curricular Supports: Align tutoring, mental health services, and engagement programs.
- Launch Retention Innovation Grants: Fund departmental pilot projects improving student persistence.
- Enhance Faculty-Student Engagement Initiatives: Faculty office-hour campaigns, early feedback surveys, and classroom climate improvements.
- Annual Retention Symposium: Showcase success stories, best practices, and ongoing challenges.

Year 5 (Sustainability & Institutionalization)
- Institutionalize Retention Framework: Embed student success metrics into departmental reviews and annual performance goals.
- Develop Student Success Academy: Centralize professional development for advisors and student success staff.
- Publish Five-Year Retention Impact Report: Document outcomes, policy changes, and return-on-investment findings.
- Establish Continuous Improvement Cycle: Integrate retention KPIs into annual budget and planning processes.

Timeline/Milestones:

| Milestone	Timeline	Deliverable
Launch the early alert student success system.	Spring 2026	Implementation report and staff training complete
Establish a student mentoring & peer coaching program	Fall 2026	Pilot program report with participation data
Integrate a predictive analytics dashboard for at-risk students	Fall 2026	Dashboard is live and functional
Review and update the academic advising model	Spring 2027	Revised advising framework approved
Assess progress and publish the Retention & Success Report	Summer 2027	Institutional progress report released

Progress Summary/Achievement Level:

On Track – All Year 1 initiatives launched. Early-alert system implementation completed on schedule; baseline and first-semester analytics indicate improved early outreach. Peer mentoring program recruitment is ongoing.

Notes/Follow-up Actions:
- Baseline data reflects the most recent academic year before the initiative, AY 2024–2025.
  Need to hire additional staff in Student Advising to support expanding roles

About the Author
Juline E. Mills, PhD is a higher education leader with more than two decades of experience in academic affairs, accreditation, and institutional strategy. She has served as a senior academic administrator guiding infrastructure, accreditation, curriculum, and student success initiatives. Her work has helped colleges and universities strengthen governance, ensure compliance, and build cultures of excellence that support both students and faculty.
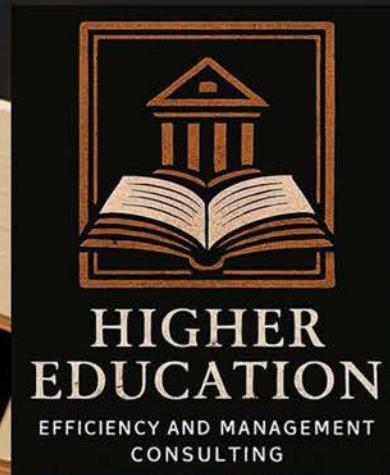
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