

The Maverick Minute: Sarah Edwards

Description:

In this Maverick Minute, Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., chats with Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Sarah Edwards, Ph.D., about the pivot to remote learning in the spring and how it impacted the academic journey of UNO students.

Transcript:

Hello, I'm Jeff Gold, and welcome to this Maverick Minute. Thanks so much for being with us today. I have the privilege of being joined by Dr. Sarah Edwards, and Sarah is an Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs here at UNO. Sarah, thanks so much for giving us a little bit of your time today.

Thanks for the conversation.

You know, I wanted to talk about the spring semester. This is a spring semester that we finished – and indeed a summer semester that's actively ongoing now – that is probably unlike any one we've ever had at UNO, at least certainly in recent memory. And as we pivoted to remote education and we required all of our students and all of our faculty to dramatically change the modalities of instruction, we were very concerned about what the effect of that would be - what it would be on our faculty, on our staff, and particularly what it would mean specifically to the academic journey of our students. In other words, whether they would complete their semester's learning, what their performance would look like, end of semester testing and assessment, and then, of course, on graduation rates for the spring semester. And so maybe you could tell our audience a little bit about what some of our experience has been because I understand, in speaking with Dr. [Sacha] Kopp, that you've studied this quite carefully.

You know, we were very fortunate to have an extended spring break in which to prepare. And, honestly, the faculty and staff pivoted with compassion and intentionality. And that intentionality was critical because there are some universities and colleges that did not fare well this spring and this summer and we simply did. That intentionality on the part of, for example, our Faculty Senate immediately putting in temporary policies to help protect the welfare of our students as well as being thoughtful; our Deans, who were absolute leaders in thinking about how to serve the needs of their students, their faculty and staff. And so, for example, one of the things they put into play was a credit/no credit policy, extending both the deadline of that and the scope. And that really helped to provide our advisors with the tools they needed to have, the one-on-one conversations of what's best for students. And so, for example, with that policy, we had very few students withdraw from their courses, half the rate that we would see in a semester.

So, say that again – HALF the rate that we would typically see in a spring semester.

Yes.

Wow.

And we doubled – actually went up 6% - our A and B rate, and we doubled our number of students who selected the credit/no credit option. And so, that had an impact overall of having students who had choices. They had compassionate faculty who wanted to work with them to make sure they were comfortable and that they had what they needed for teaching and learning. So, it was – I think honestly, it was the intentionality. It was clearly orchestrated and collaborative.

You know, I got a lot of phone calls and emails and whatever from students, parents, families during the spring semester. And one I recall so vividly – this is a young woman who was really struggling academically and then her grandmother passed away from COVID. And she was absolutely heartbroken and she didn't really think that she could finish the semester, but that isn't why she reached out to me. She reached out to me because her advisor and her faculty reached out to her when they heard about what happened to her, and they made special arrangements and she finished with flying colors. And she really just wrote to me – and I ultimately found out how to reach her and she was willing to take a call from me and tell me a little bit more about the details because I wanted to reach out and thank the faculty and the staff that were so involved in helping her. But this is, you know, this is the Maverick Family in many ways, and this is a caring, loving family that are committed. You know, we talk about the Completion Imperative, we're not kidding. That's a 24-hour-day, 7-day-a-week challenge, right? And graduation rate this year for our rising seniors for those that were finishing in the spring – what did that look like?

You know what? We finished strong. Our enrollment rate, for example, in summer, was higher than it was last summer. And –

Eleven percent up, I think I read.

And fall is looking good, in particular with our transfer students. And I can tell you some of the stories I'm hearing there are folks who are more comfortable keeping their students who may have been going to an out-of-state institution, keeping them closer to home. And they know the value of the UNO Maverick Way, as you said, that we care about people. And that goes a long way, especially in hard times like this.

Well, it shows in so many different ways, Sarah, and I want to thank you for all that you do. I know that the amount of work you put in during the semester has been absolutely incredible. But I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of our faculty and staff who really went out of their way to make this semester successful and to help us build a future for UNO. Thanks for being with us today.

Thanks for the conversation.

And thank you for being with us today on this Maverick Minute.