

## **Student Success Initiative - Academic Support Task Group**

### **Recommendations**

#### **Create a “one-stop-shop” success center.**

Bridging academic and student affairs, this new unit would require **1)** the creation of new positions in order to effectively oversee the development of **2)** a new student success facility and **3)** a new website centrally locating: **3a)** all commonly used student forms (i.e. requests for credit/no credit, incompletes, grade replacement, late drop, late course changes, dual degree, etc. (additional details under “Review and Revise Policy”) as well as **3b)** all campus resources such as tutoring options, mentoring programs, career centers, advising offices, study abroad offices, honors programs, etc. The success center does not seek to replace services currently available to students, but instead to provide coordination of the current and new programs.

1

**Why?** The decentralized nature of our campus often leads to student frustration and/or difficulty (both for students and professionals) in navigating resources efficiently and effectively.

- Student feedback throughout SSI consistently suggested a desire for a centralized way to locate and access support.
- Many of our Big 10 peers, as well as other institutions, have successfully adopted a similar model. See [Appendix A](#). Especially notable are sites such as:
  - Kansas State’s One Stop: <https://www.k-state.edu/onestop/>
  - University of Minnesota’s One Stop: <https://onestop.umn.edu/>
  - Eastern Illinois’ One Stop; <https://www.eiu.edu/students/>
- Many articles highlight a growing trend in “one-stop-shop” success centers:
  - AACRAO: The Next Generation of One-Stop Student Service Centers: Part 1 <https://www.aacrao.org/research-publications/quarterly-journals/college-university-journal/article/c-u-vol.-94-no.-2-spring/the-next-generation-of-one-stop-student-service-centers-part-1>
  - Education Advisory Board: Centralized Student Success Centers <https://www.csueastbay.edu/oaa/files/docs/acinfo/censtudsuccctr.pdf>
  - University Business <https://universitybusiness.com/higher-eds-student-success-hqs/>

#### **Enhance support services.**

With this new model, existing academic support services would be maintained (i.e. any current programs providing tutoring, coaching, skills workshops, etc.) and the new success center would help to **4)** coordinate those efforts and **5)** identify and fill service gaps, broadening the scope of support to include all students. Specifically embedded within the charge of the unit would be goals to identify, increase collaboration, and establish best practices for **6)** all existing mentoring opportunities and **7)** all existing student success courses and at the same time **8)** create mentoring and/or success courses for any unserved populations. In addition, the center would **9)** utilize a case management approach to coordinate and ensure outreach to all non-returning students (including dropped students and those who withdrew).

**Why?** Many units are offering academic support programming for targeted populations but the campus lacks a comprehensive inventory of those programs, there is no mechanism for bringing that network together to collaborate and coordinate efforts, and opportunities are offered in such an

identity-specific way that many student populations are likely ineligible. The same is true for how units reach out and connect with students who leave the institution – there is no formal exit process for students and there is inconsistency across the very limited number of initiatives aimed at connecting with non-returners to assist with their transition and/or encourage their eventual return. •

#### Mentoring and Student Success Courses

- Student feedback throughout SSI consistently elevated the importance of mentoring opportunities in supporting student success.
- A number of non-FYE success courses are offered at Illinois (i.e. ENG 199 and 298, GS 102, AHS 199 MLJ) but these are limited to the very specific populations they serve, there is no sharing of best practices, and, in fact, very little cross-campus knowledge of the courses being offered.
- Many research articles support the effectiveness of student success offerings. See [Appendix B](#).
- **Withdrawal Coordination**
  - Research by the Education Advisory Board suggests that “Institutions should redesign withdrawal processes to emphasize exit counseling and use simplified forms to increase the likelihood of re-enrollment.” In addition, that “...students are more willing to reenroll when they leave campus with a positive perspective.”  
<https://www.csueastbay.edu/oaa/files/docs/acinfo/prevstudwithdrwl.pdf>
  - The Student Success Office at the University of Maryland serves as one good example of a unit that coordinates reenrollment and exit processes and leads retention initiatives: <https://studentsuccess.umd.edu/>.

#### □ **Enhance advising.**

Also folded into the work of the new success center would be goals to **10**) create and implement a campus-level web-based advisor training and onboarding and **11**) ensure that advising caseloads are consistent with the time required for the effective performance of the activity (which would likely require a comprehensive review as well as support and funding for subsequent hiring).

**Why?** Increasing availability and accessibility to advising appointments and providing more centralized interdisciplinary training and professional development opportunities for advisors will increase student satisfaction with the advising experience.

- In SSI feedback, students specifically recommended increasing the number of qualified academic advisors on campus, requiring advising for students, and increasing the quality of the experience by personalizing academic advising to connect and meet the needs of each student and ensuring accuracy of information conveyed.
- In a recent survey given to UIUC academic advisors at various meetings (IlliaAC, A&A Deans, advising webinar), feedback indicated that some units are unable to conduct mandatory advising because caseloads are too high (i.e. greater than 375). According to the NACADA 2011 Survey, the median number of advises per advisor for a full-time advisor was 296 students. For public doctorate institutions, the median number of advisees per advisor for a full-time advisor was 285 students.
- In the same survey of academic advisors, feedback also suggested that training and onboarding varies widely from unit to unit and advisors lack consistent training on resources such as the Undergraduate Records or Graduate Records applications, other portal system applications, existing university technology used by some units (which other units may not even know about), or standard university or college/unit forms.
- Bearing in mind limitations on advisor time, unit budgets, and available facilities (especially

during the COVID pandemic), asynchronous training is preferred as it allows timely sharing of best practices while maintaining flexibility for hiring units and their newly hired advisors.

- The Division of General Studies has successfully designed a web-based advisor training that is now shared and utilized by many other units on campus. Examples of other campuses that utilize online training or offer a centralized resource relevant to advisor training include: •
  - Purdue: <https://www.purdue.edu/registrar/faculty/advisors/AdvisorTraining.html>
  - UIC: <https://advising.uic.edu/professional-development/training-and-workshops/>
  - EIU: <https://www.eiu.edu/caneiu/resources.php>

### 3

#### **Streamline use of Learning Management Systems (LMS).**

Whether the campus adopts one LMS or designs one entry point for a limited number of approved systems, the new success center would tackle the project and **12)** provide one online location for students to access their grade information. If a decision is made to continue to allow more than one LMS, faculty should be required to register use of any particular LMS (from a list of those that are sanctioned) and this information should be made available to students prior to the first day of classes (for example, in the Course Explorer and in Enhanced Registration screens).

**Why?** The number of LMS used on campus makes it difficult for students to track their assignments or communications from instructors and can negatively impact assignment completion and grade outcomes.

- Some of our peer institutions have successfully adopted this practice:
  - Purdue <https://www.purdue.edu/lms-review/>
  - Wisconsin <https://it.wisc.edu/news/uw-madison-transitioning-canvas-learning-management-system/>

#### **Explore ways to better identify vulnerable students.**

Do midterm grades make a difference in student outcomes? If so, should instructors report midterm grades even after a student's first year? Further investigation into these matters is warranted and should result in appropriate **13)** changes to our current midterm grade reporting policy. Midterm grades, however, are just one way to identify students facing challenges. To increase information sharing and minimize duplication of efforts, the campus should **14)** implement a comprehensive early alert system and **15)** ensure that LMS data feeds into the selected early alert system and/or that there is a process in place that allows observer access to grade entries in the LMS.

**Why?** Despite the policies set forth in the Student Code, faculty reporting of freshmen midterm grades is inconsistent and that challenges the institution's ability to adequately research and understand if and how midterm grades make a difference. In addition, the expectation of freshmen-only midterm grade reporting narrowly focuses on first-year retention while institutional data illustrates retention concerns in subsequent years and achievement gaps between majority students and other categories of students (i.e. low-income, first generation, transfer students, underrepresented minorities and student athletes, etc.).

- Some of our peer institutions and others have successfully adopted similar practices:
  - The University of Wisconsin System recently committed \$4 million to implement the EAB Navigate early alert system: <https://fox11online.com/news/local/uw-system-to-launch>

### [new-online-program-to-help-improve-student-success](#)

- Several schools allow observer access in their LMS so that academic support staff and athletic counselors can monitor performance:
  - Northern Illinois University  
<https://www.niu.edu/blackboard/faq/qa/usersobservers.shtml#:~:text=The%20Observer%20role%20in%20Blackboard%20allows%20academic%20counselors%20and%20student,student%20is%20struggling%20or%20disengaging.>
  - University of Kansas <https://blackboard.ku.edu/blackboard-observer-role>

## **Review and revise policy.**

Though the Student Code is reviewed on some level every year, there are many policies that are inaccurate, not feasible or not followed. Specific revisions to policy and practice are detailed in the recommendations below but, in general, **16)** a thorough and comprehensive review of all academic policies in the Student Code should be conducted. Furthermore, **17)** as policies and procedures are modified, eliminated or created, there should be a well-developed and consistently-implemented training/communication plan that ensures that appropriate personnel are informed about and educated on the changes. Lastly, as language and policy becomes more uniform across all of the colleges, so can the corresponding campus forms (see **3a)**.

**Why?** A comprehensive and thorough review of all academic policies is needed to ensure that the policies enshrined in the Student Code are indeed accurate and being followed and that they reflect the full range of students we serve. In addition, policies and procedures are only helpful insofar as people know about and understand them. Advisors, college staff, and student support units will all be better prepared to support and assist students if they are well-informed of the policies that undergird the students' academic experience.

- One of the most repeated refrains from the SSI staff sessions was "consistency." This was echoed in the feedback from students who attended the Provost's Undergraduate Student Advisory Board session as well.
- The University of Michigan's *Standard Practice Guide*, though designed for administrative policies, could serve as a template for organizing student policies, highlighting recent policy changes, and offering a list serve for individuals interested in receiving quarterly policy updates:  
<https://spg.umich.edu/about/about-this-website>.

## **Drop Status**

To avoid confusion and maintain supportive posture even when students fail to meet minimum requirements, we should **18)** implement standard practice across colleges with regard to drop notification and **19)** create an additional drop status category for provisional drops.

**Why?** Allowing every college to develop and implement such varied processes leads to confusion for students and other student-facing campus units. For example, not only are students from each of the colleges receiving drop communications at different times but the inconsistent use of drop categories (provisional drop 17, final appealable drop 17, and not-appealable drop 18) creates confusion and even visa difficulties for international students. Creating a drop 16 category, meant to signal that a student's standing is under review, would help to clarify processes for administrators, resolve visa disruptions, and minimize anxiety and stress for students.

- Survey responses provided by Illinois academic units at Illinois clearly illustrate the diversity of approach to drop policy. See [Appendix C](#).
- During Spring 2020, in response to COVID, the university successfully introduced an "under review" message in the students' view of academic standing which could easily be paired with a

change in back-end coding and utilized again in future terms.

#### **Incompletes**

Again, with consistency as the aim, measures should be taken to **20)** ensure that each college facilitates their “incomplete” process in such a way that does not place undue burden on the student.

**Why?** In the current system, two students taking the same course may need to follow two widely different paths toward receiving an incomplete in the course. One unit might issue the incomplete automatically while another might require the student to contact each professor to argue the case. The simple fact that the student needs to seek an incomplete means that the student is in need of assistance and warrants the removal of unnecessary hurdles.

5

- Survey responses provided by Illinois academic units at Illinois clearly illustrate the diversity of approach to incomplete policy. See [Appendix D](#).

#### **Fall break**

Whether a mid-October break is added to the current academic calendar or Thanksgiving Break is shortened to accommodate the mid-October break, a **21)** fall break opportunity should be introduced.

**Why?** A break at mid-semester would allow many students a chance to return home, which would address homesickness for those having difficulty with the transition to university life. A few days off at the midpoint would also allow students to take some time to get caught up or to re-evaluate their academic plan while there is still time to make decisions about dropping classes or making other schedule adjustments.

- Counseling Center data shows that the demand for individual counseling appointments in the fall semester is highest in the month of October. In fact, the number keeps growing. The Counseling Center itself put forth the suggestion that the university initiate a true mid-semester “fall break.”
- Many other institutions offer a fall break. Among our Big Ten and aspirational peers, the following have an October break in addition to their Thanksgiving Break:
  - Big Ten: University of Michigan, Purdue, The Ohio State University, Indiana University, University of Nebraska
  - Others: Duke University, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, University of Virginia

#### **Immediate Action Items**

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, we have witnessed the need for swift changes. We have demonstrated what is possible on this campus when students' needs are a truly primary focal point. If we can take the momentum that has been created by this situation and institute lasting change, we will not only resolve the challenges our students are currently facing, but also improve the student experience for future terms.

The shift to a virtual campus has affirmed the necessity of going paperless and has created a demand for many colleges to process all forms online. This would be an opportune time to develop **online common forms** that can be utilized by every college and a central online landing point where students can easily access and utilize those forms. Additionally, this should necessitate a review of procedures, like the incomplete policy

which could be re-envisioned in a more student-centered way.

With much of our Fall 2020 learning taking place online, the number of LMS that students are required to navigate will continue to create additional challenges as well. We must put in place a tool to allow students to **easily identify the LMS being used** for each course and instructions on how manage each LMS. In addition, the sooner we can begin to decrease the number of LMS that are in use, the better.

Since the transition to remote learning in March, we have witnessed varied approaches to identifying and reaching out to students at-risk, determining who is or is not engaging, and connecting with students who are not yet enrolled for the fall. Moreover, in the midst of the pandemic, we know that students and families are re-thinking their enrollment options and it's possible that a number of students may be choosing to take time away from the university, transfer to other institutions, or discontinue their college education entirely. This elevates the need for **streamlined and enhanced retention efforts**. Whether through the establishment of a new position and/or a new case management process, significant time should be devoted to tracking students, identifying the real reasons for departure, and organizing outreach to support their return. Adopting and implementing a campus-wide early alert system would be a sure way to support the attainment of this goal.

## 6

Finally, we believe that many of the **policy adaptations** that were instituted in the Spring 2020 should be considered for the longer term as well. For example, the addition of the "under review" academic standing category used in Spring 2020 seems to be a more student-friendly way of communicating about the end of term review process and something that could easily continue moving forward. In addition, greater flexibility around the timeline for drop and credit/no credit decisions, whether we are in the thick of a pandemic or not, seems to benefit students who are navigating increasingly complicated grading and grade reporting systems.

### **Summary of Report/Conclusion**

Overall, each recommendation put forth will have a great impact on the student experience at Illinois by providing every student a better chance to meet their goals. The decentralized nature of our campus may have benefits at times, but continues to create a very different academic experience for our Illinois students. As we seek to establish more equitable approach that will help eliminate the graduation gaps and improve the chances for success for all students across campus, we have to be willing to make significant changes to our current practices. The "one-stop-shop" success center would serve as a monumental investment from the university to centralize their academic and student support efforts. This success center would comprise of a dedicated professional staff that has the sole purpose of ensuring that the academic experience in areas of policies, advising, and support resources are consistent for all students. This success center would complement the services that are currently provided across campus, with the primary mission of ensuring the "consistency" of our practices and providing information that is easily accessible by all. In the last few years, the University has taken great strides to centralize and advance our efforts around undergraduate research, marketing and branding, and diversity. We believe the same approach should be taken in the area of academic support. We view this set of recommendations as necessary steps to ensure that we provide the high-caliber support services that could and should be part of every student's Illinois experience.

