

Student Success @ Illinois

Annual Report 2023-2024

Overview and Purpose of Student Success @ Illinois

In Fall 2019, the Student Success Initiative kicked off to launch efforts to increase access, eliminate equity gaps, and enhance the student experience. In the time since, several task groups, implementation teams, committees, and focus groups have met to discuss and recommend approaches to improve various elements of student success on campus. In Fall 2023, the Student Success Initiative was changed to Student Success @ Illinois to best articulate the continued student success efforts across campus.

In the 2023-2024 academic year, Student Success @ Illinois has continued to further progress in several areas and facilitated multiple groups and activities. These include the Policy and Issues Groups, faculty/course programs, advisory groups, task groups/committees, and the Student Success Undergraduate Advisory Board. Student Success @ Illinois also coordinated the 3rd Annual Student Success Symposium. Overviews of each of these areas are included in this report.

Student Success Steering Team

The Steering Team provides oversight and coordination of operations. Members represent the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs & Provost, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Technology Services, and Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

Members of this team meet regularly to address progress of Student Success @ Illinois activities, discuss future goals, and identify areas of improvement. New members from Student Affairs and Technology Services were added in Fall 2023 and a faculty member was added at the end of Spring 2024.

Current Steering Team members:

Gioconda Guerra Perez, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Jim Hintz, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Beth Hoag, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Melissa Kisubika, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Kathy Martensen, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Nidia Ruedas-Gracia, Assistant Professor, College of Education

Nick Vance, Technology Services

In the 2024-2025 academic year, the Steering Team identified improving international student orientation programming and better understanding students' sense of belonging as key focus areas.

International Student Pre-Arrival Orientation

International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) collaborates with several campus offices and academic units to provide orientation programming to international students and their families in their home country. These sessions have been well attended in past years, however interrupted by COVID 19. During Summer 2023, many students and families had specific questions about their program of study, housing, health and wellness, or campus safety that were not fully answered due to lack of representation from

university units. To improve the situation, we worked closely with ISSS and Student Affairs to ensure the participation of University Housing, Public Safety, and additional academic unit representatives. In June, 2024, this expanded contingent of Illinois representatives traveled to China, India, and Turkey. Survey data from participants has yet to be analyzed at the time of writing of this report; anecdotally, it was observed that participants seemed to be able to obtain answers to their most pressing questions, obtained content that was relevant to their interests, and overall were more satisfied with the pre-arrival orientation than in past years.

Student Belonging Module

Student Affairs conducted a qualitative study in AY2023 regarding students' feelings of belonging on campus. The Steering Committee reviewed the results of this study and decided to add a belonging module to the Chancellor's Senior Survey to collect more information about students' feelings of belonging.

The module included a Sense of Belonging Scale and a Health and Wellbeing Climate Scale, both of which had three questions and students responded using a five-point Likert scale. There were also two open-ended questions:

- At which physical location(s) on campus (e.g., Main Quad, the Union, Residence Hall, etc.), do you feel like you **most** belong?
- At which physical location(s) on campus (e.g., Main Quad, the Union, Residence Hall, etc.), do you feel like you **least** belong?

Over 1,300 student responses were submitted, and data analysis is taking place in Summer 2024.

Happenings for Student Success @ Illinois

In the past year, Student Success @ Illinois has made significant strides to enhance the visibility of student success on campus. Updating from the "Student Success Initiative" to "Student Success @ Illinois" as a name better articulates the continuous process of expanding and addressing student success on campus.

This name change also came with overall reorganization of the Student Success @ Illinois website. The website represents a central location for information about all Student Success @ Illinois activities. It also will now be the space for many student, advising, and staff resources that were previously situated on the Office of the Provost page. This allows these items to be more accessible to students and to supporters of student success efforts on campus.

In addition to the updated website, a new email address was launched to best identify Student Success @ Illinois. Communication can now be sent to success4all@Illinois.edu.

Student Success Symposium

The 3rd annual Symposium was held on February 8, 2024, at the Illini Union. The 2024 planning committee included: Melissa Kisubika, Teresa Spence, Linell Edwards, Gennifer Gilbert, Staci Ryan, José Canas, Elizabeth Mason, Mary Maurer, David Schug, Julio Velasco, and Alyssa Aiello. Total costs for the

2024 symposium were \$33,276.00. The majority of the costs were covered by the Provost's office, with the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Technology Services sharing some of the costs. Three hundred seventy-five people registered for the Symposium and approximately 250 attended. The event was open to all University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign faculty, staff, and students. Breakfast and lunch were provided for all attendees. Our keynote speaker was Melinda Mechur Karp, and her topic was "*Building Systems of Holistic Support.*" She also presented one breakout session. New additions for the 2024 Symposium:

- Three hybrid breakout sessions were added.
- The keynote spoke during lunch instead of the beginning of the day.
- Presenters Corner, Student Corner and Community Corner were added instead of the reflection activity used in prior years.
- Formal process initiated for the Student Success Champion awards, given to an individual and team.
- Technology Services sponsored a cocktail hour during the end of the day activities.

The 2025 Student Success Symposium will be held on February 6, 2025. Planning is underway and the 2025 planning committee includes: Melissa Kisubika, Teresa Spence, Linell Edwards, Gennifer Gilbert, Staci Ryan, Jose Canas, Elizabeth Mason, David Schug, Chadly Stern, Carol Wilson Smith, Christina Huppert, Andrea Bridges, Charlotte Peloquin, Abrielle Bujack and Alyssa Aiello. Though early in the planning stages at the time of this report, the committee has identified the keynote speaker, Lindsay Romasanta. A Graduate College representative was added to this year's planning committee.

As the flagship university for the state of Illinois, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign wants to be a leader around Student Success. Accordingly, the hope is to expand the Student Success Symposium more broadly. As the Symposium grows, funding support from campus partners will be increasingly important.

Policy and Issues Groups

The Policy and Issues Groups (PIG) tackle specific topics each semester to address issues of equity and accessibility of the Illinois academic experience. Members of each policy and issues group are varied dependent on topic and have representation from across campus.

Dual Degree – Fall 2023

In Fall 2023, a group of staff who work directly with students pursuing dual degrees was convened to discuss current policy, processes, and communication related to dual degrees. This group met multiple times throughout the fall semester. Each college/unit is utilizing a paper form to complete Dual Degree applications that is modeled after the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' form. While the requirements for dual degree declaration may slightly differ, the Dual Degree PIG participants agree that the current process is working well. Based on discussion, there is continued need for communication across academic units to ensure that dual degrees are processed accurately and the correct degree is prioritized in the Banner student information system.

To enhance visibility and transparency, there will be a dual degree page on the Student Success @ Illinois website to list college contact information and any special unit requirements. It will mirror the

inter/intra-collegiate transfer page currently located on the Provost website. Targeted completion is mid-Fall 2024.

Centralized Forms and Minor Hours – Fall 2023

The Policy and Issues Group on Centralized Forms and Minor Hours met throughout the fall semester. The group consisted of academic advisors and administrators from various colleges and units. There were two focus areas discussed by this PIG: revisiting the minor hours requirements and centralization of student forms.

The current undergraduate minors policy requires students to complete six distinct advanced hours in the minor field. Members also reviewed the data on the top minors among the Spring 2023 graduates and the feedback from the CoUD on the policy options. The group voted on whether to keep the current policy or to change it to require nine advanced hours in the minor. The result was a 50/50 split, and the group decided to present two options with pros and cons to the Council of Undergraduate Deans (CoUD) for further discussion. Ultimately, CoUD's representatives were also equally split, so no further action to revise this requirement was undertaken.

The Centralized Forms and Minor Hours group also received an update on the withdrawal/cancellation form, a form centrally managed by the Office of the Registrar that allows students or colleges to initiate the process of withdrawing or canceling enrollment from the university. The form was not ready for the Fall semester due to issues with student insurance, but it was expected to be available for the Spring semester. There is no new update on the progress of this form at the end of Spring 2024.

Another topic that the group addressed was the possibility of establishing a central website for student forms, such as proficiency exam reports, petitions, and other forms that are not universally used. The group agreed that while creation of common versions of these forms would not be feasible, a central website could link to the academic units' forms pages or provide instructions on how to access them would be a viable option. Such a site could be part of the Student Success @ Illinois page along with other student resources. The group concluded by planning to continue working on the centralized forms project and to share best practices with each other.

General Education – Spring 2024

The Office of the Provost hired the inaugural Director for General Education in September 2023. The Director will work on defining general education at the university as a program. This work includes as an area of focus equitable access and outcomes for historically marginalized students in general education. For example, the Director and a current Provost's Fellow are analyzing data on which populations of students bring in credit from high school for certain general education categories; which populations of students have access to smaller, more high-touch gen ed courses such as those available through our Campus Honors Program; and student outcomes by race/ethnicity by gen ed category (final grade averages by race/ethnicity, time-to-degree by race/ethnicity and when students who take longer than average are completing certain gen ed categories).

Informed by the aforementioned data analysis, the Director for General Education will make recommendations to the campus General Education Board and, where appropriate, to the Academic Senate to revise policies and practices in general education to facilitate a more equitable general education program. For example, if underrepresented minority (URM) students are found to have

significantly lower final grades than their non-URM peers in gen ed courses in a specific discipline, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will engage with those offering departments to discuss the findings and opportunities for support with equity-based pedagogical strategies. If time-to-degree analysis reveals URM students are being held up in degree completion by a specific gen ed category, Student Success @ Illinois' Policy and Issues Groups will examine factors that might be contributing and make recommendations for campus policy changes as appropriate.

Probation Language and Communication – Spring 2024

Cognizant of research showing student's experiences and perceptions of being on academic probation are influenced by language used, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education held meetings with stakeholder groups including the Council of Undergraduate Deans, the Office of the Registrar, and the Graduate College to discuss alternative language. A proposal to the Senate was authored and approved in early spring, 2024. Effective starting in the Fall, 2024 semester, all academic standing codes at the university that used the word "probation" will be replaced to either "low GPA warning" or "college academic warning" depending on the code.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2024, a Student Success @ Illinois Policy and Issues Group has focused on probation language and communication. The group examined college, departmental, and program websites to ensure language used there is consistent with the revision to the university's language associated with academic codes. Additionally, academic unit representatives were asked to evaluate practices in determining students' academic status, messaging to these students, and programs available to support them to ensure these practices are equitable, supportive, and inclusive.

Advisory Groups

Early Alert/Outreach Advisory Group

The Early Alert/Outreach Advisory Group has been meeting since 2022 to research and recommend appropriate early alert markers to connect students with relevant resources early in the semester.

Members of the Early Alert/Outreach Advisory Group:

Hannah Christensen, Technology Services

Stephon Fuqua, Division of Intercollegiate Athletics

Norma Garcia Tellez, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Zelda Gardner, College of Fine and Applied Arts

Rod Hoewing, Office of the Registrar

Logan Honegger, College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

Melissa Kisubika, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Provost

Leslie Lewis, Gies College of Business

Jeffery Lindsey, Office of the Dean of Students

Kathy Martensen, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Provost

Jennifer Mendez, Office of Minority Student Affairs

Kristy Valentin, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Nick Vance, Technology Services

Courtney Wright, Grainger College of Engineering

The group has been looking into a variety of systems, both vended outside products and internally designed, to provide notice to students and advisors of triggering of risk indicators for interventions to avoid dropout or poor outcomes. In Spring 2023, the group gathered other Big 10 and in-state institutions for a discussion around Early Alert systems. Based on this discussion and the needs of this campus, the Advisory Group has recommended the creation of an internal system compatible with Undergraduate Records, the system most widely used by advisors across campus. In the Spring 2024 semester, the group piloted with a selected group of instructors use of Canvas Learning Management System data to detect early warning signs academic issues. The pilot effort is looking at grade progress and engagement with course materials. Information from the pilot will be used to help build an equitable, sustainable early alert system.

Related to early alert and outreach, the university is in process of procurement of Unizin. The Unizin Data Platform is a data infrastructure element which can be leveraged for use cases such as providing students with information about their progress within courses, how they are doing relative to others in these courses and within their program. Students can use this information to reveal behavior patterns associated with good learning skills, guide decisions about actions they can take to improve academic outcomes and provide transparency in their course standing. It can also be leveraged to develop an advisor-facing data solution that provides real-time analysis of student academic performance in the current semester to empower advisors to identify in a timely fashion when a student may benefit from an intervention.

Also in Spring 2024, the Early Alert/Outreach Advisory Group also worked to create an academic wellness campaign to support the state's Mental Health Early Action on Campus (MHEAC) legislation. Funded by the MHAC grant, this campaign will feature sticker pages for students and notepads for academic advisors. Both items highlight the Academic Wellness webpages as part of the Student Success @ Illinois website. The sticker page will be available to students in Fall 2024 through academic departments and offices. The notepads for advisors will be available at the Advisor Series and can be used when meeting with students as they include tips and tricks for student success specific to academic wellness.

This advisory group will continue to meet and focus on advancing the Early Alert progress through the summer and into next academic year.

Advising Advisory Group

In Spring 2023, the Advisor Series was launched as an opportunity to bring together the advising community at Illinois. This community had specifically noted they were feeling undervalued and overworked, especially considering the pandemic and pressures to be ever present for students. The series was the first step in creating a space to learn, dialogue, and build community. Following that first semester of the Advisor Series, a small team was assembled to participate in the 2023 Equity Institute hosted by the American Talent Initiative. It was during this institute that the concept of an Advising Advisory Group was developed to further the efforts of this small team and to expand the planning efforts for the Advisor Series. Based on the success of the Advisor Series and the Advising Initiative efforts out of the Equity Institute, the Advising Advisory Group was brought together in Fall 2023 with various representatives from across campus. There are two subgroups for this Advisory Group: the Advisor Series and the Advising Initiative.

- **Advisor Series Subgroup**

The Advisor Series provides a forum to build community among advisors, learn new information, share best practices, and overall provide a space for support to this community. The Advisor Series meets monthly during the academic year. All advisors and those adjacent to advising are welcome to attend. The Advisor Series subgroup helps to plan, coordinate, and execute the Advisor Series.

Members of the Advisor Series Subgroup:

Reba Daniels, College of Fine & Applied Arts

Calen Gutwein, Division of General Studies

Susan Helmink, College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

Melissa Kisubika, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Chaya Sandler, College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

The AY 23-24 Advisor Series included:

- **Advising @ Illinois guided discussion** – A guided table discussion around Advising @ Illinois and issues that affect the advising community provided an opportunity for feedback, brainstorming, and sharing for attendees from across campus.
- **What Does It Mean to Be Exploring?** - The Division of General Studies (DGS) shared their approach to working with exploring students along with tips and tricks for working with students who are navigating their college career and beyond.
- **Self-Care with a Slice of P.I.E.S.S.** - Self-care is often associated with physical needs or time away from work, but in this presentation, attendees looked at self-care through different lenses of personal need - those often forgotten-about categories that can help just as much as the physical needs. This meeting was a conversation with Josh Hagerstrom from Faculty/Staff Assistance & Well-Being Service.
- **Library Resources and Tour** - Attendees toured and learned about resources in The Orange Room, Media Commons, and other Main Library spaces.
- **Pushing Your Own Professional Development** - Participants learned about on-campus and off-campus professional development experiences from six campus panelists including NASPA/American College Personnel Association (ACPA), National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), Illinois Academic Advising Association (ILACADA), Council of Academic Professionals, Academic Senate of the Urbana-Champaign Campus, and the Department of Education Policy Organization & Leadership.
- **Incorporating Academic Coaching into Student Services Throughout Campus** - This presentation showcased how Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) provides one-on-one coaching services, and DRES staff discussed ways to implement this model in other departments on campus.
- **Supports for Neurodivergent UIUC Students and Colleagues** - Dr. Jeanne Kramer and Dr. Kim Patton highlighted specific strategies for success at the university and in the workplace as well as introduced the Illinois Neurodiversity Initiative (INI), a program of supports for neurodivergent students supporting mental health, social confidence, future employment, and academic strategies.
- **Utilizing Career Services for Collaborative Practices** - Nikki Mercer (The Career Center) and Emma Andruczyk (Engineering Career Services) highlighted strategies for collaborative relationships between advisors and career services to best serve students. This discussion provided an overview of the career services available to all students on campus and focused

on the many ways advisors can be further involved in their students' career development journey.

- ***Celebrate and Dialogue about Advising @ Illinois*** - Participants spent time in community with each other to celebrate the year and discussed a few topics of interest including Teams for Advising @ Illinois, communication tools, and engaging with faculty/supervisors about advising.

Overall Participation:

	In Person Count	Virtual Count	TOTAL by Date
08.25.23	37	N/A	37
09.29.23	37	38	75
10.27.23	30	43	73
11.17.23	20	9	29
01.26.24	37	64	101
02.23.24	33	65	98
03.29.24	36	50	86
04.26.24	42	37	79
05.23.24	38	N/A	38
Total Attended	310	306	616

Participation by Colleges/Units:

A total of 226 individuals attended; below are the breakdowns of attendance by academic college/unit or other department unit based on self-disclosed unit/department.

Academic Colleges/Units	Total Individuals	Other Department/Unit	Total Individuals
ACES	13	OVCSA	15
AHS	9	DIA	12
DGS	13	VCAA	6
EDU	1	Illinois Abroad	5
Grainger	37	ISSS	3
FAA	13	CCAAS	2
GIES	14	VetMed	2
iSchool	6	Admissions	1
LAS	66	Campus Honors	1
LAW	1	Carle Med	1
LER	1	NCSA	1
MEDIA	1	OSFA	1
		OVCDEI	1

Topics/Presenters under discussion for the AY24-25 Advisor Series include:

- International Student and Scholar Services
 - Division of Intercollegiate Athletics
 - General Education Program with Melissa Newell, Director for General Education
 - Leadership Center
 - Study Abroad
 - Virtual visit to advising spaces in different academic units
 - Wellness
- **Advising Initiative Subgroup**

The Advising Initiative subgroup continued the work from the Equity Institute in advancing efforts to create a sustainable and equitable advising experience for students and a professional advising community for academic advisors and those in advising adjacent roles.

Members of the Advising Initiative Subgroup

Teri Farr, Division of General Studies

Melissa Kisubika, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Elizabeth Mason, College of Applied Health Sciences

Melissa Newell, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Adam Reedy, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Christina Swanson, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Ross Wantland, Office of the Vice Chancellor of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Heather Zike, Grainger College of Engineering

In Fall 2023, the Advising Initiative subgroup developed and collected feedback from a short survey that was given to the advising community to serve as a landscape analysis and help shape the focus and understanding of advising at Illinois. The survey was sent out to the advis-I listserv and shared amongst Council of Undergraduate Deans and across college advisors. During the time the survey was open, emails were sent to departments or individuals to ensure that feedback represented as many areas of advising on campus as possible.

Participants

Unit	Individuals
ACES COLLEGE	3
ACES DEPT	9
AHS	4
BUS	11
CAMPUS PROGRAM/OFFICE	8
DGS	12
DIA	2
EDU	2
ENG COLLEGE	7
ENG DEPT	10
FAA COLLEGE	2

FAA DEPT	6
GRAD COLLEGE	1
ILLINOIS INTERNATIONAL	4
LAS COLLEGE	11
LAS DEPT	31
LER	1
MDIA	4
OMSA	3
SIS	5
VETM	2
Total Participants	138

Group	Individuals
Senior Level Academic Advisor (7+ years)	33
New Academic Advisor (0-3 years)	28
Advising Adjacent	23
Assistant/Associate Dean/Director (oversee Academic Advising)	20
Mid-Level Academic Advisor (4-6 years)	17
Academic Advising Administrator/Coordinator	16
Faculty with Advising	1
Total Participants	138

Survey Response Themes

Challenges and Opportunities in Decentralized Advising Models:

1. Variability in advising quality and processes due to differences in resources and communication among advisors and departments.
2. Difficulties in accessing up-to-date information and navigating inconsistent policies and procedures.
3. High advisor caseloads and diverse responsibilities impacting personalized student support.
4. Lack of centralized resources and communication channels hindering coordination and consistency.
5. Need for improved onboarding, training, and advocacy to address resource inequities and staff retention concerns.

Desire for Centralization and Standardization:

1. Many respondents express a need for centralized resources, systems, and training opportunities to streamline advising processes, improve efficiency, and ensure consistency across departments and colleges.
2. There was advocacy for centralized advising newsletters, learning centers, career ladders, and training programs to enhance communication, collaboration, and support for both advisors and students.

3. While acknowledging the benefits of centralization, there are concerns about a one-size-fits-all approach, especially for specialized fields like STEM.
4. Respondents emphasize the importance of maintaining specialization and personalized support within departments to address the unique needs of students in different academic programs.
5. There is a strong emphasis on the need for improved communication and collaboration among advisors, departments, and colleges to better serve students.

Based on the findings from the Fall survey, in Spring 2024, the Advising Initiative subgroup held two advising feedback sessions with small groups of invited advisors. These sessions included guided questions to help further establish priorities and to ensure that voices from the advising community were represented. A total of 27 individuals participated across the two sessions.

Highlighted findings:

The findings below reflect the importance of effective communication, collaboration, and ongoing training to enhance the quality of advising and support services for students.

1. **Proud Achievements in Advising:** Advisors take pride in their ability to connect with students and provide holistic support beyond academic advising. They celebrate student successes and help them achieve their goals.
2. **Barriers and Challenges:** Advisors face barriers such as the need for centralized resources, better communication from campus offices, disparities between colleges, and difficulties in accessing information and support services.
3. **Centralized Onboarding and Training:** There is a consensus on the need for centralized onboarding and training for advisors, including online modules, a cohort model, and mentorship programs.
4. **Improving Communication:** Improving communication channels between advisors, faculty, and campus offices is emphasized, with suggestions for utilizing email, team communication platforms, and centralized websites.
5. **Priorities for Solutions:** Training for supervisors, ongoing training for advisors, updating centralized resources, and ensuring effective communication channels are identified as priority solutions.
6. **Advisor Training and Support:** A structured training system for advisors is highlighted, including shadowing, mentorship opportunities, and community-building events.
7. **Campus-wide Communication and Resource Accessibility:** The need to improve communication channels and create centralized resources for transferring majors, accessing financial aid information, and updating course offerings is addressed.
8. **Collaboration and Training Assessment:** Efforts to improve collaboration between departments and assess advising experiences on campus are highlighted.
9. **Involvement in Decision-Making Processes:** Advisors express a desire to be more involved in decision-making processes that impact advising and student experiences.

10. Faculty-Advisor Collaboration: Improving faculty understanding of the importance of advising and integrating advisors into leadership roles within departments is emphasized.

Ask Alma Advisory Group

The Ask Alma Advisory Group began meeting in Fall 2022 following the recommendations outlined in a report by an early group, the Ask Alma Implementation Team.

Members of the Ask Alama Advisory Group:

Charlotte Bauer, Graduate College

Doug Burgett, Office of Admissions

Nick Chancellor, McKinley Health Center

Linell Edwards, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Gretchen Forman, Office of New Student and Family Experiences

Arianna Holterman, The Career Center

Melissa Kisubika, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Kathy Martensen, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

Joy Phaphouvaninh, Illinois Abroad and Global Exchange

Joe Shroyer, University Bursar

Julia Smith, Office of Undergraduate Admissions

Val Smith, Office of Student Financial Aid

Jennfier Sturner, Technology Services

Elizabeth Tsukahara, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Nick Vance, Technology Services

Charged by the Office of the Provost and Student Affairs in 2021, the Ask Alma Implementation Team explored the idea of utilizing a chatbot to provide students, in particular, an easier way of navigating information that is spread across many different campus units and websites. The idea at that time was to utilize a campuswide chatbot that could answer general questions and refer more complex questions to appropriate campus units, acting as a concierge of sorts. Based on initial research and focus groups with students, the team authored a report in favor of adopting the technology. The report also outlined several principles to guide adoption of a bot and articulated the need for ongoing leadership, oversight, and campus collaboration to ensure that a bot provided accurate information.

When the Ask Alma Advisory Group was formed in 2022, we immediately began exploring vendors, talking with peer institutions already using bots, and put together a list of criteria and requirements to move with the vendor selection process. Simultaneously, we learned of a project already underway with Undergraduate Admissions and a third-party vendor to pilot a chatbot. In collaboration, we decided to move forward with that pilot but to include two other units, Financial Aid and then the Graduate College. However, as the pilot moved along, it was clear that a single bot was not suitable for use across different units and different student audiences. This is important because information may change significantly depending on whether a student is an undergraduate, graduate, international student, etc.... The pilot bot could not accurately distinguish certain key works and their implications (i.e., graduate students vs graduates of the institution) even within its own knowledge base of FAQ responses and for this reason the vendor recommended that separate bots were a better solution for our campus.

Concurrent with these efforts, the Illinois App team has been working on an AI-based solution (now in beta testing) that searches for content on the Illinois webpage to provide responses to questions. We are eager to see the results but are appropriately cautious because answers to even basic questions like “when is the deadline to drop a class” have different responses depending on various factors, yet they also have real consequences if not answered accurately. Nevertheless, we believe this is an important next step in determining how to proceed.

In the time since the Ask Alma Advisory Group (and the group before it) started meeting there has been a rapid emergence of AI technologies which also led us to rethink the initial approach outlined in the report. Students now use these AI-based technologies with the expectation of receiving formulated answers, rather than referrals to web content.

Going forward, we anticipate that it might be best for bots to be managed more locally by individual units so that units can decide how best to manage their content. Indeed, some units have already started using them (McKinley and College of Education, for example). This approach, however, would also benefit from some campus-level direction to ensure the bots meet all accessibility and security requirements and have appropriate campus branding.

Some next steps:

Organize a community of practice (perhaps via Teams) for front line staff who answer the bulk of general questions and technology experts who oversee products such as bots that support this work. We recognized that there is no campus wide network for staff who serve as in these customer service roles, and that providing a space for them connect would be beneficial.

Look into chatbot options we, as an institution, already have access to through existing contracts. Explore these options and perhaps create options that units could adopt that would have security, accessibility, and branding already covered.

Coordinate closely with the Illinois App effort by continuing to have overlap in membership of these groups, particularly among technology experts.

Task Group

- **Transfer Student Experience Task Group**

The Transfer Student Experience Task Force was charged on June 16, 2022, by then-provost Andreas Cangellaris. The transfer student experience in general was defined broadly as a sense of belonging and availability of programming and academic resources. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the task force had two subcommittees, one focused on academic policy and the other concentrated on the student experience. The original charge letter specifically identified policies such as the Residency Requirement and Language Other than English requirement that needed further exploration; the academic policy group investigated the impact of those policies on transfer students. The student experience group examined broader student life experience data that was already being collected, identified gaps where more information is needed, and worked closely with key stakeholders to identify ways to improve the transfer student experience.

The official charge letter including those individuals who were invited to participate is available on the Student Success @ Illinois website.

Full task force meetings were typically held every other month, with the subcommittee meetings occurring in between these full group meetings. Both the full task force and the subcommittees heard from experts in the field from on campus and around the state, and gathered and synthesized a significant amount of data from many relevant groups and constituencies on campus. Data included quantitative analysis of students' academic performance and qualitative feedback from focus groups with transfer students and other key stakeholders. Based on reviews of sources of information, discussion at subcommittee and full task force meetings, and presentations to the Council of Undergraduate Deans, the task force presents the final report of outcomes and recommendations.

A key outcome of the task force was crafting a proposal to reduce the residency requirement from 60 to 45 credit hours. The rationale for the shift was to reduce time to degree completion for transfer students and bring our campus in line with requirements of peer institutions. The proposal, Residency Faculty Senate EP.24.044 "Revise the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Residency Requirement and Update the Language in the Student Code Section 3-801 a.1. to Reflect This Revision" was submitted to the Faculty Senate on Monday December 4, 2023. By i-clicker and show of hands, EP.24.044 was approved with 105 in favor, 5 opposed, and 7 abstentions. The newly approved residency requirement is effective Fall 2024 and is ready for implementation.

The task force identified the course articulation process as a primary barrier to transfer student success. Time-to-articulation, inconsistencies, and a need for clarity are significant problems that affect our current and prospective students. In collaboration with staff from the Office of Undergraduate Admissions' Coordinated Course Articulation Unit (CCA), the task force and CCA staff shared recommendations with CoUD on two occasions, most recently in early Spring, 2024. In response to feedback from CoUD, CCA is in the process of upgrading the existing course articulation system as well as enhancing training and communication materials for the course articulation system. The task force recommends continued concerted efforts to improve course articulation, noting that the Provost's office will need to pointedly bring all colleges and offices together to ensure a uniform approach for course assessment progress and identify opportunities for continued improvement.

In addition to course articulation, the task force recommended continued consideration of the campus' Language Other Than English requirement. This continued consideration was handed off to the Director for General Education and a working group convened by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education.

A third recommendation of the task group is providing academic advisors specific guidance on working with transfer students through a training module or other accessible tool to enhance advising for transfer students. It is recommended that the Advising Advisory Group include transfer student specific tools in their development of onboarding tools for new and returning advisors.

Fourth, the group recommended a formal space designated for transfer students to allow them to gather and socialize in person. The Office of New Student and Family Experiences is located at 616 E. Green, Champaign. It is an office space for the professional staff and lacks a space for student-led events or space for students to gather informally.

Finally, noting discrepancies between Fall and Spring transfer student orientation programming, the task force recommends that Spring Transfer Orientation information be added to new students' Myllini checklists as well as promoted by the primary University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign social media accounts to better disseminate Spring orientation programming information.

Faculty/Course Programs

Inclusive Course Redesign Initiative (ICRI)

The Inclusive Course Redesign Initiative (ICRI) was proposed by Kevin Jackson, the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education, in the summer of 2023. The Provost's Office developed a list of courses that display significant performance gaps between students who come from historically underrepresented populations and students who do not. Three instructors of courses identified as having a "high performance gap" were invited to participate in the ICRI pilot – PSYC 100, CHEM 102, and ACCY 201.

The instructors were offered support for redesigning their courses – in the areas of project management, instructional design, teaching strategies, media development, accessibility, quality assurance, and data analytics – provided by the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL). Additionally, the Provost's Office offered a three-thousand-dollar grant to each participating instructor, renewable for two additional semesters, and either a negotiated one-section teaching buyout or funding for a fifty-percent Graduate Assistant for the first semester of participation.

The main goal of the ICRI is for instructors to close the performance gap by redesigning their course while applying practices shown to be effective in building more inclusive classes. Teaching and learning team members from CITL identified that successful approaches begin with developing a fuller understanding of the social and cultural experiences that students bring to the learning environment, and intentionally constructing a safe space for belonging in an inclusive and caring classroom. Each participating instructor identified which practices shown to be effective in building more inclusive classes would work best for their content and course structure.

Ahead of the Fall 2023 semester, the instructors worked with CITL team members to redesign elements of their courses in alignment with these practices. Some of the significant changes included: redesigning lecture slides to highlight learning objectives and the importance of content to students future careers and lives; adding additional content to the courses around student success strategies such as study habits, learning how to learn, etc.; reformatting iClicker questions to reduce mental load; changing the format of discussion sections and assignments to encourage more collaboration; identifying and communicating with at-risk students earlier on in the semester; following up with students after the first exam to check in, praise those who did well, and encourage those who struggled to seek out additional resources; standardized materials across TA sections; and adding additional review opportunities to class time ahead of exams.

Comparing the DFW rates of each course between the Fall 2022 and Fall 2023 semesters, the DFW rates for:

- PSYC 100
 - Dropped from 1.9% to 1.7% for White students
 - Dropped from 18.2% to 3.9% for Black/African American students
 - Dropped from 7.3% to 5.0% for Hispanic students
 - Dropped from 4.4% to 2.6% overall
- CHEM 102 (participating instructor's section only)

- Dropped from 10.1% to 6.6% for White students
- Dropped from 25.9% to 13.6% for Black/African American students
- Rose from 13.6% to 21.1% for Hispanic students
- Dropped from 9.9% to 7.3% overall
- ACCY 201
 - Dropped from 8.9% to 7.7% for White students
 - Dropped from 18.2% to 13.0% for Black/African American students
 - Dropped from 19.2% to 16.0% for Hispanic students
 - Dropped from 9.8% to 8.5% overall

Overall, the initial results from the ICRI pilot were very promising. The three instructors presented at Student Success Symposium in February 2024 to share some of the best practices they had used in their course redesigns. Additionally, these instructors continue to work with the CITL to make further improvements to their courses and will do so through at least the Fall 2024 semester. Data for the Spring 2023 semester and later is still being collected.

Two additional courses were added to the ICRI in Fall of 2023 – MATH 220 and SPAN 122. These instructors have similarly been working with the CITL team members to redesign elements of the courses. The first changes for MATH 220 were live to students in Spring 2024, while the changes for SPAN 122 will be live in Fall 2024.

Projects and Pilot Programs

Mental Health Early Action on Campus (MHEAC) – First Year Experience

Student Success @ Illinois is working with the MHEAC committee to enhance mental health and wellness information within the first-year experience courses. In Spring 2023 (for FY23), the funding from this grant allowed time and space for pilots with the Grainger College of Engineering and the College of Media to reframe content within their first-year experience (FYE)/University 101 courses to include mental health content throughout the course. This content launched in Fall 2023 within those courses and an assessment was conducted with these two partners and the College of Fine and Applied Arts serving as a control. For FY24, the funding has been utilized to support a graduate student to work with all pilot partners and to facilitate the creation of an etext focused on the wellness wheel. Along with partners in Grainger College of Engineering and the College of Media, additional pilot partners in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences and the College of Fine and Applied Arts were added. The etext for these courses will be available in the summer of 2024 for use in the Fall 2024 semester and will include videos by a college specific administrator, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, the Chancellor, and for each chapter a video featuring students. The etext will be available to all students even if they are not students in these courses and will be available for the entirety of a student's career.

Student Success Early Screening and Support Project

The Student Success Early Screening and Support Project (ESSP) pilot provides students an opportunity to understand their individual needs and access relevant campus services before these needs have a negative impact on their academics and/or overall University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign experience.

A partnership with the Illinois Neurobehavioral Assessment Laboratory (INBAL) and the Illinois Scholars Program (ISP), the project had four goals:

1. Use a tiered system of analysis to provide personalized, evidence-based, relationship-centered, responsive guidance to ISP students. This goal was met, as the pilot program provided services and support to the student cohort that they would not otherwise have accessed.
2. Position students who participate the opportunity for academic success in fulfillment of the university's promise of a transformative experience. Goal 2 was partially met. Students in the pilot were provided with screening and, for those who chose to participate, with assessment at no out-of-pocket cost. However, students in the pilot were unable to receive temporary accommodations from Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) because DRES' waitlist closed in October.
3. Gain insights into viability of expanding the screening and assessment protocol to a broader student population. This goal was partially met. The ESSP pilot illustrates the level of need that is significantly greater than current campus structure can support, with approximately 50% of participants' screenings indicating a need for further assessment.
4. Obtain a better understanding of the larger support structure that the university must develop to meet students' needs' The pilot also partially met Goal 4, demonstrating an imperative to support students' neuropsychological needs. With the current campus structure insufficient to provide this support, a plan is necessary to scale up and maintain a structure that is sufficient.

Based on this pilot, continuation of ESSP was not recommended absent addressing the university's current structural limitations. Careful evaluation of goal 4 was recommended: There is a clear, pressing need for integrated on-campus services. The majority of students' needs simply cannot be met in the current setting with DRES as the sole provider of neuropsychological testing/evaluation and of officially recognized academic accommodations letters on campus. In the existing structure, only the most high-functioning and well-resourced students will persevere to obtain the full evaluation and accommodations they need. Steps towards supporting students' success might include allowing more flexible eligibility for instructional accommodations and/or dedicated funding to hire and retrain psychologists and relevant staff such as learning specialists.

Student Group

Student Success Undergraduate Advisory Board

The Student Success Undergraduate Advisory Board (SSUAB) is a student led board of undergraduate students selected by Provost Office staff through an application process. The SSUAB brings together students from across campus to dedicate time and effort to ideas and projects important to them. Each year the group identifies up to three projects, divides into groups, and attacks the projects that are selected. Each group will then provide an end of year presentation to stakeholders on campus who can help further those projects and initiatives.

The past year, the SSUAB tackled the following three projects: First Year Experience courses, Food Insecurity, and Inclusivity Spaces on campus. The board presentations are available for viewing on the Student Success Undergraduate Advisory Board website. The projects took shape over the course of six formal full board meetings. The project groups often met outside of formal meetings to ensure completion of their goals. The members presented their projects to invited stakeholders including the Provost on May 2, 2024.

Below is the breakdown of students represented on the 2023-2024 SSUAB:

College/Unit	# of Students on Board
College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences	1
College of Applied Health Sciences	6
College of Education	1
College of Fine and Applied Arts	1
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences	8
College of Media	1
Gies College of Business	3
Grainger College of Engineering	5
Total	26