

## Summary: Task Force on Student Success

Report to: Drs. Jacque Kilpatrick (lead, Academic Affairs) and Jane Sweetland (lead, Student Affairs), Student Success Partnership

From: Elizabeth Hartung, Nick Fuentes, Breana Christie, Darius Riggins

We must meet students where they are, especially first-generation college students who value education but don't have any knowledge *about* college. – Marie Francois, ISLAS Grant and History Professor

I believe we have to make the students more responsible for their own outcomes. We can't go to class for them, or study for them...[If a student is on probation] I like to talk to the student, find out what happened, and tell him it's not the end of the world. Often it's the just wrong major! – Barbara Duffin, Assistant Director, Advising

Our focus is on the developmental side – where is the student now in her life? How can we do something today to help the student? “How can we make you successful today?” – Leah Alvarado, Associate Director of Student Success Programs

In the summer of 2011, the four of us were asked to form a task force to survey a group of key stakeholders on campus about how they conceptualize and advocate for outreach to at-risk students and student success. Over the summer months, we identified 36 potential contacts in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The brief executive summary reports our results based on 25 responses. The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

From Academic Affairs:

- ten sitting chairs in Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Math, Chemistry, Biology, ESRM, Nursing, Spanish and Communication, and English;
- three of five AVPS (or designees) for Extended University/International Programs; Arts and Sciences; and Library;
- three PIs on standing grants (ISLAS, VISTA, LLAMP)
- three Academic Advisors

From Students Affairs:

- five in student support services, including EOP and TRiO programs, Counseling Services, Disability Services, and Outreach;
- the Dean of Students (now AVP for Student Affairs); and
- Associate Director of Records and Registration

We use respondents' names in the interviews. Given the small size of our campus, anonymity is impossible, and our subjects volunteered to participate freely.

From a careful reading of the interviews, we believe there is ample testimony in support of our mission to be a student-centered University, in the healthiest sense. That is, all of us, irrespective of division, want students to feel empowered, want to give students a chance to succeed (albeit not limitless chances), want to make sure that our institution is representative of the region that we serve, and want to graduate well-prepared citizens and scholars. Obviously, the key focus from the academic affairs side is providing instruction to students who may arrive ill-prepared for the rigors of university work. From student affairs, the emphasis is on creating a co-curricular learning environment that extends what happens in the classroom to the residence hall, campus events and beyond.

In our brief guided interview (attached), we purposefully did not define what we meant by 'at-risk' student; many of the respondents defined that student in the context of their own work. So, at risk for faculty members could mean a student at risk of failing or not performing up to potential. At-risk, however, could also mean at-risk of leaving the campus because of medical or other issues beyond the student's control. It could also mean at-risk of expulsion due to disciplinary infractions. Looking at the responses to the question on contact with at-risk students, here the advising center, judicial affairs, and admissions and records bear the brunt.

Advising has instituted several procedures to stop students who are failing their courses from continuing business as usual. One of the advisors, Monica Rivas (not interviewed here) is running a series of workshops this fall for readmitted students. All students readmitted after academic disqualification and on academic probation must schedule meetings with the advising center. Dishearteningly, for as small as we are, currently 150 students are on probation, and 86 were academically disqualified after the spring semester. Likewise, in the interview with Damien Pena, a number of students are at-risk of expulsion due to drug and alcohol abuse, or for academic dishonesty. Dean Pena and his team handled over 100 cases last academic year. Other students are at-risk due to not understanding college-going culture, and Leah Alvarado and her team in Student Support Services are staying in close contact with those students in this academic year. EOP and SSS have partnered with the UNIV 100 and 150 courses for the fall term, supported in part by the ISLAS grant. Another specifically at-risk group of students are students with a psychological, learning, or physical disability. Valeri Cirino-Paez and her team have pioneered a program – SPEED -- to help students stay on task and succeed.

Faculty members interviewed, in particular program chairs, have a different set of issues on the ground in their classrooms. Oftentimes, students will reach out for help when it is too late. Or they may not realize what they need to do to succeed. They may have a wonderful attitude but struggle with basic reading skills. The theme of college preparedness comes up frequently from teaching faculty who work hard with students who are trying to juggle too many things, and whose writing, reasoning and math skills are poor. In this context, time management skills are only a small part of the problem. For example, chairs in the sciences and in Math are much more

likely to see students who are not prepared for their majors and who have received poor advice in High School.

However, regardless of where one comes down on the continuum of how much professionals should intervene (Gary Berg describes the excessive hovering of private institutions as compared to the get-in-line mentality of public institutions, which captures the split fairly well), there are exciting and innovative ideas being kicked around on campus.

Academic programs are doing what they can to (1) communicate expectations clearly to students (see Spanish handout); (2) provide tutoring help (Chemistry, Biology, Math); (3) identifying students early who are struggling without compromising program standards (School of Education); and (4) making good use of the library's resources through tutorials, classroom presentations and so on. Most program chairs report meeting with struggling students one on one and their efforts to try and help the student recognize and resolve any problems.

The topic of early warnings/dashboard indicators came up primarily in the student affairs interviews. There is an example of a typical e-mail alerting students that they are at risk of faltering academically (provided by Gina Farrar). Damien Pena mentioned a pull down menu system he used at a prior institution whereby faculty could send out early warnings for different student groups (for example, student athletes, EOP students, etc.) Such voluntary systems are used on other campuses to good effect.

Chairs would like to see more funding for tutoring for students, and for dedicated spaces on campus where students can meet. Matthew Cook, who was interviewed shortly after arriving here, raises the idea of training students to take the library to other students.

One thing is clear. We do need for students to succeed. We need to admit students who, whatever their academic deficits, are good risks for us. As public servants and stewards we need to use our resources wisely. And as Political Science Chair Scott Frisch said, we also have a responsibility to try to help students find employment. The at-risk student who comes to us, and who does not acquire the requisite skills and personal responsibility needed while she is with us, is a failure in more senses than one. Most of us want to see students take responsibility – we don't want to enable – but we recognize that some students have the ability but not the knowledge of how to be good students. Identifying those students is the dilemma.