Identifying and Remediating Early Academic Risks: Case Studies of High-Performing Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Key Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary survey data</td>
<td>University academic success administrators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key questions:
- How do over-performing institutions identify students at academic risk?
- What mix of early academic interventions do over-performing institutions use to remediate academic risk?
- How do over-performing institutions evaluate the success of their early interventions?

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Overview</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study A</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study B</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study C</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study D</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study E</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study F</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inquiry Overview

The Division of Student Affairs at the University of Hawaii-Manoa sought to examine strategies used by peer institutions to identify students with early academic risk and ideas for developing programming to remediate these risks. The study sampled large public research universities that have outperformed peer and overlap campuses in achieving high six-year graduation rates. The case studies of these institutions focus on the types of early intervention used to support student academic success and student persistence.

Sixty-minute telephone interviews were conducted with senior academic success administrators at participating universities. These individuals were identified as institutional representatives responsible for leading or coordinating efforts around identification and remediation of early academic risk. Case study analysis consisted of descriptive statistics for budget and staffing information, and comparisons of academic success program components.

Custom Research Support – Short-Answer Analysis of Issues of Concern to Individual Members or Small Groups

The SA-LC maintains dedicated staff to support members’ needs for short-answer, quick-turnaround research inquiries. Requests may address issues raised in the SA-LC’s collaborative research studies, leverage the collective experience of the SA-LC membership, review secondary literature, or include small-scale primary research investigations. Requests are fulfilled on a first-come, first-served basis. SA-LC staff works to deliver accurate, reliable data in all cases; however, we cannot guarantee the accuracy of data from all sources referenced.
Methodology
The case study project investigated the following questions around early intervention programs at six institutions that are over-performing relative to their peers in terms of their six-year graduation rates:

- How do over-performing institutions identify students at academic risk?
- What mix of early academic interventions do over-performing institutions use to remediate academic risk?
- How do over-performing institutions evaluate the success of their early interventions?

Sixty-minute telephone interviews were conducted with key informants (see Table 1) at the participating universities. The researcher took notes during the interviews and drafted a case study for each institution on its programming for students at risk for academic difficulty. Interview data was supplemented by documentation of at-risk programming that is published on the Web sites of the six case study schools.

The respondents read and commented on the drafts for their schools prior to compilation of the six cases, which are presented here. To preserve anonymity of the participating institutions, each institutional case study is assigned a pseudonym, lettered A through F.

Table 1. Titles of Key Informants on Programming for At-Risk Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Title of Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Director of Learning Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Academic Advisor, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| C*          | Associate Dean, Office of Academic Services
              | Director of Retention and At-Risk Students |
| D           | Associate Dean of Students for Learning Support and Retention Programs |
| E           | Director of Educational Opportunity Program |
| F           | Retention Coordinator, Office of Undergraduate Education |

*TWO respondents

Findings
This section presents the six case studies for the participating institutions, focusing on criteria for identifying at-risk students and strategies for early intervention with incoming and currently enrolled students who are at risk for academic difficulty. Specific programs of interest targeted by the interviews included:

- Pre-enrollment summer programs
- Tutoring/coaching
- Grade notification (e.g., to parent/guardian, academic advisors)
- Transition programming for transfer students
- Interventions in courses with high failure rates
- Other academic difficulty programs

Respondents were asked to discuss the age of their programs, staffing, budget, and rates of student participation in these areas, as well as any evaluations of value that may have been done. A discussion section, which follows the findings, articulates common themes among the cases.
Institutional Case Study A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Type of Institution:</strong> Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate Enrollment:</strong> 24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retention Program Characteristics:</strong> Summer bridge program, learning center, intervention in high-failure courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Introduction*

The Director of the learning center at this West Coast University of 24,000 undergraduate students responded to the survey. He noted several institutional obstacles to retaining at-risk students, such as the task force that was formed in response to the university’s low four-year graduation rates relative to other state universities (their six-year rates were comparable). Driven by the state legislature, the outcome of the task force was systematic encouragement of students to take more units per quarter in order to graduate them in four years. This resulted in pressure on at-risk students and insensitivity to poorer students, who must often work while attending school, explained the Director.

Low-income students are also adversely affected by revisions in the criteria for determining minimum progress in order to stay at the university, which is a low GPA or insufficient credit units. In essence, the new system changed the way the minimum progress policy was enforced and gave less flexibility to advisors so that more students will be notified of insufficient units, which is detrimental to lower income students who must often work.

Despite the challenge of balancing sensitivity to student needs with maintaining minimum progress standards, the Director explained that they are above other colleges for six-year graduation rates because of a collaborative effort to help students feel welcome. “It’s a team effort. We’re one component of it,” he explained. Having chaired a retention committee and now implementing the recommendations, the Director appreciated the level of support from top administrators who demonstrate an institutional commitment to meeting the needs of students in academic difficulty. “It takes an institutional commitment to retention,” he expressed.

*Identifying At-Risk Students*

In addition to employing an Academic Performance Index to assess first-year students’ high school contexts, entering students who are at risk for academic difficulties are first identified for the university’s summer bridge program according to the following criteria:

- College entrance scores
- Parent income/first generation status
- Admission to the university by exception (i.e., not meeting A-G requirements for high school courses)
- Participation in outreach programs (e.g., Upward Bound, ETS)
- High school GPA

The Director is also in the process of considering the implementation of recommendations from a committee report on identification of at-risk students.

The university’s summer bridge program appears to be the cornerstone for serving students who are at risk for academic difficulty. The program enrolls approximately 200 students, although the respondent noted that there are many more students in the entering freshman class who would
benefit from participation, but the resources don’t exist to support them. Participants are identified according to the above criteria, and these students receive some priority for services in the learning center. During students’ first two years in this program, staff members at the Center monitor grade reports and send letters requesting a meeting to any students who earn a grade of C- or lower. Students who do not respond to the letters are then contacted by phone and e-mail. The purpose of these meetings, explained the Director, is not to chastise students but to examine what happened academically and ways to get them back on track with the resources available on campus.

Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) students who have not participated in the summer bridge program receive a two-and-a-half-day orientation program, during which time staff members from the learning center and EOP have an hour-long session with them about services offered to them. Enrollment in support courses for EOP students has risen since summer 2007, according to the Director, because more students were made aware of the resources and have taken advantage of them.

Undergraduate students who are already enrolled in the university are identified for services to address their academic difficulties by the deans of their schools (four for this university). Because the deans’ offices track students’ grade reports, contact with students facing difficulty is first made by these offices, which establishes a contract with a student who will be placed on academic probation. The learning center may be included in this contract, and though the contents of the contract vary by school and by student, the center monitors whether or not a student has fulfilled his or her contract.

*Interventions for Identifying Students At Risk*
Through their learning center, this university offers multiple resources for addressing specific academic needs to specific populations of students. As displayed by Table 2 below, the university maintains a summer bridge program for entering students, tutoring and coaching, a system for academic probation and dismissal, and interventions in courses with high failure rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Program exists</th>
<th>Years in existence</th>
<th>Participants per year</th>
<th>FTE staff</th>
<th>Program budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrollment summer academic programs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>200 (227 in 2007)</td>
<td>45 (15 peer advisors who live in the residence halls, some dean’s office staff, and 25 center staff)</td>
<td>$400,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic difficulty programs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30%-40% earn an average of C- or lower</td>
<td>Built into overall center budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• follow up for bridge program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contract arranged by the Dean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory grade notification</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic tutoring or coaching</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>100 part-time (4 to 20 hours per week)</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic transition programs for transfer</td>
<td>No**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic probation or dismissal program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15 years (linked to the center)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>None (overseen by deans)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention in high-failure courses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28-30 years for chemistry and math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-700 per year in chemistry; 400-500 per year in math</td>
<td>8 FT specialists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Staff accounted for in center budget (not summer bridge budget)
**The University offers orientation programs to new transfers

Of the programs named by the survey, only mandatory grade notification and a transition program for transfer students are not currently part of the University’s system for at-risk students. The Director cited the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in explaining why grades are not reported to parents or guardians and also noted that the summer bridge program did include transfer students at one time, but it was discontinued because so few students participated in it and it was difficult to offer a coherent program for upper-division students. Transfer students are included in the university’s orientation program, however.

*Summer Bridge Program*
As noted, the summer bridge program enrolls approximately 200 entering students, most of whom are at risk for facing academic difficulties. The program begins with a four-week summer residency prior to their first year, during which time the students live in the residence halls on campus.

Early in this residency, students must take placement tests for writing, math, and chemistry, and their daily schedules depend largely on their academic needs, though everyone has access to tutoring for three hours in the evenings. The placement tests lean toward under-placing students at first, but they are then promoted if deemed appropriate. Instructed by the center’s staff, students take three weeks of non-credit academic coursework, which includes writing, math, study skills, chemistry, reading, and physics. The residency concludes with final exams that inform placement in fall semester courses.

In addition to their academic coursework, students in the summer bridge program also register for their fall classes and receive advising and an orientation to campus resources, such as the library, learning center offerings, L.GTB resource center, and cultural programs. Their orientation also involves a drug and alcohol awareness program, date rape program, sexually transmitted diseases program, and a study skills workshop.

The summer bridge program is overseen by the Director of the Learning Center and the Director of the EOP, and is delivered to participants by the center’s staff, including undergraduate tutors and resident advisors. Participants are able to get to know the center’s specialists during the course of their summer residency, which assists in relationship building beyond the summer and into the academic year.

*Tutoring*
Given that starting a tutoring program requires hiring students, determining which subjects need to be covered, identifying a teaching philosophy and methods, and training the student tutors, the
Director surmised that the center’s tutoring program may have been the easiest to implement (though he noted that because all of the programs have existed for 15 to 30 years, this was a hard question to answer). With a total of 4,200 requests for tutoring annually, the center fields approximately 1,500 to 1,600 requests in the fall, 1,400 requests in the winter, and 1,200 each spring. All university students are eligible to take advantage of the center’s tutoring, which focuses on writing, math, and chemistry, though special requests in other less common areas are also met by seeking out tutors who have taken and excelled in the course for which a student requires help. These latter tutoring offerings are made possible by support from other campus programs.

While writing assistance occurs in drop-in, one-on-one tutoring relationships, tutoring in math and science takes place in pre-arranged groups. Students can seek out drop-in assistance from professional staff or tutors whenever they need help, whereas pre-scheduled groups require that students sign up for one- or two-day groups per week, with participants often staying with a tutor for more than one quarter.

The tutoring program is staffed by undergraduates who excel in their subject areas and are trained to guide students by asking questions that will enable them to come to an understanding of a concept or problem on their own. Training for tutors has evolved over the years and is more sophisticated than it originally was and centers on the Socratic method of teaching by asking questions. In their training, instructors demonstrate the method and then put tutors in small groups to try the method under the supervision of an experienced tutor. These experienced tutors meet regularly to practice and critique themselves on their instruction. The Director noted that his experienced staff members are very good at training new tutors.

The program is overseen by a Coordinator and was recently voted the best student employer on campus, which is evidenced by the tutors’ dedication to the center as many will work there until graduation. Applicants for tutoring positions are screened by the Coordinator, who checks their GPA and conducts interviews that ask candidates to deliver a sample teaching lesson. If hired, the applicants receive training in tutoring.

*Academic Probation and Dismissal*

As noted above, the academic probation and dismissal system at this university is overseen by the deans of the various undergraduate colleges. While the deans monitor the progress of all undergraduates and follow up with a strict system for determining probation and dismissal, the learning center tracks participants in the summer bridge program and intervenes with these students who receive a grade of C- or lower in any one course. Specialists at the center meet with these students to help them solve problems and get them back on the right track, and students are made aware during their summer residency that this will occur. As the director explained, the intention behind the tracking is not to chide students – the idea is to help them. It is up to the students to seek out assistance if their grades do not fall below the C- minimum.

The types of intervention for students facing probation or dismissal depend on the needs of the student. For example, a student with difficulty in writing will be matched with a writing specialist, but another student might have trouble with general study skills and will be paired with a staff member to address time management and other study skills. Most of the interventions occur in a one-on-one relationship, but those who have math difficulties will generally be encouraged to attend a group or workshop that is specific to their coursework.
**Intervention in High-Failure Courses**

The center offers workshops that are specific to courses with high failure rates, and each subject area is overseen by a specialist in math, chemistry, or writing. The workshops are instructed by professional staff members who are specialists in their subject areas and generally centers on reviewing key concepts and problem solving by students. Enrollment in these workshops varies by the course with which they are paired and is open to any student of the course. The workshops have no credit but do require an informal sign-up from participants. A similar co-class is available to EOP students who need supplemental instruction in difficult courses, and these co-classes are worth one workload credit.

**Evaluations of Early Interventions**

Each year, the director of the learning center collects the grades of students they tutor, though without a parallel group of students for comparison, the impact is hard to measure. For instance, some students seek tutoring to get As instead of Bs, whereas others just want to survive their courses. The center also examines the grade reports for students in the bridge program, but again, the Director noted that without a peer group for comparison, the impact is difficult to assess.

The data collected from these programs is used to keep track of the effectiveness of the services they provide in order to appeal for additional support for their programs. For example, the Director explained that a program for biology undergraduates is funded by a Howard Hughes Institute grant. Those students come to the summer bridge program, then take a pre-chemistry course in the fall, followed by chemistry in the winter. The Director explained that the biology students who participated in the summer bridge program tend to perform better than the other students in the course, averaging roughly half a grade point higher than the overall class average. “It’s effective help,” he explained.

As a result, the Director believed that the summer bridge with its corresponding follow-up system is a very effective program for retaining students at the university. He described the program as “very valuable to the campus for students to feel like they belong.” The students in residency form a “nice community,” and he has been very impressed by the residential component that assigns students of different ethnicities as roommates to broaden their perspectives, which results in students of different ethnicities getting along together.
Institutional Case Study B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution: Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Enrollment: 34,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Program Characteristics: REACH program, TRIO/Upward Bound, first-generation focus, teaching center, tutor time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction

The survey was completed by an Academic Advisor in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) at this university located in the southeastern United States, which reported an FTE undergraduate student population of 34,618 students (total headcount of 50,576). The university’s office of admissions uses a holistic process to identify first-generation college students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds whose college entrance exams may show deficiencies in their sub-scores. These students are then designated for participation in special programming, such as the REACH Program, which is a first-year program whose 350 to 400 participants follow a specialized curriculum and receive more intrusive advising than other students. In addition to generational status, entrance exam scores, and income, the university also identifies students who may be at academic risk by taking high school quality into consideration. The program is coordinated by the CLAS, and all of these students are categorized as undecided majors so that they can be monitored by this one college.

Students who may be vulnerable to academic risk strictly due to their first-generation status may be referred to a second program. These students receive scholarships to attend the university and are assigned peer mentors who closely follow their progress. The program for first-generation students is overseen by the President’s office, and the students are monitored by a committee of student affairs professionals and faculty appointed by the President.

Evaluation on the REACH Program’s first-year retention rate found that it is comparable to the overall freshman retention rate: REACH averages 91% retention, whereas the overall freshman retention rate is approximately 93%.

For high-risk students who are monitored upon enrollment, advisors sometimes request instructor grade reports. In extreme cases, the advisors will contact the family (students sign release forms upon enrolling), though the CLAS adheres closely to FERPA.

To identify currently enrolled students who are facing academic difficulty, the university employs a computerized universal tracking system and advisors can also do individual monitoring of students. Every semester, students’ overall GPA, course selections, and GPA in those courses are compared against benchmarks. Students who do not meet these benchmarks are flagged and must meet with an academic advisor. The benchmarks vary by major, but the minimum overall GPA is 2.0 for the CLAS; some majors require a minimum of 2.5 or 2.8. A first time off-track flag typically involves communicating with the student about what is required for him or her to return to good standing. If the issue is related to GPA, advisors remind students of tutoring resources and services for developing study skills, most of which are offered by the university’s Teaching Center. A second time off-track flag is more serious, and a student in this situation cannot continue in his or her major without returning to good standing within that semester. Similar support is provided in these circumstances (i.e., tutoring and advising on study skills).
The university attributes the following graduation rates to the monitoring performed by the universal tracking system:

- 6 year = 76.61%
- 5 year = 73.76%
- 4 year = 51.56%

The interview respondent believed that the REACH Program is highly effective for students because it provides more intrusive advising than other students receive. She added that the universal tracking is also effective in helping to steer students out of majors in which they are not performing well and toward majors that play more to their academic strengths. However, universal tracking has its detractors. According to the respondent, some people point out that students who are making average progress are dismissed prematurely from majors due to stringent universal tracking criteria. These students must then find new majors for which they are more qualified on paper, although they may be less interested in these disciplines. This lack of interest might consequently discourage them from continuing at the university.

In addition to REACH and the program for first-generation students, the institution and the CLAS employ several other mechanisms for assisting students at risk for academic difficulty, including a summer TRIO/Outward Bound program, tutoring, and an academic probation/dismissal system (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Program exists</th>
<th>Years in existence</th>
<th>Participants per year</th>
<th>FTE staff</th>
<th>Program budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrollment summer academic programs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>Two: one FT faculty member and one program assistant</td>
<td>$1, 373, 076 DOE grant from 2004 to 2007 (renewal pending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory grade notification</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic tutoring or coaching</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Multiple offices across the university</td>
<td>Multiple offices across the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic transition programs for transfer students</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic probation or dismissal program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17 (CLAS)</td>
<td>Approx. 3,600 (CLAS)</td>
<td>65 professional advisors</td>
<td>Varies by college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention in high-failure courses</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TRIO Upward Bound
Local students from 10 high schools (9th through 12th grade) are eligible based on income or first-generation status to attend the six-week summer program as part of a program that runs 30 weeks of the year (24 weeks from September to April and 6 weeks in June and July). The program was under development for five years and has been at the university for 37 years and enrolls approximately 110 students annually.

During the academic year, the students attend college-prep classes on Saturday mornings. Their core courses include English, Spanish, Mathematics, Sciences, and Computer Applications, and they also receive academic, career, and life skills counseling as well as mentoring and tutoring. The summer component consists of residency in the university residence halls, and students are immersed in an intensive schedule of classes, college entrance exam preparation, and hands-on science laboratories. In addition, students attend local and statewide conferences, enjoy cultural and educational events, and participate in leadership activities. The students do not receive university credit, but the program exposes them to the expectations that come with attending college.

Hosted by the CLAS, the program is directed by a faculty member in the department of geography and assisted by one part-time employee. The program has been funded by a DOE grant of $1,373,076 for 2004 through 2007 (renewal is pending).

Tutoring
Several different campus offices deliver tutoring services, which have been offered by the university since its earliest days. Any student may seek out tutoring assistance. The university’s Teaching Center provides services such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, and study skills workshops. The Counseling Center facilitates workshops on test anxiety, math anxiety, and study skills, and the Office of Academic Support and Institutional Services provides tutoring primarily for minority students. In addition, the Disability Resource Center works with students who are officially diagnosed with a disability and provides note-takers who accompany these students to class (as well as other accommodations they might need).

The length of tutoring relationships varies by the student and lasts as long as that student needs them to be successful. Most tutoring offices employ professionals, though some peer tutoring is also conducted. The REACH office employs peer mentors, who are paid with work-study funding. Most peer mentors have formerly participated in the program and want to give back. The Teaching Center staffs graduate students who apply to be tutors.

The Teaching Center is the university’s primary resource for academic assistance. Using innovative programs like free tutoring into students’ dormitory rooms via campus TV (Tutor Time), students can watch a live broadcast and call the Center with questions during the show. The normal live tutoring hours are Sunday through Thursday, 8 p.m. to midnight, but many sessions are replayed on TV throughout the week. Students are able to submit their questions during a four-hour window prior to the broadcast, and tutors respond to the questions on air in the order they are received. Subject areas include chemistry, physics, statistics, calculus, pre-calculus, and algebra.

In addition to this unique program, students may also use walk-in tutoring, which is a free drop-in service for help in mathematics, science, engineering, and other disciplines. No appointment is necessary. Free tutoring by appointment is also available, which takes place on a recurring basis. Students with GPAs below 3.0 are given priority for tutoring by appointment, and once a student is approved, he or she may schedule up to two appointments per week until the end of the
semester. These appointments are up to 50 minutes in length and depend on qualification and availability of tutors. These tutoring sessions are intended to clarify information presented in class, and students must apply to receive these services. International students may also apply to receive tutoring in English.

The Teaching Center also offers test preparation throughout the semester in various mathematics courses, and students looking to improve their general mathematics skills or wanting to prepare for a future mathematics course can participate in a non-credit mathematics program. They must complete a placement inventory to determine their individual needs, after which an individual program is prepared for them. These students commit to a standing appointment under the supervision of a mathematics tutor.

In addition to tutoring in undergraduate courses, The Teaching Center also offers test preparation for the GRE and CLAST (College Level Academics Skills Test), the latter of which is required of all students in the state’s public university system.

The Teaching Center also features a study skills/learning strategies program, which is free to all students. Students may work individually with a specialist or attend workshops on a variety of topics.

In addition to the Teaching Center, the university also maintains a Reading and Writing Center. According to its Web site, the purpose of the Reading and Writing Center is “to support independent learning and encourage scholarship by fostering writing and reading skills. We provide individual assistance to those wishing to develop their writing, better understand the writing process, and improve reading comprehension and study skills.”

In particular, the Reading and Writing Center provides assistance with drafting and editing essays, research papers, application essays, theses and dissertations, drafts, and lab reports. Individual coaching is also available in reading and study skills, and test prep for the GRE and CLAST is also offered there. Their Web site also provides links to grammar and style guides, as well as resources for resume writing, technical writing, and creating annotated bibliographies.

**Academic Probation Dismissal**

The academic probation and dismissal program at this university (first through *mapping* and then through *universal tracking*) has been in effect for 17 years and addresses the academic needs of approximately 3,700 students every year. The program is staffed by 65 professional advisors (across the university’s colleges) who make initial contact with struggling students and then might refer them to campus resources.

Academic probation formally notifies a student who is not making satisfactory progress. Academic probation can occur for the following reasons:

- Failure to maintain normal academic progress in their degree program. Probation is removed when the college sees that acceptable academic progress has been made.
- Undergraduate students with less than a 2.0 cumulative GPA for university courses and a deficit of fewer than 15 points.
- A persistent grade point deficit of fewer than 15.

Probation is removed when a student’s deficit is reduced to zero. If the deficit increases again to 15 or more, the student faces dismissal from the university. Students who are dismissed may be
permitted to reenroll if they complete an acceptable application for readmission. However, any student who is readmitted will be dismissed again if his or her grade point deficit is 15 or more at the end of any term. In the CLAS, dismissed students are not considered for readmission if they have accumulated more than 20 deficit points. They must either find another college in the university to readmit them or transfer to a different institution altogether.

One CLAS initiative that was under development for approximately a year flags students on probation and instructs them to visit a Web site where they must complete and download a series of exercises in order to be able to register. The exercises include a GPA calculator, a common causes for bad grades worksheet, and a projected short-term academic plan. They must also meet with an advisor to review their responses to these exercises. Finally, they are referred to appropriate resources on campus, such as counseling tutoring. According to the respondent for this interview, the CLAS online exercises for probation students have been the easiest to implement with the lowest investment level.
Institutional Case Study C

Type of Institution: Public

Undergraduate Enrollment: 21,000

Retention Program Characteristics: EOP Summer Institute, Office of Diversity, Women in Science Projects, Transition Programs for Transfer Students, academic success seminar, freshman withdrawal program

Introduction

The interview for this case was conducted with two key informants from the university, the Director of Retention and At-Risk Students and the Associate Dean. The university’s School of Arts and Sciences at its main campus location enrolled 21,000 students for the 2007-2008 academic year. Its three other schools (Pharmacy, Art, and Biological/Environmental Sciences) enrolled an additional 8,000 students. The respondents noted that some of the programs that address at-risk students are campuswide, while others are just for the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS).

The SAS for this university uses several criteria to identify incoming students who may face academic difficulty, including:

- High school quality
- SAT scores
- Parents’ level of education (collected, but not used, other than for first-generation students who may qualify for specific programs)

Because the university is so large, it consists of many offices that strive to meet the needs of at-risk students. As a result, a lot of information is collected by Admissions, though the information is not always used.

The respondents described several criteria that are used to identify currently enrolled students who are facing academic difficulty. The Committee for Academic Standing sets standards with which students must comply. Although not all faculty maintains the same strict criteria, students who are having difficulty receive a mid-semester warning if performance is sub-par. Contact is made with students who have received two warnings in a semester.

In addition, incoming students must take placement tests in writing, math, and a foreign language to determine their sectioning for their first-semester courses. Chemistry courses also use the math placement exam to assign students in sections, and all chemistry students are tracked for performance throughout the semester to ensure they have been placed in the appropriate section of the course. The respondents explained that Chemistry (and other disciplines) offers special sections for students who may not be quite ready for the regular course curriculum.

The respondents discussed several early academic initiatives that target students at risk for academic difficulty, showing how comprehensive this university is for addressing the academic needs of its students.
**Summer Programming**

There are two pre-enrollment summer programs at the university: the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) Summer Institute and a summer institute that is part of a math and science program for women.

The EOP summer institute has operated for approximately 40 years, enrolling 303 students in 2006-2007. This state-funded program identifies low-income students and assists them in attending any state university. Because their high schools are typically less rigorous, the admissions standards are slightly different for these students, and attendance at the pre-college summer program is required for acceptance into the program and the university.

The summer institute takes place for five weeks between June and August, during which time EOP students live at the university to prepare for the college transition. They enroll in degree and non-degree courses and also receive help with writing, tutoring, personal counseling, academic advising, career counseling, time management advising, and financial aid counseling.

Run through the Office of the Vice President for Undergraduate Education, the program is delivered by 26 FTE instructors, 23 FTE tutors, and 28 FTE resident assistants. The interviewees explained that the program benefits EOP students by identifying their risk factors and assigning them a dedicated advisor for their four years at the university. These advisors work closely with their students up to graduation from the university.

The overall budget for the EOP program is $1,012,827, though this includes academic year programming as well.

Directed by the Assistant Dean and delivered by five FTE staff (includes support staff and program coordinators), the second summer program is part of an initiative designed to meet the needs of young women aiming for careers in math and science. This program has existed for 22 years and has enrolled anywhere from 50 to 150 students in the past three years. There are three different summer components to this program. The summer science institute requires interested ninth-grade students to apply, and the weekend academy (also by application) is intended for girls in ninth and tenth grades. The career exploration day is open to any girl in the eleventh or twelfth grade.

The summer science institute requires admitted students to attend a weeklong residency at the university for their four years of high school. During the institute, the girls participate in field trips and lab experiences in technology, science, and math (they also take English coursework). Their instructors are university faculty who do lead projects with the girls in the lab.

Students in the weekend academy program also must apply to participate in three Saturday science programs during the spring semester. They engage in exercises to demonstrate the topic of the day through an interactive program with university faculty. The girls who attend the career exploration day come to the university for one day in the Spring, and undergraduates in science and faculty/staff discuss opportunities in science careers.

**Mandatory Grade Notification**

The university adheres to FERPA standards but maintains a grade notification program to counselors for students in the EOP program as well as the university’s student athletes, which delivers electronic progress reports to the Office of Athletics every semester. The extensive advising system for athletes is run and staffed by Office of Athletics, which has a close relationship with the university’s learning center to supplement what they provide to students.
There is a high response rate, according to the interviewees, and in response to the progress reports, the Office of Athletics offers study halls for the athletes and tutoring for athletes as necessary. The progress reports for student athletes have been used since 1996 and address the academic standing of 1,000 Division I athletes every year.

**Academic Probation/Dismissal Program**

The university maintains an academic probation and dismissal program that is staffed by three FTE individuals with a budget of $4,000. There are two programs focused on first-year students (and numeric freshman who lack the credit hours to be sophomores) that have been in use for eight years.

An academic review determines if a student is to be placed on academic warning, probation, or dismissal. Academic warning refers to a student whose term GPA is lower than 2.0 and probation is used for students who have two semesters of coursework lower than a 2.0. Dismissal standards depend on an academic review to see if students are on par with expectations at the end of the spring semester; students are expected to fall within certain parameters each year (gradually moving upward in GPA). The students who do not make those cutoffs are on track for dismissal, but they can be readmitted depending on which semester they fall below the standard.

A readmitted student returns on continued probation. The university holds advising conditions for students on probation or those returning from dismissal. First, the Academic Success Seminar is a seven-week program that addresses a smaller population of students who have two consecutive terms of a 2.0 GPA or have not earned 21 credits. This program usually serves 16 to 20 students with a thematic curriculum that is team facilitated. The intention behind the program is that it creates continuity across the semester by focusing on topic areas such as time management and learning strategies. The Academic Success Seminar also includes material presented by career services, the office of the Dean of Students, the library, and academic services to help students with direction.

Students on probation also must pursue individual advising with professional advisors who meet with them for a minimum of two sessions during the first two weeks of the semester to kick off the term, review their needs assessment, and set goals. The pairs then follow up in the last two weeks of the term, prior to pre-registration for the next semester.

The university also has a program specifically designed for freshman withdrawal, which deals with the bulk of the students in the 200 who are part of the probation/warning system. Described as the easiest and least expensive to implement, this program for first-year students with a term GPA lower than 1.0 has been in effect for eight years and addressed 179 students in 2007. These students are advised to take a leave from the university, rather than continue for the spring, because of the academic standing policies that will impact them with dismissal beyond the freshman year. There is intrusive advising for students who decide to return, which includes an academic needs assessment and pre-semester advising in January to discuss each student’s problems, make decisions about scheduling, and teach policies to rebuild GPA. Students are required to participate in an academic conference and are paired with a professional advisor to deliver services in the area of need. The advisors inform students of available resources and review the requirements of the program. Students need to meet their advisor three times during the semester, with the last meeting coinciding with the last day that students may withdraw from a course.

The Academic Success Seminar and Freshman Withdrawal program were described by the respondents as the “biggest bang for the buck” because they require the lowest level of
investment while generating the most impact on retention and student success. The goal of the Freshman Withdrawal program is that students persist given a dire situation. An extensive study of the outcomes of this program conducted by the Office of Academic Services found that while 54% of first-year students on academic warning used to be dismissed at the end of the spring, the new figure is 48% since the implementation of the Freshman Withdrawal program. There is a direct and inverse relationship showing that students who participate most fully are removed from probation at the highest rates. Since 2005, the number of dismissals has consistently declined, and results from spring 2006 show an even greater decrease in dismissals of students in the freshman withdrawal category. In addition to a decrease of students in academic difficulty, students also have demonstrated greater knowledge about scholastic standing policies and appear more open to asking for help.

The program has been recognized nationwide as a best practice and published in a monograph for special populations in October 2007. The program is anchored with an evaluation from students; the respondents explained that seeing students say they feel there are people to assist them makes a big difference in helping them navigate bureaucracy to persist through graduation.

The Academic Success Seminar’s success was attributed to its small class sizes. The director has a strong relationship with these students through graduation, and very few end up dismissed (and early on, if they are). On average, 75% to 80% of the participants return to good academic standing and graduate in good standing. This program was highlighted the July 2007 Hispanic Issues in Higher Education.

Transition Programs for Transfer Students
The university has held a transition program for transfer students for eight years and made this program mandatory four years ago. The extensive program enrolls 2,100 transfer students each year to prepare them for the university. Taught by 19 assistant deans in 50 sections (with an FTE of five), the program is budgeted $10,000 for a one-credit (pass/no-pass) transition seminar that meets for 10 weeks during the semester. The small classes (fewer than 30 students per section) convene once per week for 80 minutes and are required of all transfer students that are not part time or non-traditional status (because their tuition is per credit hour), though the university is currently exploring options for online delivery for these students.

The course is taught by faculty and staff all over campus, including every Assistant Dean in the Office of Academic Services, residence life, student services, counseling, EOP, the library, and the registrar. The instructors are trained in the curriculum so that all instructors follow the same program.

The university has collected data on the transition program for transfer students and revised the curriculum based on student evaluations that revealed many found it tedious. In addition, when the program first started, it was optional, but it is now mandatory because research revealed that many students who wound up on probation/warning were transfer students. However, this finding didn’t hold for students who took the seminar. The interviewees acknowledged that students who are predisposed to seek assistance enrolled in the seminar, but the results of making the seminar mandatory are showing fewer transfer students with difficulty meeting academic standards. Ongoing data collection is expected to generate comparisons of three groups of transfer students: a) those who participated in the program when it was optional, b) those who opted out, and c) those who participated when the program was made mandatory.

Tutoring and Coaching
The respondents explained that the university offers myriad diverse tutoring and coaching options to its students, which can sometimes be redundant, but which also ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing academic difficulty. The Office of Undergraduate Education oversees all of these programs.

**Learning Centers**
The Learning Centers employ eight full-time staff with an annual budget of $224,310. The Learning Centers have been in operation for 16 years and work with all campuses for this university.

There are multiple centers around the campuses that run various tutoring (e.g., one-on-one, group, exam prep for specific courses), both independently and jointly with departments. For instance, tutoring is available for general chemistry; the tutors attend lectures, review homework, and work with students on specific content. Course-specific tutoring is intended for students in that course but there is no registration required. The tutors are graduate students and undergraduates who have taken the course and are hand-selected by the instructor who advertises and interviews for the positions.

Recently, the Learning Centers started to do some work remotely, such as a very successful exam prep program that is broadcast on the university TV station and recorded for students to watch at their convenience and e-mail questions to the tutors afterwards.

There is an overall Director of the Learning Centers and a local Director of each building, as well as 50 student employees at each center (tutors and coaches).

Coaching at the Learning Centers covers issues of time management, study skills management, concentration, and memorization, and is delivered by professionals in these areas. The coaches set a routine meeting with their students to see them every two weeks over the semester, and the services of each coaching relationship depend on what the student wants.

**Women in Science Projects**
The aforementioned project for young women aspiring to careers in math, science, and technology consists of a tutoring initiative. A similar initiative in the sciences also provides tutoring for women in science, technology, English, and math. Peer and faculty mentoring is available through this program, along with a research experience in the lab and an introductory course in scientific research. This enrichment program serves 120 students each year.

Another program for women in science offers a residential learning community for women returning to college after having families or being in the workforce. They live on campus in a community with a lot of support because they have been out of college for a while. In-house study sessions run by graduate assistants who live in residence with the students are available, as is tutoring that is not course-specific. This program enrolls 100 resident students, who live on campus for two years, though residence is not required (but is strongly encouraged).

**EOP**
The EOP program employs 23 tutors who offer a lot of availability and convenience to students needing help in math, science, and basic subjects (not writing). The services depend on the needs of the students requesting tutoring, but the program serves 1,000 students who are in the EOP program (and 330 in the summer program).

**Math and Science Learning Center**
This Center, specific to math and science, employs four full-time staff with a budget of $250,000 and has been in service for 20 years. Separate from the Learning Center, the Math and Science Learning Center is grant-based and offers enrichment as well as tutoring services to 100 participants per year. Students self-identify and come to this center for help, which also provides supplemental instruction and study groups delivered by undergraduate and graduate tutors. Faculty members also offer review sessions for specific courses.

**Office for Diversity**
This program employs five full-time staff and has an annual budget of $500,000. Recently, it has undergone a one-year redevelopment phase following the university’s restructuring, though it has been deployed for the last 12 years. The purpose of this program is to fill the gap left by the EOP program, whose population mandated by state qualification for SES. The majority of EOS students are from underrepresented ethnicities, and some students attended the same high schools but do not make the EOS cutoff, and the Office for Diversity meets the needs of these students in science and math. Intended for underrepresented populations (by race, SES) who aspire to careers in the health professions or to medical school, the Office for Diversity’s tutoring is course-specific and structured.

Many of the 200 students who enroll in the program each year come to the university below par in math and require remedial math assistance. The students self-identify for enrollment in this highly regimented program, and if they do not follow the program guidelines, they will be excluded from the program, which emphasizes general biology, math, general chemistry, and organic chemistry (all premed requirements), as well as some physics. The program was described as “high-energy motivation in spite of students’ challenges,” and consists of a staff-led rally every semester for juniors and seniors who are taking the MCAS. The schedule is very structured, and there are mandatory meetings and study halls. Students need to show their exams and homework to staff, who are very supportive of the students who stick with the program.

The Office for Diversity has its own Director and hires undergraduate and graduate students as tutors. It also employs some FT staff and relies on faculty as well.

The program has collected data on satisfaction from participants as well as academic performance outcomes. The results indicate a beneficial impact, but the respondents noted that no control group was used, which hinders inference from the research. In addition, the program does not allow students to continue if they cannot fulfill their obligations to the program, so impressive results have been found for students who continue, though these appear to be the most conscientious and committed students. However, surveys from students show that they love the program and report high satisfaction.

**Honor Program Peer Tutoring**
When undergraduate students enroll at the university, the top 8% of students participate in a program through which 2% tutor in subjects they choose. This program offers one-on-one tutoring at a higher rate than any other center. A student will come to the center with a need in a course or subject area and is connected with an honors student who tutors them. They set meeting times and locations that are convenient to the pair.

**Interventions in High-Failure Courses**
Like several of the other universities in the study, this institution also offers a Supplemental Instruction program. The university also hosts a **segue program** that provides less rigorous sections of courses that are known to be particularly challenging to students. There are no FTE staff members for this program because it is part of instruction and a budget was not available. It
has operated for 15 years and offers sections in courses for students who would have a success problem in the regular version of the course. Sometimes this means that a freestanding course is developed, or alternately, a section of an existing course is conducted. Enrollment depends on the results of a placement test. The goal of this program is to intervene ahead of time and not place students in courses where they are likely to fail, such as psychology, chemistry, biology, sociology, and history.

For example, the chemistry department holds a section for General Chemistry, which has a high failure and high repeat rate. After the first exam, the professor identifies students who scored below average and gives them an opportunity to step out of the main course and into a course called Preparation for General Chemistry, which gives them skills at a slower pace. These students do have to repeat General Chemistry, but they do tend to do better than those who choose to stay (i.e., better success rate if they opt for the extra semester).

There is also a new program under way that compares math and writing placement scores with success in General Chemistry, which has found a strong correlation with math placement (less so with writing). As a result, students in algebra are not permitted to take General Chemistry. The university now breaks down students’ math placement scores and assigns students to various types of Chemistry based on those scores: Prep for General Chemistry, the segue section of General Chemistry, or Full General Chemistry.

_Detractors to Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students_

While office hours and the electronic distribution of information is quite good at this university, according to the respondents, they explained several institutional practices that might interfere with assisting students who are at risk for academic difficulty, though most of these examples may vary by department, school, or campus. For example, some students are advised to register for more than a semester’s minimum credits so that they can drop a course.

In addition, the university’s budget problems have led it to admit more students in order to raise tuition revenue, while services and classroom capacity have not been expanded. Class size is a direct result of scholastic standing policies to inflate retention rates, they explained. As a result, too many students are brought in, and the new admits tend not to be at the upper end of the academic spectrum; more often, they are students who need more intervention, and academic support services cannot keep up.

The segue program for chemistry and other challenging courses also has some disadvantages. The program sometimes causes students to change their minds about their major or spend more money and time to attend summer school. The interviewees explained that the program needs to develop a curriculum that can substitute for the regular course and not act as a prerequisite.

Another problematic area for students has been the university’s transformation to one set of scholastic standing policies, by which an academic review based on cumulative GPA only occurs once per year. As a result, maintaining an annual review policy potentially leads students to linger in poor performance or to decline in performance over a long period of time so that the damage is so significant by dismissal, there is no way for students to return to the university and the cost of languishing prevents them from coming back to finish. Students would be better served by a review that occurs more than once a year.

Similarly, the probation period for students, believed the interviewees, carries on too long – three to five semesters – so that the university is ultimately moving away from early intervention; students may be dismissed with 95 credits when they weren’t called to task before. Key
information about the consequences of poor performance should be added to their grade reports, explained the respondents. Early intervention is the key to helping students manage academic difficulty, explained the respondents, which is why the Freshman Withdrawal and Academic Success Seminars have worked so well. Students persist for many reasons, and they need to have someone to connect with at the institution, to deliver earlier interventions that are ready for them as they enter college.

Finally, the interviewees believed that the university often does not have enough space in their classes – students cannot enroll in courses they choose because registration is competitive. However, this situation often motivates students who might have a registration block.
**Institutional Case Study D**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution: Public</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Enrollment: 15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Program Characteristics: Scholastic Enhancement Program, Supplemental Instruction Program, learning center</td>
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</table>

**Introduction**

The Associate Dean of Students for Retention and Learning Center Services responded to the interview for this Midwestern University of approximately 15,000 students. The Associate Dean and the university want all students to have a good start, she explained. For example, the university has hall academic advisors who live with first-year students in order for them to have access to staff 24/7. In addition, the President of the university recently established five-year strategic goals that target the university’s 81% six-year graduation rate, aiming to improve it to 85% and eliminate the gap for minority graduation rates. One initiative will be a residency policy that is planned for fall 2009, by which students will be required to live on campus for two years. This program is intended to support programming designed to improve persistence and graduation rates.

Admissions maintain a detailed process for reviewing applications, using several criteria to admit students and for identifying incoming students who might be at risk for academic difficulty, including:

- the rigor of their high school courses
- the quality of their high schools
- the consistency of their grades in high school
- their college entrance exam scores
- their parents’ level of education
- their status as a member of a special population (e.g., athletes, students of color, low-income, and fine arts students)

As a Division 1 school, this university attracts many high-caliber athletes, some of whom are admitted with special consideration because of talent. These students, as well as some Fine Arts students, do not match the profiles of the rest of the general population of students and can be conditionally admitted with the expectation that they will receive extra support in their studies from the university.

Similarly, the admissions office employs ratings when examining transcripts and knows different high school curricula around the country. They use a scale for rating the schools of applicants based on their status as suburban, rural, or urban because curricula are generally not equal across these regions. As the respondent explained, students might appear to be more successful in schools that lack the kinds of curricula available to students in private schools. The Admissions office maintains a comprehensive approach to reviewing applications, looking at AP courses, English courses, the percentage of national merit scholars, and the percentage of students who go on to four-year or two-year colleges, among other criteria. In addition, they closely monitor students whose grades dip in their senior year of high school.
The Associate Dean explained that she works closely with the Admissions office to be aware of incoming students who might face difficulty, and the university has a Scholastic Enhancement Program (SEP) that reserves the right to determine how students are admitted. For instance, if the athletic department wishes to admit a student and says the applicant meets the NCAA criteria but not the university’s general admission standards, the application is referred to the Associate Dean for review. She then determines if the student is a good candidate for the program. SEP is mandatory when it is deemed appropriate for an applicant, and if the student is accepted to the university, his or her acceptance can be conditional on enrollment in the SEP program.

In addition to SEP, grade notification, and the probation program, the university has several programs in place to address academic difficulty, including a pre-enrollment summer program, academic tutoring and coaching, and intervention in courses with high failure rates (see Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Program exists</th>
<th>Years in existence</th>
<th>Participants per year</th>
<th>FTE staff</th>
<th>Program budget</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-enrollment summer academic programs*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandatory grade notification</td>
<td>Yes**</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100 to 150</td>
<td>2 FT support staff</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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</table>
| Academic tutoring or coaching                          | Yes            | 106                | Tutoring: 1,978 headcount and 13,000 hours  
Coaching: unavailable      | 250 tutors     | Included in $1,000,000 Learning Center budget |
| Academic transition programs for transfer students     | No             |                    |                       |                            |                                    |
| Academic probation or dismissal program                 | Yes            | 20 for probation  
5 to 7 for suspension | Probation: 2% of student body  
Suspended: >1% of student body | 2 FT (direct contact is distributed) | Unknown                            |
| Intervention in high-failure courses                   | Yes            | 15                 | 1,700-2,000           | 35 SI leaders; 1 FT administrator (also does other things) | Unknown                            |
| Academic difficulty program***                         | Yes            | 16                 | 100-150               | 2 FT                       | $1,000,000 for the Learning Center, not segmented by program |

*No summer bridge program; a program for high school students is discussed below  
**For SEP  
***SEP

*Pre-enrollment Summer Program*

SEP replaces a former summer bridge program that, after 10 years, was not viable because students who exited the bridge and entered the university system were not monitored by the system, and many left the university. In addition, the Associate Dean explained that students tend to not want to commit several weeks of the summer before their first university year. A study of
the bridge program resulted in recommendations that the university increases its monitoring of students until graduation, and an Assistant Dean was hired and given one year to develop a replacement program in light of the research recommendations. The SEP was formed to take on that need. As a result, retention of students has improved and the new program is able to serve a larger number of students.

SEP does not have a summer component, but the university does have a number of summer programs for junior high and high school students that have existed for a number of years, according to the Associate Dean. Enrolling between 50 and 100 students annually, the university’s Leadership Program hosts high school students who live on campus and take courses and workshops from university faculty. The program attracts both local students and those from around the country, and approximately 25% go on to apply and enroll at the university. There is also the Junior Scholars Program.

SEP

Staffed by two full-time administrators, the SEP typically enrolls 100 to 150 out of the 200 to 250 students who are admitted to the university on the condition they participate in this program, which monitors its students for academic progress until graduation. Students who participate in the SEP agree that SEP staff can access grade reports and other academic records and can confer with a student’s parents about his or her academic progress.¹

A segment of the students who enter the university through the 16-year-old SEP are part of the new Gateway program, which guarantees that qualified low-income students will be financially supported throughout their schooling. Most of these students’ parents have not been college educated, but Gateway students are not at risk academically. In its first year, which was 2007-2008, 18 out of the more than 200 Gateway students came to the university through SEP.

In their first year, SEP students take a one-credit-hour seminar taught by the program coordinators. This seminar amounts to an extended orientation course that introduces all aspects of the campus: the library, computer system, different campus resources, tools needed to be successful, time management skills, organization, the university curriculum, how to calculate a GPA, the advising system, financial aid, student counseling, health center, and the SEP program components and expectations.

The Associate Dean explained that university policies “give the program teeth,” such that if a student is suspended before the end of his or her second year but has been working hard and the staff thinks it is in the student’s best interest to stay in school, a suspension can be waived by the administration. Similarly, if a student will not adhere to program guidelines, SEP administrators can prevent the individual from registering for future classes.

SEP students work with staff on course selection and are advised to use tutoring. They receive feedback on their mid-term evaluations in their courses, as well as intervention with disciplinary problems, if necessary. Students in the program also meet with staff regularly, typically three times per semester. Sometimes a student on probation or warning will meet with staff weekly. These students are put on a signed contract, a copy of which is sent to parents.

¹Probation students on academic warning also must allow their advisors to have access to mid-term grades; these advisors work with students but cannot share information with parents without students’ permission.
SEP is housed in the Learning Center, which has a budget of approximately $1 million per year. The Learning Center is also made up of programs and services for intercollegiate athletics, learning disabilities, tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic probation, and struggling students. It also offers a learning strategies course and learning strategy workshops, and it oversees the first-year student intervention process for students on academic warning. The Center has a full-time staff of 15 and 10 graduate assistantships, one that is assigned to SEP, two that work with learning disabilities program, two that work with academic support (teaching the learning strategies course and doing workshops), and four that help administer the tutorial assistance program.

SEP students have the opportunity to participate in a course called Techniques for College Success (a two-credit-hour course). Students must request to enroll in the course and meet with a learning specialist to see if it will be a good fit (and not just an easy A). The semester-long course focuses on meta-cognition and goal setting, learning styles, learning strategies, and time management.

Finally, new to the SEP is a research and learning community, through which the at-risk first-year students become involved in faculty research and present a poster at the undergraduate research forum. This is the third year for this small initiative, but it has had a lot of success. Last year, 11 students participated in the program, living together and learning about research conducted by faculty members who mentor them. The program is costly because the faculty is paid with a stipend to underwrite the research and to conduct weekly workshops that cover a topic relevant to research (e.g., human subjects or library use for a particular discipline). All of the participating students work directly under different faculty on their faculty sponsors’ current research projects.

Although this research community is expensive, the Associate Dean remarked that the SEP in general is one of the university’s most cost-effective approaches to addressing academic difficulty. It requires two staff members, but the program uses many resources that are already in place for students. For instance, the SEP did not have to build a tutoring program, and it adapted an evaluation system that was already in place for athletics. Much of the expense concerns the time required for communication and staying in touch with students, which the Associate Dean explained is more an issue of labor intensity than money.

**Academic Tutoring and Coaching**

Any student at the university may seek tutoring at the Learning Center, which is staffed by 150 to 200 peer tutors. While the office was established in 1973, the Associate Dean remarked that tutoring at this university has existed for 106 years. Academic coaching by the Center’s 20 to 25 coaches has been offered on a referral basis for the past three years; an approximation of the number of students served and hours delivered was unavailable. In 2006-2007, approximately 13,000 hours of tutoring were delivered and a headcount of 1,978 students received tutoring services.

Coaching is designed for students who have difficulty managing life skills or who need assistance with organizational skills. It is also intended to assist students who have been diagnosed with ADHD and other learning disabilities. Coaching services are delivered by a graduate student who is trained in organizational development and monitors the student’s progress toward short- and long-term goals. The delivery consists of very intensive shadowing in a one-on-one conversational relationship geared toward changing habits that lasts at least one semester. A student may request additional coaching beyond the duration of the semester, or a learning specialist or advisor might recommend additional coaching for that student.
Tutoring, on the other hand, is designed to be content-specific to a student’s specific course. Students may self-select for tutoring, but they are often referred for tutoring by a learning specialist at the Learning Center, a faculty member or their academic advisors. Tutoring services are free and are delivered by undergraduates who have excelled in a subject area, and most tutoring takes place in one-on-one pairs, though some occurs in groups, based on student demand and preference. For instance, a student who is interested in tutoring will make an online request, stating his or her preference, and if demand in that subject area is particularly high, small groups of students will be formed according to course and instructor. Students who participate in tutoring must sign up for a minimum of five sessions.

*Academic Probation and Warning Programs*

Once a student is enrolled at the university, several policies are in place to identify students facing academic difficulty, and there are two full-time staff members assigned to the academic probation and warning programs (with direct contact staff assuming multiple responsibilities). Mid-term evaluations are distributed during the first semester for all first-year students in order to solicit feedback from their professors, and this information is made available to these students and their first-year advisors. In the university’s advising program, advisors live in the residence hall. Mid-term grade information is shared with the hall advisor, who in turn meets with his or her students about their mid-term grade reports. Student athletes are evaluated through a separate system twice each semester and are monitored by the student athlete academic support services as part of the Learning Center operation.

First-year students who do not earn a cumulative 2.0 GPA in their first semester are given an academic warning in the form of a letter from the Dean of Students and receive a mandatory intervention. The intervention involves a hold placed on their records and a required meeting with a learning specialist as well as their academic advisor. These students are also required to complete a learning strategies assessment (LASSIE).

If upperclassmen earn below a 2.0 for their overall GPA, they are placed on academic probation. They receive outreach from the Learning Center, but they face no restrictions. These students are offered optional academic counseling and access to the learning strategies course. The university is currently considering additional interventions for students on probation.

If a student on probation earns below a 2.0 the following semester, that individual is notified with a letter from the registrar that he or she will be suspended for two terms. He or she can automatically reenroll, but a hold is placed on the student’s record, and before registering the student must meet with an academic advisor and a learning specialist.

If a suspended student returns and earns below a 2.0 in the semester back, that student is dismissed and is not allowed to reenroll for two calendar years, at which point he or she must petition to return to the university. However, students can petition throughout the process if they have an extenuating circumstance.

*Intervention in High-Failure Courses*

Modeled after the University of Missouri in Kansas City, the university developed a Supplemental Instruction (SI) program and now offers it in 30 to 40 sections of courses with high withdrawal and/or failure rates. This program provides direct support to more than 6,000 students each year. Approximately 2,000 of these students participate by attending SI review sessions that are delivered by peers who excelled in the corresponding courses by earning a grade of A. Having been recommended by course faculty, the university’s 35 SI leaders are trained in collaborative learning, learning theory, and group dynamic techniques before they repeat the course with their
students and conduct regular review sessions for them. One full-time staff professional is responsible for the SI program, though this individual also assumes other responsibilities.

The SI program is easy to implement because the materials for training are all developed at the University of Missouri, as is an assessment system, but the program is expensive because the university has to pay SI leaders. Training also requires a time commitment, which is an expensive resource.

Program Evaluation
As noted above, the Associate Dean explained that the SEP was developed in response to targeted research concerning retention of at-risk students. She added that an overall program evaluation of the Learning Center was conducted three years ago and is conducted on a five-year basis. However, the Center collects extensive data on each of its programs and services every year, for example, students evaluate the tutoring and SEP, and a survey of student athletes on academic support is also performed. Grades are pulled for all students who use tutoring, and extensive comparative data is pulled for students who participate in the SI program. Data was not easily accessible at the time of the interview for this project, but the Associate Dean explained that so far, their data has confirmed the success of the Center.

She believed that no one program is superior to any other when it comes to retaining at-risk students or students in general, explaining that the variety of options is what makes the university climate positive for students. All students are different and have different needs, and likewise, they leave for various reasons, she said. It is important for each institution to examine its culture and climate and ensure there are a variety of supports in place.

This university is unique because it is selective while attracting and admitting many students of talent (in fine arts and athletics), who constitute an at-risk population that might not be at risk in other institutions; they would be in good standing elsewhere, she explained. It is important, she continued, to understand the dynamics of what factors will impact a student athlete’s academic success and to be aware of the support they need even when they do well. They need people to be sensitive to their pressures, and the university provides this.

The university’s success depends on its holistic approach of checks and balances. For instance, the SEP serves a certain population of students, but the university has other options in place for the rest of the student body, such as tutoring, which is not meant for any one type of student.

Challenges to Retention
The Associate Dean noted some university policies or practices that can pose a challenge to retention and student persistence. First, the university could improve its advising system, she explained, because faculty members do not always do a good job with lower division students (especially sophomores). In addition, university divisions put prerequisites in place before students can matriculate, which can appear as major obstacles to some students. The business school, for instance, maintains criteria for students to be business majors, such as a minimum 3.0 overall GPA and completion of specific courses to be admitted to the major. Likewise, Teacher Education serves a maximum number of students in a cohort, resulting in a competitive process for selecting students by GPA, which is not a valid criterion for who will make a good teacher. Having a GPA requirement of 2.5 when the cohort contains students who have all earned a GPA of 3.5 will eliminate hard-working students who meet the minimum of a 2.5, she explained. In effect, departments that set their own standards to manage enrollments contradict university standards and put students in jeopardy by focusing on GPA instead of learning.

26
Institutional Case Study E

Type of Institution: Public

Undergraduate Enrollment: 17,425

Retention Program Characteristics: Student Readiness Inventory, First Start program, Learning Enhancement Program, TRiO program

Introduction

The Director of the TRiO program in Student Support Services (SSS) responded to the survey for this university of 17,425 full-time students in the Western United States. She explained that the following criteria are considered when identifying first-year students who may be at academic risk:

- Less rigorous high school courses
- Deficiencies in certain types of high school courses
- High school GPA
- College entrance exam scores (ACT, SAT)
- Parents’ level of education

The University creates an index number based on students’ ACT composite scores and high school GPA, and students whose index number falls below a certain standard are flagged as potentially struggling students. In particular, a student with a weak reading score is anticipated to have a difficult time in college, though the university does not offer remedial reading assistance. Students with math deficiencies can receive remedial instruction. If a student is below the university’s minimum for admission on the index, the ACT, or high school GPA but is still within a certain range, the individual can be admitted through sponsorship by the SSS program.

The university is also beginning to employ an early warning assessment (Student Readiness Inventory - SRI) offered by ACT, which relies on a survey given to incoming students to identify areas that might be flags for concern. The SSS project had used the Noel-Levitz survey (a similar instrument) for a couple years, but will switch to ACT version when the university implements the ACT SRI, which will highlight areas of social or non-academic weakness for a student. The online administration of this survey produces an instantly scored report for the student’s advisor, who can work with the student to find appropriate campus resources to help the student. The Noel-Levitz measure even provided a score measuring a student’s likelihood of dropping out.

The university uses overall GPA to identify current students who are having academic difficulty, and SSS is aware of students who qualify as low-income and may be working, which can pose a challenge to academic success. Students are also referred to the SSS program by advisors, financial aid, or disability services when they are showing academic difficulty. In addition, students can self-select to receive academic support, and the director noted that many students come for assistance in math even though their GPAs may be high from better grades in other subject areas. Because the program is federally funded (receiving an annual grant of $300,000), SSS must attend to students who are low-income and/or first-generation college students (as well as those with disabilities) because only these students meet eligibility criteria.

The TRiO director discussed the multiple outlets available to students within SSS and elsewhere at the university, including the First Start and Upward Bound/Bridge summer programs, academic tutoring, the academic probation system, and intervention in high-failure courses. However, she
spoke more generally about what seems to prevent students from leaving the university, explaining that students who feel like they belong on campus tend to stay. Intrusive advising makes students feel like they have someone who cares about what happens to them and is available to see them through their years at the university. Many different outlets on campus provide advising to students, beyond the official advising system at the Advising Center (see Table 5). The confluence of support options catches students who may have fallen through the cracks at another institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Program exists</th>
<th>Years in existence</th>
<th>Participants per year</th>
<th>FTE staff</th>
<th>Program budget*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrollment summer academic programs*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25 to 40 in combined programs</td>
<td>3 FT residential; 1 FTE of 3 instructors; 1.5 FTE who do advising as part of their jobs</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory grade notification</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic tutoring or coaching</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>200 students in SSS only</td>
<td>1 FT tutor; 4 FTE students who work 2 to 20 hours/week; also some volunteers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic transition programs for transfer students</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic probation or dismissal program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention in high-failure courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*$300,000 federal grant for Student Support Services (SSS)

**Summer Pre-Enrollment Programs**

Recently merged into one program, the First Start and Upward Bound Bridge summer programs serve between 25 and 40 first-year students in a six-week residency. First Start began as a non-residential program that was turned into a residential program after university administrators saw the positive outcomes of the Upward Bound Bridge model in effect. The TRiO Director took six months to develop the revised First Start program, which was then merged with the Upward Bound Bridge program.

The high school students in the Upward Bound program participate from tenth grade onward, and the First Start program – which was modeled on Upward Bound Bridge – enrolls low-income, first-generation students who are admitted to the university but need remedial instruction based on their index scores and placement in one of two remedial math courses. In the program, students take up to nine credit hours over the six weeks, amounting to half a semester of coursework in math, writing skills, and college success strategies.

The TRiO director oversees these summer programs, which are instructed by a full-time math teacher who works year-round for SSS, a post-doc student in the Ed-Psych department (which sponsors the college success strategies), and a faculty member in the writing department (which is currently piloting a new writing skills course in the summer bridge program). Together, these three instructors amount to one FTE. The summer programs are also staffed by three full-time
staff members who reside with the students and 1.5 FTEs, which consists of two SSS staff members who do advising in the summer program as part of their overall job responsibilities.

The director noted that First Start was one of the easiest programs to implement for at-risk students because the model was already in place in the form of Upward Bound Bridge, which was expanded to include more students. However, because of the residency component, First Start has not been the program with the lowest investment level.

_Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL)_: The program offers ESL tutoring and three levels of conversational English classes.

_Academic Tutoring_: In addition to the TriO/EOP tutoring services, tutoring resources span 13 departments on campus (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Tutoring Services Offered Across University E**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Type of Tutoring</th>
<th>Fee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Government-Sponsored Tutoring Center</td>
<td>Individual and group, by appointment, in most subject areas, including academic skills</td>
<td>$3.00/hr for group $6.00/hr for individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics department</td>
<td>Drop-in tutoring provided to student athletes in most subject areas, by appointment</td>
<td>Free to student athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Disability Services (CDS)</td>
<td>Content area tutoring for eligible students who are registered at CDS</td>
<td>Free to eligible students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Ethnic Student Affairs</td>
<td>Drop-in tutoring for students in math and English during office hours</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRiO</td>
<td>Drop-in and appointment for students eligible for TRiO, in mathematics and writing skills</td>
<td>Free to TRiO/EOP students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise and Sport Science</td>
<td>Group and individual tutoring for students in upper-level ESS courses</td>
<td>Free to ESS students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and Residential Education</td>
<td>Drop-in tutoring in chemistry, physics, math, and writing</td>
<td>Free to all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Center</td>
<td>ESL tutoring and three levels of conversational English classes</td>
<td>$100/semester for tuition and books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Drop-in and group tutoring for students in 1,000, 2,000, and some 3,000 level math courses</td>
<td>Free for math students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Sciences</td>
<td>Drop-in tutoring in math and physics for students in the naval sciences</td>
<td>Free for Naval ROTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Drop-in tutoring for students in designated physics courses</td>
<td>Free for students enrolled in specific physics courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Affairs</td>
<td>Individual tutoring for students receiving VA benefits, in any course required by a major or for general ed. requirements</td>
<td>Free or reimbursed for qualified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondent noted that the Tutoring Center offers one of the largest tutoring programs at the university. The Tutoring Center matches students with tutors in their areas of need and provides individual and group tutoring for students in a range of subjects, though this resource is the only tutoring option that charges a fee. Described by the university Web site as “a reasonable rate,” the TRiO Director also noted that this fee is often waved for students with Pell Grants, and the student government also helps to defray the cost of tutoring. Tutoring appointments take place at times determined by the tutors and their clients, including evenings and weekends, and at a location chosen by the tutor and the student. All new Tutoring Center tutors are trained, and continued training is also offered. The goal of this tutoring training program is “to teach tutors to promote student independence, active learning, and motivation,” according to the Web site.

**Academic Difficulty Program**

Many professionals on campus are responsible for assisting students with academic difficulty, according to the TRiO Director. The university offers a course titled *Strategies for Academic Success* through the Educational Psychology department, and this course is open to all students. The University College also offers Academic Success workshops by registration and the Learning Enhancement Program (LEP) through the Counseling Center. This program offers a variety of Student Survival Skills workshops in the areas of Time Management and Study Skills, Test Taking/Test Anxiety, Assessing Learning Styles, Memory, Critical Thinking Skills, and Reading/Note-Taking Skills.

LEP also offers an online learning center that is accessible to all students. This site is designed to help students find basic study tips and academic support at any time. It consists of a variety of academic resources compiled from other universities and learning Web sites in the following topic areas:

- Assessment
- Critical Thinking
- Health and Wellness
- Learning Disabilities
- Learning Preparation
- Learning Strategies
- Library and Internet
- Math and Science
- Math Study Skills
- Memory
- Note-Taking
- Oral Presentations
- Online Courses: Effective Study Strategies
- Reading
- Study Skills and Test Guides
- Test Anxiety
- Test Taking
- Time Management
- Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Center</th>
<th>Tutoring for all students in writing, by appointment or walk-in</th>
<th>Free for all veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
• Writing

The Counseling Center on campus also offers workshops in test anxiety and an online reference list for students contending with various areas of stress, such as time management, anxiety, and study skills.

Academic Probation Program
The university maintains a visible system of academic standards and the outcomes for students who do not meet them, which is available for students to review on the university Web site. Students at this university must maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 to remain in good standing and is considered “low list” if their term GPA is below 2.0 but their cumulative GPA is a 2.0 or above. A low list student is still eligible to be enrolled at the university.

If a student’s cumulative GPA falls below 2.0, that student is placed on academic warning and an advising hold is placed on his or her registration. The student needs to complete an Academic Success Workshop to have the hold removed; the workshop is conducted in a 60-minute session at the Advising office or through an online program. The Academic Success Workshop explains the university’s policy on probation and offers strategies and resources to help students overcome their academic difficulties. Students on academic warning are also encouraged to make individual appointments with an academic advisor who helps them to generate strategies to be more successful.

Students on academic warning who do not increase their cumulative and/or term GPA to a minimum of 2.0 are placed on academic probation. These students receive a letter from the Advising Center informing them that they need to meet with an academic advisor in order to have the hold on their records removed.

Students who do not increase their cumulative and/or term GPA to a minimum of 2.0 after a third term are suspended from the university for two terms and must appeal to the university to reenroll. To begin the appeal, they must meet with an academic advisor two months prior to the start of the term for which they hope to return. Students with extenuating circumstances that contribute to their suspension may appeal to return to the university before the end of the two-term period.

Programs for Transfer Students
The university hosts a center for transfer students that require them to meet with an advisor and attend either a comprehensive or abbreviated orientation session before they can register for their first semester at the university. Advisors from the university’s Advising Center also regularly visit community colleges that yield many transfer students to meet with prospective students.

Intervention in High-Failure Courses
The university offers Supplemental Instruction in courses with high failure rates. SI sessions are conducted by undergraduate students who have excelled in a given course and are recommended as SI leaders by faculty. SI is housed in the Learning Enhancement Program, which describes the purpose of SI on their Web site:

“The main goal of the SI program is to help students learn the course material and improve their course grade. In addition, we assist students in improving their study skills. We also provide students with an informal, personal, small group
learning experience that helps them feel connected to other students and demonstrates the power of group study.”

SI is available in the following subject areas at this university:

- Chemistry
- American Civilization
- Algebra
- Physics
- U.S. National Government
- Psychology

**Inhibitors to Success**

The respondent named a few institutional practices or policies that might compromise students’ academic success. Sometimes, she explained, the admissions system becomes too liberal with their window for admission when considering applicants who do not meet standard admission criteria. As a result, students are admitted to the university who might not do well there, but once they enroll, the support staff cannot advise them effectively. In response, some departments are trying to implement more stringency with admissions. However, she noted, TriO often sponsors these students, so she would not want to necessarily make the policies more rigid.

In addition, the university is large and decentralized, making each department a kingdom unto itself. It becomes difficult to distribute a mid-term grade report to faculty in order to determine which students are struggling halfway through the semester because faculty do not tend to fill them out and there is no institutionalized requirement for these reports. The athletic department tends to get a better response in this area because they wield more influence, but other programs struggle to achieve a faculty response with these reports because there is currently no system for it.
Institutional Case Study F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution: Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Enrollment: 16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Program Characteristics: Minority Student Advisory Program, Academic Monitoring System, Academic Success program, Summer Bridge program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction

The undergraduate Retention Coordinator responded to the interview for the case study of this Southern university, which enrolls a full-time undergraduate headcount of 16,000, on average, each year. The respondent explained that the university has a vast range of services designed to assist students at risk for academic difficulty, housed in different offices around the campus. Despite the institutional commitment to fostering student academic success, the recent push to get students to graduate on a four-year timeline may turn out to be an impediment to their academic success. However, she acknowledged that it might also help them graduate in a timely manner.

The Retention Coordinator explained that the university does not use any specific criteria to identify incoming students who may be at risk for academic difficulty and does not track certain students for special services because they may be at risk due to income, high school rigor, or grades and exam scores. The university tracks students in the following groups: summer bridge participants, state-funded scholarship recipients, student athletes, students of color, and first-generation college students.

The University has a program that guarantees free tuition for students (including non-residents). The program is directed to students from historically low-income families, as opposed to those whose parent(s) may have had a low income the prior year, but who have assets or other resources to help pay for college costs. This program centers on family income to identify its students, but it also provides non-financial assistance to its participants during their college years through academic skills workshops, financial skills workshops, a mentoring program, individualized advising, and counseling. The university Web site explains:

“They may experience challenges in adapting to the large University setting or to various aspects of college life. Carolina provides excellent services to help students, including a Learning Center, a Writing Center, Math Help Center, and General Chemistry Resources Center. In addition, students have access to academic and other student services support organizations, programs, and assistance.”

As indicated in this description of campus resources, the university has a range of options for students facing academic difficulty, though certain budget and staffing data was unavailable to the respondent during data collection, so it is not presented in a table for this case.

Summer Bridge Program

For 20 years, the university has hosted a seven-week summer bridge program for 60 first-year students, who live at the university but are not responsible for the cost to attend. Designed to ease the transition from high school to the college, students enroll in several academic courses:

- Basic Writing
- English Composition and Rhetoric
• College Algebra
• Pre-Calculus
• Selected Topics in Mathematics
• General Descriptive Chemistry I

Each participant must take one English course and one mathematics or chemistry course, which are taught by the university’s faculty, and students who successfully complete their coursework earn three credit hours. Their grades are recorded on the official transcript and count toward their grade point average.

Academic lectures by faculty from various departments help to improve the Bridge students’ note-taking and listening skills, as well as their comfort with the size of college lecture courses. Students visit academic departments and professional schools to learn about their programs, preparation for admission, and career opportunities. They learn about the range of majors, faculty, current students, and administrators.

Students also participate in learning strategies instruction that is taught by the Learning Center. These workshops help students with skills for note-taking, test taking, and problem solving. Individual and group tutoring are also part of the Summer Bridge Program. Other information sessions include financial aid, study skills, time management, student judicial system, and academic advising.

The program also consists of cultural and recreational activities so that incoming students can learn about the resources and opportunities available at the university.

The program recruits students from small and medium-sized high schools because these students can experience difficulty adjusting to a larger college environment and diverse class setting. As a result, the summer bridge Web site explains that the program “attempts to reaffirm the self-confidence and self-esteem of every student.”

Students who did not take any high school Advanced Placement courses are encouraged to apply for the Summer Bridge. The selection process also considers students who might benefit most from the program and who are seeking a highly structured and culturally diverse environment. Admission to the program depends on the following criteria:

• State residency
• Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores (for placement purposes only, students must submit their Math SAT IIC results)
• High school courses and grades
• High school class rank
• Size of the student’s senior class
• Extracurricular and leadership activities.

The program's staff includes 10 tutors, as well as residential counselors who are students at the university, all of whom have records of academic success. Counselors meet informally with students to discuss subjects such as campus and Greek organizations, social life, cultural diversity, self-awareness, and student government.
**Academic Probation/Dismissal**

The Office of Undergraduate Education oversees the university’s new academic probation program. All students are required to meet certain requirements to stay in good academic standing. Students are placed on academic probation if they have a GPA below 2.0 or have insufficient credits:

- 9 academic hours to enter a second semester
- 24 academic hours to enter a third semester (30 hours is recommended)
- 36 academic hours to enter a fourth semester
- 51 academic hours to enter a fifth semester (60 hours is recommended)
- 63 academic hours to enter a sixth semester
- 78 academic hours to enter a seventh semester (90 hours is recommended)
- 93 academic hours to enter an eighth semester
- Special permission of the Dean to enter a ninth semester

Students are considered at risk if their GPA falls between 2.0 and 2.3. The academic probation program has only been in effect for one year, with 159 students placed on probation in the 2007-2008 academic year. The budget for this program is $5,000, though this also includes “anything having to do with retention,” according to the respondent, who also believed that while comparison of programs is difficult, the probation program was the least expensive to implement because it relies on information and support systems that have already been in place.

Students on probation receive several services, including student success mentors, student academic counseling, peer mentors, and academic support for student athletes. These resources are housed in the office of Academic Services and Undergraduate Education (see following section) and are intended “to be responsive to students’ individual needs and to provide appropriate services so students can gain the confidence essential to their success at the University.”

Students who are not in good standing after their first semester must meet with an academic advisor to devise a plan that will help them return to good standing and are encouraged to attend summer school at the university. During their probationary semester, they must follow a four-step program that is outlined on the university’s Web site. First, they must complete an online self-assessment, which states that it “is an opportunity for [students] to reflect on [their] experiences and to start thinking about ways to improve [their] academic performance.” The assessment asks academic and non-academic questions and asks questions about employment, social life, mental wellness, and factors that might contribute to academic difficulty. After completing the assessment, students must participate in the online Student Success Seminar, which assists them in setting new academic goals and learning skills like time management. When they complete the seminar, students must sign a contract that states their understanding of the requirements for good academic standing. A hold is placed on their registration until they complete the online assessment and seminar, submit the signed contract, and meet with an academic advisor. The meeting between the student and an academic advisor is intended to assist the student with “academic planning and the development of educational and career plans.”

There are also two optional programs for students on probation: a) Come Back and b) Individualized Counseling sessions with the Learning Center, which is set to start in fall 2008. Come Back is a semester-long program in which students on academic probation meet weekly for an hour. In creative and experiential ways, Come Back addresses study skills, test-taking
strategies, learning styles, overcoming procrastination, time-management, emotion regulation, stress management, persistence, and self-understanding. The spring 2008 semester was the first deployment of the program, for which 36 students registered. Come Back meets for an hour per week in a group led by a mental health professional and peer coach. The students connect with other students in similar circumstances while learning important skills for college success. Results from the resiliency program already point to success: 60% of participants returned to good academic standing after the program.

The evaluation of the new probation program that was conducted after its first year found that 52% of the students placed on probation in the fall returned to good standing during the spring semester. The university is now studying the outcomes of a summer program.

*Academic Difficulty*

Academic Services is made up of seven academic support programs:

- Academic Support Program for Student Athletes
- Chemistry Resource Center
- Physics Tutorial Center
- Math Center
- Writing Center
- Learning Center (includes the Academic Success Program for Students with L.D/ADHD)
- Summer Bridge Program (described above)

Staffed by 13 counselors, specialists, and administrators, the Academic Support Program for athletes serves approximately 800 students, including programs on study skills, tutoring services, registration advising, and a Supplemental Instruction (SI) program. Selected student athletes also act as liaisons between their teams and the Academic Support Program based on their academic success and leadership. These students participate in monthly leadership development workshops.

The General Chemistry Resource Center supplements instruction for students enrolled in any of nine chemistry courses through drop-in tutoring. The Physics Tutorial Center operates in a similar fashion for that department. The Math Help Center works with students seeking help in several math courses and is staffed by undergraduate students, math graduate students, and faculty. Four to seven tutors are available to work with individual students or in small groups. The Math Center also has a new program that offers help via e-mail. The Writing Center offers free help to all university students, staff, and faculty. Tutors work with students on all areas of writing, such as topic development, organization, style, and grammar. Individual tutoring is available by appointment.

The Academic Success Program for Students with L.D/ADHD and the Learning Center offer peer mentoring and tutoring, a reading lab, supplemental instruction, and counseling with learning specialists to students who have officially diagnosed learning disabilities. These specialists act as advocates for students in their courses and often assist in securing accommodations such as extended exam times. They also advise students on note-taking, writing, studying, time management, and test-taking. Students can also receive coaching at the Learning Center, and they choose the focus (e.g., academics, relationships, career, personal growth, money, and health). The student and his or her coach design the structure and format of the sessions, whether in person or by phone or e-mail. Finally, the Learning Center offers groups that meet regularly on topics such as managing stress, balancing life, and handling addictions.
Academic Counseling and Advising for Minority Students
The Office for Student Academic Counseling is responsible for academic and personal support to all of the university’s students. As stated on their Web site, “OSC’s primary objective is to sponsor programs and activities that promote academic excellence, increase retention, and improve the campus climate for diversity among Native American and African American undergraduates.”

The office provides several key programs to students:

- The Minority Student Advisory Program
  - In this program, Minority Advisors (MAs) act as peer counselors to minority first-year undergraduates by providing academic counseling and assisting them with their transition from high school to university life.

- Academic Monitoring System
  - This program identifies students in danger of academic failure early in the semester. Professors and instructors complete progress reports that assess students’ performance, which the deans review to direct graduate students to develop strategies for improvement with the students.

- Academic Skills Enhancement Workshops and Scholastic Advancement Sessions
  - These workshops help students to strengthen study skills through organized topical discussions.
  - The sessions provide academic assistance in the natural sciences, math, English, social sciences, and foreign languages. A minority advisor conducts each session and will often provide tutoring by appointment.

Mandatory Grade Notification
The university delivers all first-year students’ grade reports to their academic advisors. Overseen by the Office of Undergraduate Education and delivered by three FTE staff members in the office of Academic Counseling, this early warning system delivers mid-term assessments of how the student is doing.

Programs for Transfer Students
The university offers five programs for transfer students:

- Transfer Student Honor Society
- A student organization for transfer students
- Peer mentoring for transfer students
- Minority Student Transfer Committee
- Transfer student orientation program for students coming from two-year colleges
Discussion
The six case studies presented in the Findings exhibit several areas of congruence that may be insightful for meeting the needs of students who are at risk for academic difficulty. In addition to an institutional commitment to retention at high levels of the administration, these universities also reported the following similar themes: a) relationship building; b) variety of safety nets; and c) intrusive advising.

Relationship Building
Nearly every respondent explained that retention of students who face academic difficulty necessitates communicating that they belong at the university and have advocates available to assist them in navigating their academic challenges.

The importance of belonging, or building relationships between at-risk students and on-campus adults, is supported by several empirical studies. Ostrove and Long (2007) noted the role of social class in college students’ sense of belonging, which they asserted was a protective factor in persistence. As the case study respondents in the present study reported, income is often a criterion for identifying at-risk students in the incoming class, and building supportive relationships with them can be important to seeing them through to graduation. Conveying a sense of belonging to freshmen who may be first-generation college students or who may also have to work while attending school appears to be the keystone in their bridge to graduation. As Ostrove and Long found in their survey of liberal arts students, social class background was significantly related to perceptions of belonging at college, and sense of belonging mediated the relationship between class and adjustment to college life.

Variety of Safety Nets
All of the interview participants explained that their campuses maintain multiple strategies in place for attending to students who need academic assistance, primarily through myriad tutoring resources, tracking GPAs, and college skills instruction. Although the availability of multiple safety nets was described as redundant by some of the participants, these options also may give students so many options that they cannot avoid getting help. Institution E, for instance, published a list of 13 tutoring offices on its campus, as well as coaching and counseling in various skill sets (e.g., time management, note-taking).

What is evident is that the safety nets that are available to students are context-specific, meaning they aim to leverage a particular student demographic in a specific campus culture, such as an institution where math and science requirements often threaten students’ academic standing or a university that admits many students of talent (fine arts and athletes) who will require academic support outside their areas of expertise. As a 2008 pilot study (Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu) of the association between university practices and student retention rates revealed, each campus has “a unique constellation of factors influencing student persistence” (p. 13). The authors of this study advised a course of action that is supported by the findings of the present case study: “Schools should take away from this research the need to understand retention within their individual institutional context” (p. 21).

Intrusive Advising
A 2003 report by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) asserted that academic advising, among other factors such as financial aid and research, assists in college students’ persistence to graduation. The authors of the report recommended early outreach programs and advising systems to identify students who are at risk, which all of the respondents’ institutions appear to use.
The case study respondents often referred to the use of intrusive advising, which is a component of the relationship building and attempts to cultivate belonging that they perceive are important to retaining at-risk students. Indeed, research has repeatedly concluded that providing at-risk youth with one supportive relationship with an adult is critical as a protective factor (Spencer, 2002). Setting a dependable and persistent advising system in place for incoming students who are at risk for academic difficulty is prominent in a comprehensive program for at-risk students.

Recommendations for Future Research
As the authors of the AFT report advocated, further study of students’ reasons for not persisting to graduation is necessary for universities to target their needs and interests in a contextualized way. While the case studies of peer institutions’ strategies for supporting at-risk students are hopefully insightful and useful, the University of Hawaii, Manoa is advised to consider an evaluation of its student body to ascertain what it may need to design and develop to best meet their contextualized needs for academic support. More than one of the institutions in the sample reported the use of student evaluations of tutors, advisors, and/or support programming to inform policies and practices.

The University of Hawaii may also wish to undertake a self-study of faculty and staff perceptions of resources available and needed for at-risk students and the extent to which faculty, staff, and students believe that relationship building, intrusive advising, and a variety of safety nets are available and known by students.

References

