Education Advisory Board | Academic Affairs Forum

Centralized Student Success Centers

Promoting Student Success Through Central Provision of Resources

Custom Research Brief

Academic Affairs Forum

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Table of Contents

1) Executive Overview **4**

Key Observations 4

2) Overview of Student Success Services **5**

Services and Programming 5

Format for Services 7

2) Operation of Student Success Centers **8**

Staffing 8

Promotion of Services 9

Space Needs 10

Hours 11

Budget 12

2) Assessment of Student Success Center Programming **12**

Assessment Process 12

Observed Outcomes 12

3) Research Methodology **14**

Project Challenge 14

Project Sources 14

Research Parameters 14

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Institutions establish centralized student success centers to address college transition and preparedness challenges and increase student retention. Underclass students especially struggle to manage their free time efficiently and may not be prepared for rigorous college curricula. Centers offer individual and group tutoring, supplemental instruction for courses with high failure rates, academic counseling, and academic strategy courses and workshops. Administrators at **University D** and **University E** also plan to offer centralized first-year advising services to improve advising quality and relieve a burden on faculty members.

Contacts recommend that administrators centralize student success resources on one website and in one office on campus. Central websites typically feature an "About Us" section that describes the center's mission, a complete list of services with detailed descriptions, information for prospective student tutors or instructions, and information for faculty and staff about how to request presentations or submit student referrals. **University D** maintains a central website for its student success center; however, offices within the center are located in different locations on campus because of space limitations. Contacts seek to physically centralize resources for students' convenience. **University C** previously offered student success resources in different offices or locations on campus but centralized resources to improve accessibility of services and facilitate assessment.

Contacts encourage administrators to offer for-credit learning strategies courses or require low-performing students to participate in student success center programming to maximize student use of resources. Students on academic probation at **University D** rarely seek services from the University's student success center because all services are voluntary and students are embarrassed to utilize resources. In addition to required or for-credit courses, contacts explain that modern facilities with updated lounges and computer labs encourage students to seek center services.

Faculty members submit student referrals to student success centers so that center staff can send targeted emails to students who would benefit from services. Faculty members at **University C** may call the student success center or send names and student identification numbers to the center's email address to recommend students for academic support. In addition, faculty members may submit referrals through the University's Blackboard interface and First Year Intervention website.

Student success center directors seek greater faculty involvement in student success center operations beyond referral submission. Contacts recommend that faculty members assist supplemental instruction leaders with creation of class outlines and provide guidance to tutors about their personal teaching style and expectations. Institutions that seek to involve faculty in student success center programming should appoint directors who have both education and academic backgrounds because directors who have teaching experience possess greater credibility with faculty members.

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2) Overview of Student Success Services

Services and Programming

Offer Services That Address Course Content Needs and Promote Study Skills Development

Administrators consider programming at peer institutions and services provided by other offices on campus to determine the types of services to offer. For example, **University A** does not offer writing services through the centralized student success center on the University's health sciences campus because another campus office provides writing instruction. **University E** features a number of services outside the student success center, including a writing center within the English department and a math lab in the Math department. The new center's director plans to incorporate these services because students perceive there is a negative stigma associated with seeking out departmental centers. Students may be concerned that tutors or staff in departmental centers will alert faculty members that they have pursued help.

Services That Address Course Content Needs

Tutoring	Most institutions feature individual or group tutoring in core courses. The top five tutored subjects at **University D** include math, English, chemistry, biology, and Spanish. Sessions typically last 30 minutes to an hour.
Supplemental Instruction	Free supplemental instruction (SI) sessions allow students to review material and prepare for tests in courses with high withdrawal or failure rates such as math, business, chemistry, and engineering. Contacts advise offering supplemental instruction for courses with a large number of sections especially because students often do not receive adequate one-on-one attention by faculty members in these courses. Undergraduate students who lead SI sections complete readings, attend class meetings, and take notes to prepare to teach SI sessions. Supplemental instruction groups at **University D** meet three times per week for one-hour sessions.

Student success center staff at **University C** identify courses with at least a 20 percent failure rate annually to determine courses for which to offer supplemental instruction.

Services That Promote Study Skills Development

Academic Counseling	Institutions offer peer and professional academic counseling and coaching. Academic coaches at **University C** meet one-on-one with students to review course loads and discuss learning strategies.
Academic Success Workshops	The student success center at **University D** offers voluntary, one-hour workshops one to two times per semester. The most in-demand workshops are the center's time management and study and test-taking skills workshops. Students on probation at **University C** attend a 60-minute workshop to review their academic record and develop plans for academic success.
Presentations On-Demand	The new student success center at **University E** will offer presentations on study skills upon request in locations such as residence halls and for groups such as sports teams.

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Services That Promote Study Skills Development (Cont.)

Academic Strategies Courses	**University A** requires undergraduate students who are on academic probation or are likely to go on academic probation to attend a one-credit academic strategies class. The course discusses time management, test-taking, and study strategies. Students complete an academic development plan during the course but complete few additional assignments. The student success center at **University B** features several for-credit learning strategy courses. For example, students who are enrolled in any section of the University's finite mathematics course may complete a math learning strategies course.[1] The course teaches students problem-solving strategies to prevent reliance on memorization.

Promote Students' Social Integration Through Mentorship Programs and Student Employment Services

Students who participate in campus activities or work on campus are more likely to experience high persistence and retention rates. A program at **University A** encourages students who struggle in their courses to develop their academic skills. Students attend two workshops and two academic counseling sessions to receive certification as scholars. Center staff encourage scholars to pursue additional training to become academic mentors to other students. The student success center at **University D** oversees student employment services because students who receive a campus job are more likely to socially integrate.

Provide First-year Advising Services Through Student Success Centers to Improve Advising Quality

Institutions also plan to centralize first-year academic advising within student success centers to provide professional advising based on individual students' preparation. Three academic advisors in the new student success center at **University E** will meet one-on-one with entering first-year students during eight early registration advising sessions. Advisors will have access to student data featured on Banner such as demographic data, test scores, high school grade point averages, and placement scores.

Administrators at **University D** also plan to fully centralize advising resources for first-year students and transfer students to relieve a burden on faculty members. Two professional advisors located in the student success center currently train 28 graduate students who advise students in different departments on campus. The University offers additional advising through a center for first-year programs. Under the new model, one professional staff member located in the student success center will coordinate all advising services.

[1]University B student success center website.

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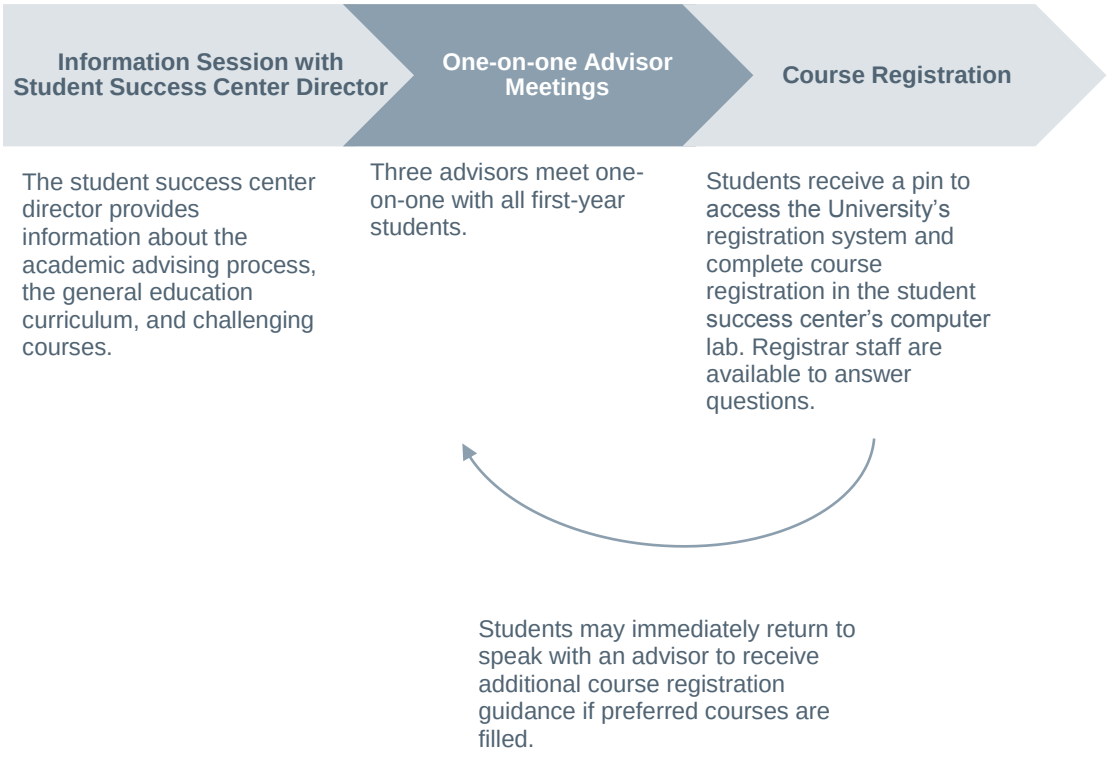
Early Registration Advising Sessions at *University E*



Format for Services

Centers Adapt Services to Phone or Online Formats Based on Student Demand

Student success centers primarily deliver services face-to-face. However, most institutions offer tutoring services through Skype or over the phone if students are unable to visit student success centers in person. The student success center at **University D** offered tutoring services and partnered with a third-party vendor, AskOnline, for several years through a $7,000 annual contract. Staff selected AskOnline because the system allowed the center to employ its own tutors, whereas other vendors provide professional tutors. Contacts express high satisfaction with the platform and the company's technical support, but observe that few tutors outside of math or writing were comfortable providing tutoring services online despite training.

Student success centers also increasingly adapt services to online formats to respond to decreased in-person attendance and to provide greater flexibility to students.

Success centers that do not adapt programming to online formats may include links to external online resources such as studyblue.com on their website.

Online Student Success Programming

- **Online academic strategies workshops and courses: University A's** center currently delivers its academic strategies course in a hybrid format. Students attend courses in person but complete discussion board assignments and submit projects online. The center will offer the course entirely online through Blackboard Learn next quarter.

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- **Video podcasts:** Center staff at **University B** are converting content from the center's in-person workshop series into 15- to 20-minute video podcasts to respond to declining attendance rates for in-person workshops. Sample podcasts include test taking and time-management. Contacts describe podcasts as a more student-friendly delivery system because students may listen to podcasts at any time and access lessons multiple times.
- **Online PowerPoints: University D** features presentations from workshops on the student success center's website for students who cannot attend sessions in person.

2) Operation of Student Success Centers

Staffing

Hire a Director, Coordinators, and an Administrative Assistant to Serve in the Student Success Center Full-time

Professional staff select services and programming, provide professional advising and counseling services, and train student tutors and instructors. Directors and assistant directors coordinate all student success center programming, whereas coordinators typically develop and train staff for individual services such as tutoring or individual courses.

Common Professional Staff Positions

	Role	Typical Qualifications
Director	▪ Selects and develops student success center programming ▪ Hires and supervises student success center staff	▪ PhD or master's degree in education or a related field ▪ Previous experience directing student success programming or managing student success centers
Assistant Director	Supports director in organization of student success center programming	▪ Master's degree in education, counseling, or related field ▪ Previous experience in tutoring or academic support
Coordinators	▪ Hire, train, and manage reporting student staff ▪ Develop courses	▪ Master's degree in education, counseling, or related field ▪ Previous experience in tutoring or academic support
Administrative Assistant	▪ Serves as front office manager ▪ Directs visitors ▪ Answers calls ▪ Performs general administrative tasks	▪ Computer proficiency ▪ Strong communication skills

Contacts recommend hiring directors with institutional research or assessment experience. The student success director at **University A** also conducts assessment for the student affairs division.

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Hire High-performing Students to Serve as Tutors, Supplemental Instruction Leaders, and Peer Academic Coaches

Institutions hire 10 to 40 peer tutors based on student demand for services. The ratio of tutors to undergraduate students ranges from one tutor for approximately 100 to 1,000 undergraduate students. Most institutions restrict eligibility to undergraduate students who have earned a B or higher in a particular course for tutor positions. Prospective tutors at **University E** submit essays, a resume, and faculty recommendations and complete interviews with the student success center director, a faculty member, and a student. Tutors complete 10 to 20 hours of training over the course of one year that includes case studies, scenario simulation, tutoring technique modules, and academic policy compliance lessons to receive certification.

Students who serve as tutors or supplemental instruction leaders must be comfortable communicating with faculty members to better understand their teaching expectations.

Compensation

$10

University D pays supplemental instruction leaders $10 per hour.

Students who receive an A- or higher in a course are eligible to teach supplemental instruction courses. Faculty members recommend SI leaders at **University D.** SI training includes modules on study strategies, proactive learning, and facilitation skills. SI leaders typically complete10 additional hours of tutor training.

Some student success centers also hire graduate students to serve as peer advisors or academic coaches. For example, the student success center at **University B** hires 30 to 40 graduate students to teach for-credit courses. Students receive $14,000 annually in addition to nine credit hours of fee remission each semester. **University C's** student success center hires nine graduate students annually to serve as academic coaches. One-third of graduate hires participate in a practicum-based program that prepares student to work at higher education institutions.

Staff Conduct Observations of Student Staff and Collect Feedback from Students Who Complete Tutoring Sessions

Student success center staff monitor student tutors and coaches through classroom visits and observations to identify tutors and instructors' strengths and weaknesses and maintain high quality of services. Staff draft annual or bi-annual assessments to provide students with feedback. The student success center at **University D** also collects written feedback surveys about the quality of sessions from students who pursue tutoring services.

Promotion of Services

Promote Self-referrals Through Presentations for Orientation Groups and Courses and Maintenance of Social Media Accounts

Student success center staff offer presentations to students and parents during orientation weeks and to course sections upon request. For example, student success center staff at **University A** complete presentations for undergraduate and graduate students for most majors.

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45-minute Presentation Topics

- Study strategies
- Time-management skills
- Overview of student success center services

Shorter Presentation Topics

- Services that students in audience's program typically use
- Why students in audience's program pursue services

Student success center staff also advertise services through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts. For example, the student success center at **University C** includes excerpts from supplemental instruction courses in YouTube videos.

Consult Faculty Members to Identify Students That Would Benefit From Services

Faculty members refer students for tutoring or academic counseling on an informal basis. Faculty members also submit lists of students who are performing poorly in their courses to the student success center during early alert notification periods. For example, **University C** faculty members submit referrals to the student success center for students that are receiving a C- or below when the first-year studies unit sends out early alerts during the fourth week of each semester.

Student success center staff contact students that faculty refer through informal emails. Contacts encourage administrators to insert students' names through mail merge to personalize emails and improve response rates.

Space Needs

Locate Student Success Centers in Modern, Well-Maintained Spaces to Promote Student Visits

Student success centers at **University B** and **University C** recently relocated from old houses to renovated floors in newer buildings. The student success center at University B has experienced greater student traffic since relocation. Staff in student success centers that do not occupy prestige spaces complete small renovations (e.g. repaint walls, purchase more comfortable furniture, hang art, etc.).

"[The old location] reinforced a sense of worthlessness. [In the new space,] students who are in an academically-distressed position still feel they are valued because they are visiting a space the university clearly values."

Contacts recommend that administrators locate student success centers in buildings with other programs that seek to engage first-year students or target populations such as first-generation college students. Administrators at University C located the University's new center in a six-story building with programs that engage first-generation students and students who graduated from high schools with historically low graduation rates to promote cross-referrals.

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Common Space Features Include a Large Classroom, Meeting Rooms or Cubicles for One-on-One Sessions, and a Computer Lab

The new student success center at **University B** features one classroom, a conference room for staff meetings, private offices for each professional staff member, a large entry area with furniture and a workstation for administrative assistants, a large room with eight semi-private cubicles, restrooms, and a kitchenette. The center also includes several key-operated gymnasium lockers for secure storage and eight computers for use by student staff. The new center at **University C** occupies approximately 10,000 square feet and features approximately 40 rooms, including a small computer lab, a large active learning space, several study rooms, and meetings for academic coaches.

University A's center features a small computer lab that offers the cheapest printing on the University's health sciences campus. Although printing series do not directly relate to the Center's mission, printing services encourage student visits to the center.

Offer Tutoring or Courses in Other Campus Locations and Purchase Flexible Furnishings to Maximize Space

Student success centers often provide tutoring services or host courses in other campus locations due to limited space. For example, the student success center at **University C** offers tutoring in the University's library commons Monday through Thursday.

Administrators at **University E** purchased flexible furnishing for their new student success center to enable staff and students to adapt spaces quickly for different programs. Staff can reconfigure desks and chairs in the center's audio-visual classroom for lectures or seminars. The center also features rolling white boards that students can move for group study sessions.

Hours

Offer Reduced Weekend Hours Due to Low Student Demand

Center offices maintain normal weekday hours (i.e., 8:00 AM through 5:00 to 8:00 PM). Later evening hours accommodate students who complete late afternoon courses or student athletes who must attend late afternoon practice sessions. Centers often establish reduced hours (i.e., 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM) on Fridays because most students do not seek services on Friday evenings. Centers typically close on Saturdays and Sundays due to conflicts with students' weekend plans and athletics.

Centers feature extended tutoring hours six or seven days per week. For example, **University A** offers tutoring from 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM seven days per week based on tutor availability.

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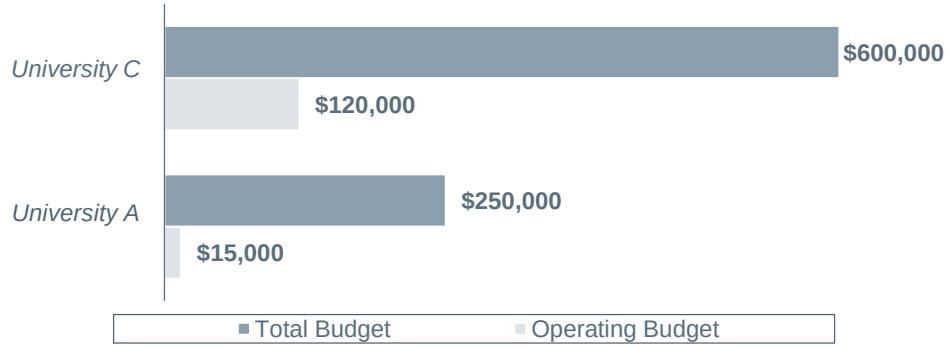
Budget

Internal Funding Supports Student Success Center Operations

Total student success center budgets reflect personnel and operating costs. Personnel costs represent between 80 and 94 percent of total budgets. Contacts recommend that centers hire graduate students with work-study awards to fulfill coordinator or administrative assistant roles to reduce costs.

Budgets for Student Success Centers



2) Assessment of Student Success Center Programming

Assessment Process

Track Student Usage and Programming Impact Through Learning Management Systems and Student Surveys

University A's student success center tracks the number of students who receive tutoring and academic counseling through Hyperion. Tutor scheduling platforms like TutorTrac and GradesFirst also enable staff to track use of tutoring services.

Contacts encourage staff within new centers to identify desired learning outcomes for services immediately. **University C**'s student success center considers student grade point average improvement and retention rates for students who utilize resources versus those that do not to determine success of programing. University A assesses the impact of its one-credit academic strategies class on students' grade point averages and the likelihood that students will receive academic probation because the course represents a concentrated combination of other services.

Observed Outcomes

First- and Second-Year Students Pursue Services Most Frequently

Contacts attribute high underclass use of services to the difficulty of the college transition and major declaration deadline during students' second years. Students from all academic backgrounds pursue services. For example, approximately 50 percent of undergraduate students who visited **University A**'s success center possessed above a 3.0 grade point average.

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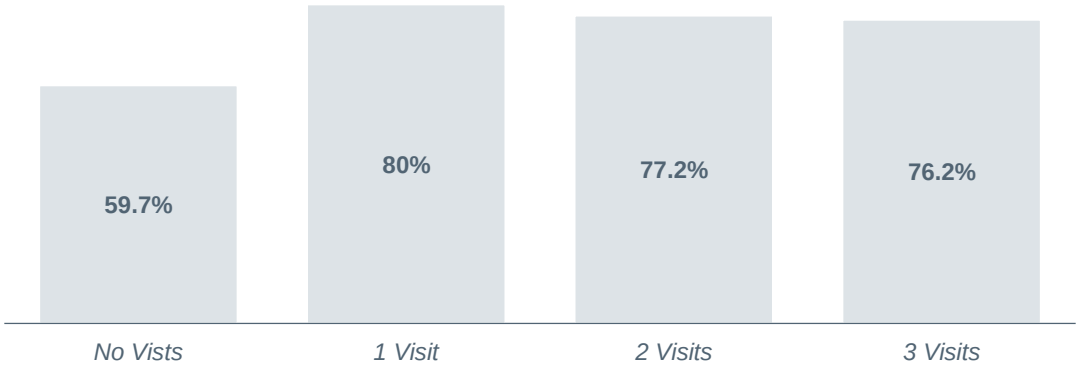
Students Who Complete Academic Strategies Courses are Less Likely to Receive Academic Probation

Staff at **University A** compared students who completed the University's one-credit academic strategies course to students from prior years who would have had to take the course had it been offered. Approximately 15 percent of students who did not have the opportunity to take the course received academic probation. In contrast, no students on the verge of probation who completed the course received academic probation. The course also contributed to approximately half a grade point average improvement for students.

Students Who Visit Student Success Centers Experience Higher Retention Rates

Students who visited the student success center at **University D** from fall 2007 to fall 2008 were more likely to persist than students who did not visit the center even if they only visited the center one time.

Student Retention Rates by Visits to the Student Success Center at *University D* (Fall 2007 to Fall 2008)[1]



[4] University D student success center website.

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3) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What services and programs do student success centers offer? What informs the inclusion or exclusion of different student services?
- What are the physical space requirements for centers?
- What staff members support student success programming?
- What is the process to assess student success center programming? What outcomes have administrators observed as a result of centralized student success centers?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Institutional websites
- "National Center for Education Statistics." Accessed March 27, 2013. http://nces.ed.gov.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed directors of recognized student success centers.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Type	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
University A	Mid-Atlantic	Private	15,000/24,900	Research Universities (high research activity)
University B	Midwest	Public	32,500/42,700	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University C	South	Public	21,200/30,200	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University D	South	Public	10,700/13,000	Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)
University E	Mid-Atlantic	Public	1,200 (all undergraduate)	Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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