2019-2020
Unit Assessment Report
Division: Academic Affairs
Unit: Student Success

I   **Mission and Goal/Outcomes Statement:**

The student success unit and its associated academic support centers (the renamed Academic Coaching and Tutoring and Career Services and Advising Centers) seek to assist and support all current students, to improve their learning, hone their critical thinking and executive function skills, and prepare them to be career-ready. Undergirding this work is the foundational goal to improve overall retention, persistence, progression, and graduation rates, particularly of our undergraduate Day students. A key part of our mission is the regular reexamination of existing University policies and the creation of new policies to improve institutional effectiveness.

II   **Personnel:**
          Administrative Staff:

Name	Position
Sean C. Goodlett	Assistant to the Provost for Student Success
Kat McLellan	Director, Academic Coaching and Tutoring (ACT) Center
Jennifer Abbott	Academic Support Specialist
Elizabeth (Lisa) Crane-Bauer	Part-time Academic Support Specialist
Tracy Foster-Howdle	Placement Testing Coordinator
Andrew Linscott	Academic Coach
Morgan Hakala	Academic Coach
Melisa Alves	Director, Career Services and Advising Center (CSAC)
Susan Beddes	Career and Academic Advisor
Lindsay Carpenter Connors	Career and Academic Advisor

Support Staff:

Name	Position
Ellen Hughes	Administrative Assistant II (ACT)
Diane Maynard	Administrative Assistant II (CSAC)
Nancy Robillard	Administrative Assistant II (Student Success)

III   **Facilities/Equipment:**

The Career Services and Advising (CSA) Center performed minimal aesthetic upgrades to the office space, removing bulletin boards and unnecessary furniture and patching and painting spots. No additional equipment or changes to the facilities of the Academic Coaching and Tutoring (ACT) Center were required in AY19/20.

IV   **Budget Expenditure Analysis:**

Departmental expenditures in the CSA Center followed the budget as it was outlined. There was one increase due to the replacement of our online career services platform, College Central, with Handshake. Until the COVID-related clawbacks, the new Director placed particular emphasis on the professional development of the advising and coaching staff, as well as event programming.

The ACT Center had no changes to its budget, and there were no COVID-related clawbacks.

V   **Action Plan for 2019-20:**

1. Complete the development of the first-year experience (FYE) seminar in preparation for Fa21 launch of the new general education curriculum.
2. Engage in collaborative development of career core competencies.
3. Advance the development of a four-year career services curriculum.
4. Improve our communication with Career Services partners and student clients.
5. Supplement pre-major guided pathways to success (the AIMs) with a more robust advising curriculum.
6. Rethink academic coaching model to accommodate new policies and the new ACT departmental structure.
7. Expand peer mentorship model.
8. Develop an external communications strategy for the ACT and CSAC.
9. Engage in long-range grant development around student success initiatives.

VI   **Programs/Activities:**

The ACT Center planned and coordinated the annual New England Peer Tutoring Association (NEPTA) conference, which was to be hosted at Fitchburg State University. Given the attendance the last time we hosted this conference, we expected more than two hundred participants, but unfortunately this event was canceled due to the COVID pandemic.

Similarly, the CSA Center coordinated the Associated General Contractors of Massachusetts career fair for the Engineering Technology department in the fall, 2019, term, and the staff had planned a University-wide career fair for 30 March. As with the NEPTA conference, the larger career fair was canceled. At present, the CSA staff are planning for it to occur in the fall, 2020, semester.

VII   Accomplishments 2019-2020:

The ACT Center had two major accomplishments. First, given the refinement of staffing responsibilities in the division of student success, the ACT was compelled to provision academic probation and warning services more efficiently. This necessity itself precipitated the development of (student-led) peer coaching services, as well as a new accompanying training model. Second, along similar lines, the ACT developed a partnership with Fitchburg High School to assist the local high school in developing its own CRLA-certified peer tutoring and mentoring programs. This work became the basis for grant work already in development, and it has laid the foundation for a more dynamic student support services model, where Fitchburg State University academic support service offices learn from students even as they learn from us.

Among the most significant accomplishments for the CSA was the successful pursuit of the Davis Educational Foundation grant. At roughly $250,000 (and more than $400,000 in expenditures), not only is this one of the largest institutional grants in recent history, but it has also charted an entirely new direction for career services and advising, to say nothing of employer development. The CSA Center also piloted a job shadowing program and has participated in University-wide conversations around employer development.

VIII   Assessment Report:

The following items were listed as objectives in the AY19/20 action plan:
1. In this last year, the plan was to complete the development of the first-year experience (FYE) seminar, and we have now come remarkably close. One additional department passed a new FYE course proposal through governance. This means that a total of 10 departments (2/3 of all depts.) have now successfully created a version of the course – Behavioral Sciences, Biology/Chemistry, Earth & Geographic Sciences, Education, EHPS, English, Exercise Sport Sciences, Humanities, Mathematics, and Psychological Sciences. The departments that remain without an FYE are Business Administration, Communications Media, Computer Science, Nursing, and Engineering Technology, and all of them have plans to submit a proposal to governance next year. In some cases, this may entail a revision of the major curriculum. Two other AUC proposals concerning the FYE also passed governance: the first reduces the required course learning outcomes from 6 down to a more manageable 3 and makes the FYE a requirement for all first-time, full-time students and transfers with 29 or fewer credits; the second proposal earned a "foundations for lifelong learning" general education designation for all existing FYEs. In short, we are almost ready for the new general education curriculum.
2. Perhaps the most successful endeavor during this last academic year was the initiation of a collaborative effort with the Economics, History, and Political Science (EHPS) department to develop core career competencies that could be mapped to their curriculum. This work laid the foundation for the Davis Educational Foundation grant application.
3. The CSA Center staff now have a fully-fleshed-out four-year career services curriculum. This curriculum is, of course, dependent on funds that would be made available for programming like alumni networking and job shadowing, career treks,

and industry nights. In short, the budget of the CSA Center will have to increase for the Center to realize its full potential.

4. The CSA Center staff have opened new and very effective channels of communication with students, alumni, employers, and internship sites. Within months of creating its Instagram account, Career Services had more than 500 followers; similarly, making the switch from College Central to Handshake has resulted in just a few short months in more than a thousand student accounts, better than 1,700 job advertisements and internship opportunities, and roughly 300 job applications. That's more activity on these fronts than the University had seen collectively over the past decade, and it happened in a few short months.

5. Years ago, as part of the "Re-Imagine the First Year of College" (RFY) project, the University developed guided pathways for all pre-majors (PREMs), in the vein of Complete College America's Guided Pathways to Success or GPS. What remained undone was the development of a curriculum to support individual student goals and teach them "how to college." That work is now well underway, and its importance cannot be understated.

6. Academic coaching has now assumed the level of University policy, as our new probation and academic warning policies require students in these student standing categories to see not only their academic advisors, but also coaches. The volume of traffic is now so great (roughly 500-600 students attending two or more appointments annually for these two categories) that the two full-time coaches could do nothing but advise these students and still not have time to see them all. The solution has been two-fold: first to rethink the intake process, so that the issues of students on probation or warning are triaged more effectively (through an assessment mechanism) and second to begin to delegate lower-level coaching to CRLA-certified peer coaches. Herein lies the future of many of our student supports. In short, future scaling of services will almost certainly involve more student labor.

7. Peer mentorship grew this last academic year through the development of the peer coaching model and the collaboration with Fitchburg High School described above. Nevertheless, there is much work to be done here, particularly as we scale up to the full implementation of the new general education curriculum.

8. In an effort to develop a new communications strategy, the ACT and the CSA Centers collaborated with marketing to revamp their websites, but much of this work was halted as the website was redesigned.

9. The advancement of grant work in student success went very far when it came to the CSA, but the development of a grant application for the ACT to the Dell Foundation, alas, was not completed. The Dir. of ACT, Kat McLellan, brought the concept along fairly far; the holdup was with the Asst. to the Provost, who ran out of time to carry the project forward. This work will have to be completed in the new fiscal year.

IX   Future Directions:

Some future directions have now been laid out in the five-year strategic plan. First and foremost of these is that "student success" will hinge on the development of a holistic, wraparound student support system that utilizes a case management model. While TRIO SSS surely supplies us a basis for that model, the new, holistic support system must operate not only at a vastly larger scale but, because it does not have a clearly-defined cohort, with better analytics; in short, the University needs to find those students who are most in need, then triage and treat their issues to help them

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overcome obstacles, whether large or small. This has implications not simply for policies, practices, and procedures, but for whole offices – including admissions, counseling, disability services, financial aid and, of course, academic advising, career services, coaching, peer mentoring, and tutoring.

Second, the student success task force has unfinished business in the many antiquated and outdated University policies. The task force began a policy review in the AY19/20, but the working group has not yet located and categorized all existing policies, let alone set a schedule and process for their review and potential revision. What must be accounted for is actual student success; in other words, every policy at this University needs to undergo rigorous examination and reexamination on a regular schedule (i.e., like the seven-year cycle of academic program review) in order to determine the *efficacy* of the policy in question. Questions that should be asked include: Does the policy inhibit or promote retention, persistence, credit accumulation, and/or graduation? Does the policy even need to exist? Who are the responsible parties tasked with enforcing the policy and gathering and maintaining data on its efficacy? What is the communication plan for the policy, and again who is responsible *that*? And when all is said and done, where do all of these policies "sit," so that they are visible to students and staff alike?