Student Success Working Group

Southern Illinois University System

June 2020

Background

The Student Success Working Group was convened in February 2020 at the request of incoming SIU System President Dan Mahony. President Mahony requested information "regarding how the System can help with these important matters in the short- and long-term as we plan together how best to strengthen the System's support."

The Student Success Working Group convened (generally) bi-weekly to formulate the report below between February and June 2020. Team members worked collaboratively throughout the process about the needs of both campuses and opportunities to leverage existing programs and resources that might be found on one campus but could be easily implemented across both through the sharing of information or expansion of existing contracts.

Team members include:

Lori Stettler*	Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs	SIUC
Miriam Roccia*	Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs	SIUE
Dr. James Allen, ex officio	Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs	SIU System
Dr. Pinckney Benedict	Professor, Department of English	SIUC
Dr. Jessica Harris	Interim Assistant Provost for Academic Equity and Inclusive Excellence Associate Professor, Department of History	SIUE
Dr. Earleen Patterson	Program Director, SOAR	SIUE
Dr. Tyler Phelps	Interim Director, Office of Retention and Student Success	SIUE
Luis Prado**	Student	SIUC
Dr. Saikat Talapatra	Professor, Department of Physics	SIUC
C. Jenise Wilson	Director, Undergraduate Advisement	SIUC
Maddy Zuber**	Student	SIUE

*Co-chairs

**Both students graduated in Spring 2020.

Areas of Focus

Communication: *The working group determined that the University needs to find additional, intentional strategies to communicate important information with students and families through multiple communication channels, especially those most frequently used by students to provide just in time*

information. Special attention must be given to equitable access as it relates to modes of communication. An additional focus on information sharing across the University would benefit all.

- **Coordinated messaging:** The University should develop a year-long communication outreach calendar to drive reminder and information messaging of important dates relevant for cohorts of students. Examples include: Fall registration, Spring registration, drop dates, payment reminders, FAFSA deadlines, etc. Text messaging systems and push notifications through existing software platforms could be used as the vehicle, in addition to traditional email messaging.
- **24-hour chat features:** It is well known that student questions and needs do not start and stop according to the work schedules of the University. While many campuses utilize Artificial Intelligence response systems/Chat Bot software for prospective students, similar software could be leveraged to serve current students. This would provide greater access to student questions whether 3 in the afternoon or 3 in the morning.
- **Cross-functional success teams:** The identification of a dedicated retention specialist(s) at the college/school/university level to inventory/coordinate/disseminate/evaluate all the programs, services and support systems currently in place and lead an effort to build cross functional teams across Academic and Student Affairs in support of student success. There is also an opportunity for coordination between student success teams to share best practice and to facilitate the possible alignment of practices.

Well-being: *The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the important role that the University plays in providing students access to food and housing, health resources, and technology resources, especially amongst traditionally underrepresented student populations. Student success is tied to student well-being and stable access to these resources. The working group has determined that additional resources related to student well-being are greatly needed to support student success.*

- **Wellness Resources:** Student well-being continues to be strongly linked to student success. The University should investigate opportunities to provide coordinated system-wide well-being focused initiatives around mental health, physical health, fitness, and nutrition. Close attention should be paid to tele-health and tele-counseling options.
- **Social Worker Positions:** The University should explore strategies to support students experiencing food and housing insecurity including the addition of social worker positions to help students navigate the SNAP and WIC applications. Assistance will be needed from the system in lobbying for opportunities for students to utilize SNAP at on-campus dining venues and for access to protein-rich foods over weekends and during the day. Social workers may also provide additional support services (assessments, advocacy, crisis intervention, etc.) for students.
- **Food Security:** Support for expansion of the current food pantries is needed on both campuses to better serve the needs of students and is critically tied to student success. Students with access to healthy and consistent food resources are linked to stronger academic performance and overall student persistence. Campuses should explore the addition of refrigeration to expand availability of protein and fresh fruits and vegetables.

- **Emergency Assistance:** The University should establish additional emergency resources for food, housing, and technology access. Designated funds should be made available to assist with support for students in need like emergency food cards for use on campus, an emergency housing strategy, and emergency access to computers, hot spots, and other technology resources.
- **Financial:** The University should work to establish or revitalize a financial literacy program that works collaboratively with existing initiatives like student emergency fund programs, and other student CARE programs. Financial literacy education should also be integrated into initiatives like new student orientation and transition programs and on-going student success initiatives.

Pathways: *The transition into post-secondary education is often difficult for youth and families from low socio-economic areas. The deliberate planning and development of structured programs can address systemic barriers to education by providing pre-collegiate programming that assists students in being successful inside and outside the classroom and is tied to the retention of students who find support systems and mentors throughout the experience.*

- **Creation and expansion of pathways to higher education:** The University should strengthen and formalize recruitment and special scholarship opportunities for students who are enrolled at the East St. Louis Charter School, Upward Bound, SMASH, dual enrollment, Summer bridge programs and other pipelines.
- **First Destination Data:** The University should invest in a software solution to better assist in the collection first destination data for recent graduates. Identifying the pathways that students take post-graduation and outcomes associated with a college education from SIU.
- **Close the Funding Gap:** The University should invest in programs and initiatives that help students develop critical competencies while closing the funding gap to higher education through targeted and innovative scholarship initiatives, enhanced student employment opportunities and re-creation of the CURCA (SIUC) and continued growth of URCA (SIUE) programs.

Retention: *The University should support new technology and delivery methods that create new efficiencies, optimize our ROI, removes barriers to student success, and delivers a personalized student experience.*

- **Transition Experiences:** The University should expand and adjust existing orientation and transition initiatives to create intentional pathways with identified and measurable learning outcomes with connections to identified high impact practices.
  - **First to second semester:** Both institutions have first to second semester retention plans in place to assist our new students in persisting on to their sophomore year. The addition of a dedicated retention specialist (attention to organizational structure) who could coordinate/disseminate/evaluate all programs, services and support systems currently in use and identify areas where we fall short would be invaluable at the campus level. Dawg Days, SIUEX
  - **Sophomore to Junior year:** Students who persist beyond their second semester into their sophomore year benefit from ongoing leadership training,

mentorship, internships, externships and job shadowing. Formalized programs exist in a variety of formats but are not collaborative and complimentary with each other.

- **Senior Success Scholarship:** The University should set up a scholarship fund through the foundation or Saluki Cares that assists students in paying for their final semester if they are in good academic and disciplinary standing with the University.
- **Intentional Support Programs:** The University should focus on the expansion of recruitment and retention efforts including intentional strategies and services developed to support first generation, degree completion, traditionally underrepresented, and post-traditional students.
- **Strengthen High Impact Practices:**   High Impact Practices are recognized for their positive impact on retention and learning outcomes for students across many backgrounds. An SIU system wide effort to strengthen and expand access to high impact practices (study abroad, service-learning, and undergraduate research, etc.) would promote deep learning, facilitate students' development of skills and competencies needed to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce and support retention and degree completion. Technological support may be needed to track student participation (ex. Campus Labs or Presence); and document and assess student learning. The University must provide equitable access to High Impact Practices for all students.
- **Industry/Corporate/University collaboration:** The implementation of a centralized effort to create a formalized relationship between the SIU system and corporate/industry stakeholders could add to retention and student success. Some of the collaborative efforts could include (but not limited to) joint pedagogical exercises, development of memorandum of understanding for guaranteed internships (specifically to 1st generation students), and long-term Co-op opportunities to juniors/seniors etc. Providing equitable access to the types of experience that result from these collaborations will be critical, including financial compensation and support for additional cost of living expenses to participate that may pose barriers to some students.
- **Expansion of Grant Funding to support Student Success:** The system should support the hiring of a grant writer to work with both campuses in accessing grants related to student success.

Technology: *Despite our community's reliance on technology and online communication, many members (students, staff, and faculty alike) identify within the digital divide – the gap of access to and knowledge of technology and the internet. In order for our system to bridge this void, we must provide increased support with user interface and online access.*

- **Student/Faculty/Staff Training and Access:** The primary pedagogical difficulty faced by both faculty and students during the recent pandemic seems to have been a surprising lack of experience with technological means of communication, coupled with a lack of access to the hardware, software, and infrastructure that allow for full remote participation in academic, co-curricular, and student engagement activities, synchronous (particularly) and asynchronous alike. Digital access and acumen are

prerequisites for contemporary learning and contemporary life. The University must ensure that students have the necessary hardware, software, co-curricular accessible to allow for full participation.

- **Universally Designed Course Delivery:** As higher education practitioners continue to identify and remove obstacles to student success, we must consider applying a Universal Design approach to online course delivery and academic support. Such a strategy provides students with multiple media for course consumption and communication with faculty, staff, and administrators. Specifically, ACCESS at SIUE and Disability Support Services at SIUC provide multiple means for the dissemination of academic support. With the assistance of information technology experts, the University system could embrace a Universal Design philosophy for course delivery thus dismantling archaic obstacles for learning.

- **Interdisciplinary Technology Hub with Shared Infrastructure For Cutting Edge (Technology Driven) Learning Experiences:** The SIU system should seek resources and invest in a centralized (interdisciplinary) technology hub for engaging students in interdisciplinary training. This hub should be developed with a single focus of providing cutting edge training to the students across campus and should be established in line with "future of work at Human-Technology Frontier" (one of NSF's 10 big ideas) ideology. This is needed for Salukis and Cougars to succeed and compete with some of the best in the world. The purpose of the "digital communication hub," separate from any particular academic unit, is to support students' use of video-conferencing and other burgeoning technologies for the dissemination of knowledge (podcasting, YouTube, Vimeo, immersive (360-degree) video, virtual reality, augmented reality, etc.). This hub should be equipped not only to provide training but also to help with students' concrete digital infrastructure needs: laptops sufficiently robust to support contemporary media (both reception and creation), portable cellular-to-WIFI solutions and other accommodations for those without proper broadband, and eventually, to future-proof our academic mission, access to virtual reality and augmented reality hardware and software, as well as to the other digital pedagogical/social innovations that will arise. This initiative would require additional personnel and financial resources as well as significant coordination between campus ITS departments.

Prioritization

Below, please find the prioritized list of recommendations based upon the narrative outlined above. This prioritization roadmap is broken into three implementation categories: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. The recommendations within each section are prioritized in order of importance. It is assumed that the timeline indicated below is the time needed for implementation, not for work to commence. A cost-benefit analysis of the proposals below should be taken up in the next stage of strategic planning when we have a better idea of priorities set by other working groups.

Short-term: Less than 1 Year Implementation Timeline with immediate impact.

1. Well-being
   1. Social Workers (2)
   2. Wellness Resources

3. Food Security and Food Pantry expansion
4. Emergency Housing, Food, and technology Assistance
5. Financial Literacy Initiative
2. Transition Experiences
    1. Retention structures should be fully developed to support retention initiatives at a campus-wide and college/school-level.
    2. Student Success Teams (campus and System-level coordination)
3. Student/faculty/staff technology training and access
    1. Organized in a more intentional way to prepare for success.
    2. Access to hardware, software and training for those with need to insure access to full participation.
4. Universally Designed Course Delivery
5. 24/7 Artificial Intelligence Chat Feature (Carbondale already has this feature, chance for shared contract/shared cost).

Medium-term: 1-3 Year Implementation Timeline with significant impact

1. Grant Writer
2. First-Destination Third Party Agreement
3. Transition experiences
    1. Sophomore to Junior year
    2. Senior Success Scholarship
    3. First to Second Year
4. High Impact Practices
    1. Close funding gaps for students to engage in HIPs such as internships, externships, study abroad, CURCA and URCA
    2. Seek Industry/Collaborations to close the gaps

Long-term: 3-5 Year Implementation Timeline with likely greatest impact

1. Interdisciplinary Technology Hub (HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR 3-5 Years)