Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative report represents the work that the institution has undertaken to fulfill the Improvement Process of the Open Pathway.

(signature)   8/15/16

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor   Date

Michael Amiridis, PhD

Printed/Typed Name and Title

University of Illinois at Chicago

Name of Institution

Chicago, Illinois

City and State

The institution uses the template below to complete its Quality Initiative Report. The institution may include a report it has prepared for other purposes if it addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the narrative in the template. This template may be used both for reports on initiatives that have been completed and for initiatives that will continue and for which this report serves as a milestone of accomplishments thus far. The complete report should be no more than 6,000 words. Quality Initiative Reports are to be submitted between September 1 of Year 7 and August 31 of Year 9 of the Open Pathway cycle. Submit the report as a PDF file to pathways@hlcommission.org with a file name that follows this format: QI Report No Name University MN. The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Date: August 9, 2016

Name of Institution: University of Illinois at Chicago   **State:** IL

Contact Person for Report: Saul Weiner, MD, Vice Provost for Planning and Programs

Contact Person's Email Address: sweiner@uic.edu

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 1

Report Categories

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. *Provide a one-page executive summary that describes the Quality Initiative, summarizes what was accomplished, and explains any changes made to the initiative over the time period.*

The UIC Quality Initiative proposal, *Promoting Undergraduate Student College Success by Enhancing the First Year Experience*, submitted in August 2014, proposed four objectives: creating viable, simplified four-year degree pathway plans starting in the freshman year; instituting more comprehensive use of an early alert system; increasing the value of new student orientation; and creating a repository of student success data. These were selected from a wide array of projects at various stages of conception and implementation that collectively comprise the UIC Student Success Initiative (SSI), which was launched in 2012. They were chosen because, at the time, they were ready to implement and represented our commitment to evidence-based enhancement of the first-year experience.

During the subsequent two years there has been a significant escalation in the progress of the SSI, and each of the four original objectives has been substantially expanded. In order to encompass the range of initiatives in each of the four areas, we have broadened the four objectives as follows:

Objective 1: In addition to four-year degree pathway plans, three additional strategies to improve students' progress toward degree completion have been adopted. One is designed to reduce the number of non-credit bearing courses that students must take if they do not place into college-level courses. A second encourages students to take at least 15 credits each semester to complete their degrees in four years. The third targets roadblocks to retention, such as UIC policies or practices that might impact students' federal financial aid eligibility. With these additional strategies underway, the first objective has broadened from creating degree pathways to *improving students' progress toward degree completion.*

Objective 2: Since 2014, UIC has increased the number of courses with early alerts, which notify advisors about students who are struggling early in the semester. To expand the early alert system, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs (OVPUA) initiated the effort to develop an Integrated Planning and Advising Services (IPAS) system, which will provide advisors with a variety of information to monitor student progress and to guide education and career planning. What began as an early alert system has evolved into a more comprehensive approach to *implementing a data-driven advising model.*

Objective 3: Improvements in orientation include online modules and library resources to augment interaction with faculty and advisors during orientation and serve as a reference afterwards. Additional initiatives to improve the transition to college include a project to enhance first-year seminars through adoption of best practices, and a Transition Coaching Coordination Program (TCCP). Hence the goal has expanded to *enhancing the transition to college*.

Objective 4: Creating a repository of student success data has expanded to include making data more accessible and actionable. The Office of Institutional Research now features interactive data displays of metrics essential to tracking student success. In addition, the Office for Research on Student Success evaluates new initiatives to determine if they have the intended effects and to identify barriers to implementation. The original goal of creating a repository of data has evolved to using *evidence to inform cycles of continuous improvement.*

Since the Quality Initiative proposal was submitted, first-to-second year retention rates increased from 79.8% in 2013 (for the 2012 cohort) to 81.5% in 2015 (for the 2014 cohort). We are pleased with this progress, but recognize that there is considerable room for growth.

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 2

Scope and Impact of the Initiative

2. *Explain in more detail what was accomplished in the Quality Initiative in relation to its purposes and goals. (If applicable, explain the initiative's hypotheses and findings.)*

The Quality Initiative (QI) began as a set of four objectives nested within the larger Student Success Initiative (SSI), a campus-wide effort launched in 2012 to attain our goal of increasing first-to-second year retention and six-year graduation rates. The four objectives were selected in August 2014 because each was aligned with an identifiable project that was ready to launch, and the four projects shared a common purpose of enhancing the first-year experience.

Since August 2014, the SSI has launched [twenty projects](), of which nine have been completed. In light of the rapid progress of the SSI, we have expanded the original QI proposal to include several additional projects that advance and extend the original goals, positively impacting not only the first year, but the entire undergraduate experience. While this report focuses on the QI, we also reference, as appropriate, the larger overarching SSI.

In the 2014 QI proposal, we proposed to increase undergraduate success "using benchmarks of an 85% first-to-second year retention rate and a 65% six-year graduation rate, with full parity among all ethnic/racial and gender groups." Since the Quality Initiative proposal was submitted, first-to-second year retention rates increased from 79.8% in 2013 (for the 2012 cohort) to 81.5% in 2015 (for the 2014 cohort). We expect to see increases in the graduation rate over time, but it is still too soon to assess the impact of the Initiative on graduation outcomes. We describe below our efforts in the four areas outlined in the original proposal.

To encompass the expansion of each objective from the implementation of one project to several we have revised the wording as follows: "create viable, simplified four-year degree pathway plans*"* has broadened to *improve students' progress toward degree completion*; "institute more comprehensive use of an early alert system*"* to *implement a data-driven advising model; "*increase the value of new student orientation*"* to *enhance the transition to college;* and "create a repository of student success data*"* to *use evidence to inform cycles of continuous improvement*.

Objective 1: Improving students' progress toward degree completion. Many UIC departments have established viable, simplified four-year degree pathway plans that outline which courses are required sequentially. These pathway plans inform advisors and help students choose classes that allow them to complete their degree in a timely manner. Establishing these four-year degree pathways is part of a broader set of initiatives to improve students' rates of progress toward their degrees.

In addition to degree pathways, three principal strategies have been employed to improve students' progress toward degree completion. One strategy involves new course models that have been developed to reduce the number of non-credit bearing courses that students must take during their first year if they do not place into college-level courses. Placing students in credit-bearing courses more quickly should allow them to accelerate their progress toward a degree. For instance, before the Fall 2015 semester began, the English Department identified students who had placed into a non-credit bearing writing course. Instead of enrolling all of these students in that course, the department instead offered to schedule 33 of them in both a section of English 160, "Academic Writing I: Writing in Academic and Public Contexts"—the required credit-bearing writing course—as well as a newly designed 1-hour co-requisite workshop. Students chose the section of English 160 that worked best with their schedule, and to avoid stigmatizing the

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 3

students, their instructors were not told which students were enrolled in the co-requisite course. All three sections of the co-requisite workshop, capped at 18 students each, were taught by the same experienced writing instructor. During the co-requisite workshop, the students developed drafts of their English 160 writing assignments, reviewed their instructors' feedback, and discussed strategies for revision. At the end of the semester, 30 of the 33 participants in the pilot passed English 160 and earned three credit hours, with 24 students receiving a grade of A or B. Since 91% of the students succeeded in earning credit, the English Department will double the number of co-requisite workshops offered in Fall 2016 in order to serve more students. This program is expected to expand until very few students will require a traditional remedial writing course. Math is pursuing a similar model.

A second initiative is a marketing campaign to encourage students to attempt at least 15 credits each semester, which will allow most of them to complete their degrees in four years. This campaign, which has been launched for the Fall 2016 entering cohort, will raise students' awareness about: the target number of credits they need to complete; the consequences for financial aid awards if they take fewer than 15 credits; and the additional tuition costs, along with lost employment wages, that they have to bear if they extend their degree completion timeline beyond four years.

A third initiative is a project to identify policies and practices that hinder undergraduate student retention, degree progress, and completion. The team's work is still underway, but one area they are examining is related to UIC policies or procedures that might impact students' federal financial aid eligibility, such as permitting grade point recalculation and repeating courses. These practices have had the unintended consequences of encouraging more students to repeat courses, which extends their time to graduation and can exhaust their aid. Maintaining eligibility for federal financial aid is particularly critical for the large Pell-eligible population that UIC serves. Without federal financial aid, many of our students are not able to persist and graduate. After identifying additional barriers that impede progress for UIC students, the project team will recommend solutions.

Objective 2: Implementing a data-driven advising model. Since 2014, UIC has successfully increased the number of courses with early alerts, which notify advisors about students who are struggling early in the semester. This is consistent with the original objective to "institute more comprehensive use of an early alert system by faculty, advisors, and students…during week 4 of a semester, supported by a computer platform." Students also receive feedback through midterm grades, although this is somewhat late and less helpful.

Early alerts are most effective when combined with a suite of support services. Building on best practices in the field, OVPUA hypothesized that if students were informed about their poor performance early on, they could access tutoring, or other services, to improve their grades by the end of the semester. To identify students who were struggling well before they received their midterm grades, OVPUA planned to implement an early alert system as part of a larger project with an external vendor, the Education Advisory Board (EAB), which was described in the original proposal. The EAB system, however, was not a good fit for UIC because its predictive model could not be effectively adapted to UIC's particular context, and hence was not retained.

Rather than work with another external vendor on an early alert system, OVPUA decided to use internal expertise from the Office of Student Systems Services, which manages UIC's student information system, to build a home-grown, smaller scale system. The Office for Advising Development (OAD) now manages the early alert system that was developed for courses in

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 4

which large numbers of freshman are enrolled and in which students have historically struggled. Faculty participation in the program has grown over time and it now engages more than 100 instructors who teach introductory courses in math, chemistry, writing, humanities, and five foreign languages. During the fourth and fifth weeks of each semester, instructors enter grades for students who have a D, F, or U in the course and may add comments about student behavior or performance. After grades are entered, the OAD director analyzes the data and distributes the information to the appropriate advisors.

Advisors appreciate the information about student performance that is available through early alerts and midterm grades, but it has been difficult for them to gather this information quickly because they must use a number of different tools and systems. To meet this need, OVPUA initiated efforts to expand the work on this goal beyond early alerts to focus on the development of a more streamlined and comprehensive Integrated Planning and Advising Services (IPAS) system. As defined by EDUCAUSE, IPAS systems provide advisors with shared access to centralized information to support four functional areas: advising and counseling; early alert systems; progress tracking; and education and career planning. When armed with the student data that will be available through a campus-wide IPAS system, advisors should be able to better monitor students' progress and refer them to the appropriate supports. Ideally, this proactive support will help students improve their academic performance, which should lead to increases in institutional retention and graduation rates over time. To further support advisors, the OVPUA will soon launch an interactive web portal for online referral of students to resources.

To inform decisions about how to most effectively design and implement the new IPAS system, the VPUA convened a committee with the requisite expertise, whose members included the registrar, the director of the Office of Student Systems Services, and experts in advising from OVPUA and two colleges. The committee recommended implementing the IPAS system through a phased approach. The first phase will involve integrating existing internal tools into the Banner advising profile to provide advisors with one-stop access to a variety of student information related to degree progress, early alerts, midterm grades, and data about student interactions with support programs. The second phase of implementation will involve an RFP process to purchase a predictive analytics system. These systems use data from multiple sources, together with sophisticated statistical models, to predict which students could benefit from additional support. The committee determined that the complex analyses that are required in predictive analytics systems could not be conducted in-house with existing resources. Instead, UIC will need to identify an external vendor who offers a predictive analytics product that can be tailored to UIC's unique context and connected to the home-grown system developed during the first phase.

To supplement this technology, and to ensure that all students at UIC are successful, student success units, such as the Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services program and the African American Academic Network (AAAN), provide holistic, developmental, and culturally responsive advising services for students. As one example of their efforts to increase retention, AAAN conducts a summer call campaign to follow up with students who have completed their first year. The feedback that is gathered from students during the campaign enables staff members to identify and address issues, such as financial hardship, that might have prevented students from returning for their second year.

Objective 3: Enhancing the first-year experience. Another goal in the 2014 Quality Initiative proposal was to "increase the value of new student orientation through changes such as improved facility space and technology, faculty presentations, programmatic components tailored to meet the needs of specific populations, and a post-orientation website that serves as a central

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 5

resource for first-year students." To accomplish this goal, one project focused on enhancing the orientation experience. While students have appreciated the information that was shared with them during orientation, the steps that they needed to complete before orientation were not always clear and the amount of information provided to them was often overwhelming. In response to this feedback, the orientation project team has designed and launched a website that will provide four types of information: (1) a checklist of steps that need to be completed before orientation; (2) logistical information about orientation; (3) online multimedia orientation modules to introduce students to policies, programs, and resources at UIC; and (4) an online library of resources that were introduced during orientation, which students can subsequently reference. The use of web-based orientation modules will allow students to complete some orientation-related tasks, such as a required alcohol education course, before orientation begins, which will allow more time for them to interact with faculty members and advisors during orientation itself.

As the orientation project evolved, OVPUA began to focus on improving the first-year experience more broadly. The Office of First-Year Initiatives (OFYI) was launched in 2015 to institutionalize a focus on this critical year at UIC by centralizing all first-year related projects in one office. One recently completed project focused on enhancing and strengthening first-year seminars at UIC, a practice that researchers have identified as having a strong impact on student success.[1] The project team researched best practices in first-year seminars across the country, surveyed coordinators and instructors across the campus to understand how different UIC colleges delivered first-year seminars for their students, and then developed a proposal for a comprehensive first-year seminar model for the university, which included specific learning outcomes. The model is designed to help students strengthen their academic skills, foster a sense of belonging on campus, and raise students' awareness of campus resources. The model seminar will be piloted in Fall 2016 in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. OFYI will assess the pilot and coordinate the process of taking the new seminar curriculum to scale across campus.

A second OFYI initiative is the Transition Coaching Coordination Program (TCCP), which is part of a broader strategy to make the transition from high school to college more seamless for low-income, first-generation students. Research suggests that transition coaches can increase retention rates for these students.[2] Building on these findings, OFYI staff decided to leverage the transition coaches from external organizations (charter school networks and nonprofit organizations) who follow graduates from Chicago public high schools to UIC. As these coaches already support approximately 200 UIC freshmen, OFYI realized that providing a UIC-based liaison for external transition coaches could be a cost-effective way to increase UIC's retention rates. The UIC-based liaison helps external coaches to identify campus resources that are aligned with each student's needs and then connects students with those resources. The liaison also encourages UIC students to become involved with campus programs, their colleges, or student organizations because the research suggests that more engaged students tend to have higher rates of persistence.[3] If the theory of action for the TCCP holds, students who receive coaching services should outperform matched peers in terms of retention, GPA, and credits earned after their first and second semesters. Ideally, if students are on-track after their first year,

---

[1] For example, Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges & Universities.

[2] For example, Bettinger, E. P., & Baker, R. B. (2014). The effects of student coaching: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student advising. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 36*(1): 3-19.

[3] For example, Harper, S. R. (2008). Realizing the intended outcomes of Brown: High-achieving African American male undergraduates and social capital. *American Behavioral Scientist, 5*(7), 1030-1055.

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 6

connected to campus supports, and engaged socially and academically, they will be able to maintain that momentum until they complete their degrees.

Objective 4: Using evidence to inform cycles of continuous improvement. The final goal in the 2014 Quality Initiative proposal was to "create a repository of student success data that would be accessible to campus for making informed decisions on changes for the first-year experience." Creating a repository of data was an important starting point, but over the course of the last two years, OVPUA decided to expand this objective to make student success data both more accessible and more actionable.

To make student success data more accessible, UIC's Office of Institutional Research (OIR) has substantially upgraded the resources and tools available on its website. While accessing student data previously involved downloading and sifting through long reports, the OIR website now features interactive data displays of important metrics related to student enrollment, retention and graduation, which allow users to disaggregate that data in multiple ways. For example, users can compare first-year retention rates for students based on their college, their incoming grades and test scores, their gender, their race/ethnicity, and whether or not they were eligible for Pell grants.

Next, to make student data more actionable, the new Office for Research on Student Success (ORSS) was established in 2015 to evaluate programs and to use evidence from that research to inform cycles of continuous improvement as the comprehensive Student Success Initiative is implemented. ORSS researchers gather quantitative and qualitative formative data to help program managers determine if their programs are being implemented as planned, to explore barriers or challenges to implementation, and to provide program managers with feedback about how to improve program quality. For example, ORSS conducted a context evaluation during the pilot for the Transition Coaching Coordination Program described earlier. To help the OFYI director shape the goals and priorities for that program, ORSS researchers identified major challenges faced by first-year students. These challenges include academic issues, financial concerns, campus-related issues, such as navigating UIC's bureaucracy, and non-campus related factors, such as the specific challenges faced by the majority of students who commute to UIC. The report also described how UIC staff and external coaches currently address those challenges, identified the components of effective partnerships that external coaches reported, and made a number of recommendations, based on the findings, to help the director consider how to adapt the proposed design of the program in order to improve outcomes for first-year students. For example, researchers recommended that OFYI host regular case management meetings where external coaches meet with UIC staff to strategize about how best to support individual students with a personalized and tailored set of interventions.

3. *Evaluate the impact of the initiative, including any changes in processes, policies, technology, curricula, programs, student learning and success that are now in place in consequence of the initiative.*

As several of our projects focus on the first-year experience, we expect graduation rates to increase over time as students who have enrolled since 2014 persist and complete their degrees. Overall retention rates increased from 79.8% in 2013 (for the 2012 cohort) to 81.5% in 2015 (for the 2014 cohort). During the same time period, retention rates for Latino students increased from 76.2% to 77.5% and rates for African American students improved from 77.4% to 81.7%, outperforming the retention rate for the overall cohort for the first time. While we have not yet reached our goals for retention and graduation (85% and 65% respectively), the trends are headed in the right direction.

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 7

We described above some evidence of impact related to our four objectives. First, we have helped some students accelerate their degree progress by using the co-requisite writing workshop to reduce the number of non-credit-bearing courses that students are required to take. Second, we have increased the amount of formative feedback that students receive through early alerts. We will also be expanding the early alerts system into a more robust IPAS system that will provide advisors with the information they need to intervene with struggling students and support their success. Third, we have enhanced the first-year experience by improving orientation and collaborating with external transition coaches who serve first-generation freshmen at UIC. Finally, we have begun to evaluate our programs so that evidence from those evaluations can inform cycles of continuous improvement.

As many of the projects associated with the SSI and Quality Initiatives are still in the planning or incubation stages, we cannot yet document their impact on student success or learning. However, there have been two important changes in processes related to student success. First, we have institutionalized a structure that facilitates the development of projects that support student success, the coordination of initiatives related to the first-year experience, and the evaluation of new programs so that we can continuously improve them. Second, we have also enhanced our efforts to work collaboratively. At the highest levels of the university, the vice chancellor for Student Affairs and the vice chancellor for Academic Affairs jointly support the Student Success Initiative. The implementation management team also includes leaders from both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. At the project level, project team members are strategically selected to ensure that the units that will be affected are represented on each team. The first-year seminar team, for example, includes representatives from Student Affairs, the College of Business Administration, and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

4. *Explain any tools, data, or other information that resulted from the work of the initiative.*

Through its website, the Office of Project Management for Student Success Initiatives provides the campus with regular updates on the status of all of the projects that are part of the Student Success Initiative. Outcomes of specific projects, all of which must have an assessment component, are likely to be of interest beyond UIC. In addition, the website also houses a well-developed suite of materials that other institutions could adapt for their own purposes. The materials include a project management framework and practices guide, along with templates for project management plans, work breakdown structures, status reports, and final reports.

5. *Describe the biggest challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing the initiative.*

There have been two central challenges associated with implementation of the Quality Initiative. One challenge is UIC's decentralized structure. Historically, the colleges and administrative units have exercised significant autonomy over their own programs, budgets, and policies. While this has fostered decision making at the unit level, there are relatively few existing structures in place to facilitate collaboration between units. The SSI has been an opportunity to strengthen partnerships between campus units. These partnerships now exist at multiple levels: in project teams, on the SSI management team, and at the executive level where the chancellor has made the student experience a strategic priority for UIC.

Another challenge has been leadership changes at UIC and in the larger University of Illinois system over the past two years. In 2015, a new president was named to the University of Illinois

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 8

system, a new UIC chancellor took on his role in March 2015, an interim provost and interim vice provost for undergraduate affairs were installed at the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year, and a new provost arrived in February 2016. A new vice provost for undergraduate affairs, who will co-lead the SSI management team, was appointed in April 2016 and will assume the position in August. Rather than impeding progress, however, these leadership changes have afforded the campus community the opportunity to reflect on direction and to integrate the perspectives of the leadership into existing plans for the SSI. The new chancellor and provost are not only committed to student success, but also invested in expanding student success initiatives so that they are even more comprehensive than those that were initially proposed.

Commitment to and Engagement in the Quality Initiative

6. *Describe the individuals and groups involved at stages throughout the initiative and their perceptions of its worth and impact.*

As noted, the projects associated with the Quality Initiative are part of UIC's larger Student Success Initiative. The broader SSI has engaged stakeholders from across the campus in both the planning and implementation phases. During the planning phase in 2013, more than 200 representatives of stakeholder groups—faculty, staff, administrators, and students—reviewed the extant research and submitted evidence-based recommendations through eight task forces: data analysis and assessment; targeted first-year curriculum; support for student learning; faculty engagement; advising; financing college; campus life; and pre-matriculation issues. Collectively, the task forces provided 125 recommendations for the vice chancellors of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to consider. During the implementation phase, the recommendations were distilled to 39 projects. Twenty of these projects, with the addition of some new ones, were designated as near-term priorities because they would have timely impact on student success outcomes. To date, nine of them have been completed, with new projects to be launched as needed. As noted, the Quality Initiative encompasses a subset of the SSI and OVPUA projects, specifically seven of them: enhancing orientation, first-year seminars, transition coaching, the IPAS system, the 15 credit campaign, identifying roadblocks, and the pilot test of the co-requisite writing model.

Implementation of the Quality Initiative and the broader Student Success Initiative are institutional priorities, supported by administrators and staff at all levels of the university. The vice chancellors for student affairs and academic affairs support the SSI at a high level, while the SSI Implementation Management Team oversees and guides implementation efforts on a day-to-day basis. This management team includes: the vice provost for undergraduate affairs, who reports to the vice chancellor for academic affairs (who is also the provost); the dean of students, who reports to the vice chancellor for student affairs; a dedicated project manager; and an associate vice provost. The project manager tracks the projects through a well-developed project management process, serves as a liaison between the project team leads and the management team, mitigates roadblocks to ensure that project teams can function effectively, and disseminates updates to the campus community on a regular basis. Projects are incubated through this process, but after the planning for implementation has been completed, they become institutionalized as new campus programs or policies. The work for each of the SSI projects is conducted by small teams comprised of individuals with different expertise from across campus.

The project teams' perceptions of the worth and impact of their projects have been overwhelmingly positive. The project teams were deliberately constructed to include members from different campus units. The members of these teams appreciated opportunities to

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 9

collaborate with their colleagues, to use their collective expertise to solve common challenges, and to share best practices. Even when project teams could not come to consensus about every issue, members with diverse perspectives remained invested in the process, documented their areas of agreement and disagreement, and proposed structures which would allow them to continue to work collaboratively on unresolved issues after the project concluded.

7. *Describe the most important points learned by those involved in the initiative.*

There were two key lessons learned during the first two years of implementation. First, support from the highest levels of leadership is critical. Senior administrators from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs lead the SSI Implementation Management Team. When project team leaders encounter roadblocks, the Management Team takes on an intermediary role, advocating with the provost and chancellor, on behalf of the teams, to identify solutions for issues that arise.

The other lesson pertains to change management: specifically, the importance of small teams combined with broad campus community support when implementing new initiatives. Ideal teams bring together a few committed people from different campus units who have highly specialized knowledge, and who are empowered to implement new programs and services. In their final report, one project team reflected that the "smaller size of this team made it easier to accomplish project objectives as it made collaboration and discussion easier than what would be possible with a larger group." Although fewer members of the campus community worked on the small project teams than had been involved in the taskforces that were convened during the planning phase, the Office of Project Management for Student Success Initiatives continues to keep the broader campus community informed about implementation efforts by sending out regular updates and hosting a [website](#) that described the status of all the SSI projects. The underlying message has been that the entire campus, at all levels, must remain informed and committed to student success.

Resource Provision

8. *Explain the human, financial, physical, and technological resources that supported the initiative.*

OVPUA has demonstrated its commitment to the Initiatives by providing a range of human and financial resources to support the Office of Project Management for Student Success Initiatives and the SSI Implementation Management Team. The human resources invested in this project are substantial. In addition to several full-time staff in Academic and Student Affairs who focus on student success, members of the management team and the project teams, who work full-time in other roles, also dedicate part of their time to the SSI.

Financial and technological resources also have been provided. To ensure that budgetary issues will not be a barrier for project teams, the Office of Project Management for Student Success Initiatives has developed a process that allows those teams to apply for discretionary funds that are allocated to the vice provost for undergraduate affairs. To date, almost all of the teams that have applied for funding have received it. Funds also have been invested in technological resources to support implementation of the Student Success Initiative. The most significant investment will be the IPAS system, described above, which will allow advisors across campus to access the same information about students. Another technological tool that has been funded is

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 10

the [website for Student Success Initiative](#), which provides the campus community with easy access to information about all of the existing SSI projects. Finally, the OVPUA will soon launch an interactive web portal for online referral of students to resources.

Plans for the Future (Feature Milestones of a Continuing Initiative)

9. *Describe plans for ongoing work related to or as a result of the initiative.*

   Of the 20 projects that were designated as priorities since Fall 2014 for the overarching SSI, as noted, nine have been completed and the remaining are either in progress or are in the planning stages. Others that arise will start as soon as there is capacity in the Office of Project Management for Student Success Initiatives. After all projects have been incubated in the project management office, they will be institutionalized and new projects will be developed to meet identified needs.

   The Quality Initiative has become part of a blossoming SSI that exemplifies the concept of continuous quality improvement, through which new initiatives are added to old ones to address gaps between current levels of achievement and our aspirational goals. As a result of this iterative evidence-based process, we are able to mitigate barriers to student success, implement a range of support programs for students, and strengthen existing programs in order to further increase UIC's retention and graduation rates.

10. *Describe any practices or artifacts from the initiative that other institutions might find meaningful or useful and please indicate if you would be willing to share this information.*

    The website of the Office of Project Management for Student Success Initiatives houses [project status updates](#) and a well-developed [suite of materials](#) that other institutions are welcome to review and adapt for their own purposes.

Audience: Institutions
Form
Published: 2015 © Higher Learning Commission

Process: Open Pathway Quality Initiative
Contact: 800.621.7440
Page 11