70/80 Task Force

Subcommittee Recommendations for Advising, Student Success Portal Enhancement, and First-Year Seminars

Friday, September 30, 2016

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SUCCESS PORTAL INITIATIVE PROPOSAL
September 30, 2016

Success Portal Initiative Committee

President's 70/80 Task Force on Retention

Committee Members

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Barrie Fitzgerald, Office of Institutional Research
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Ning Wang, 70/80 Task Force Strategic Messaging Member, COBA

Student Success Portal – A Student Retention Initiative Proposal

The 70/80 Task Force on Retention selected the redesign and promotion of the Success Portal as one of two projects to recommend for implementation by Valdosta State University because of its potential impact on retention, the relative feasibility and speed of its implementation, and the excellent foundation that has already been established by the existing programs and databases in use on campus.

Initiative Summary

The Student Success Portal, also referred to as the Faculty Portal, provides an online interface that allows faculty to trigger intervention for at-risk students in order to increase student retention. The portal provides dashboards, student profiles and messaging tools used by faculty, advisors and student support staff throughout the semester to trigger and react to student performance and risk indicators, such as class attendance and class performance. Faculty are able to identify students within their courses who have high-risk factors, which triggers intervention as appropriate by several offices including, but not limited to, the Office of Centralized Advising, the Student Success Center, Housing and Residence Life, the Counseling Center and the Access Office.

Faculty use of the Success Portal has been documented to positively impact student retention. Projections from past data suggest that even limited engagement with the portal positively impacts students' success and retention while frequent engagement with the portal has been correlated with an average 5% improvement in retention. However, faculty use of the portal is not widespread. During any given semester approximately 68% of instructors of record who teach at least one undergraduate course do not use the Faculty Portal to trigger intervention for their at-risk students. The goal of this initiative is to enhance usability and increase usage of the Success Portal among faculty and support staff. In order to enhance the usability of the portal, collaboration between technical programmers and the users of the portal is needed to further improve the functionality of the portal. To increase faculty use of the portal requires a visible and effective communication and promotion campaign.

Projections of Retention Change

Success Portal usage data from 2012-2014, collected and analyzed by the Office of Institutional Research, clearly reveals a strong correlation between faculty usage of the Success Portal and student retention (see Figure 1). The graph demonstrates that increased use of the portal by a faculty member increases student retention. The graph also reveals a four to six percent difference in the retention rates of first-time, full-time students who had at least one instructor with 1,500 or more page views within the portal during the 2012-2014 study period compared to students whose faculty who did not use the portal at all during that period.

Figure 1. Retention Rate Based on Page Views in the Faculty Portal.
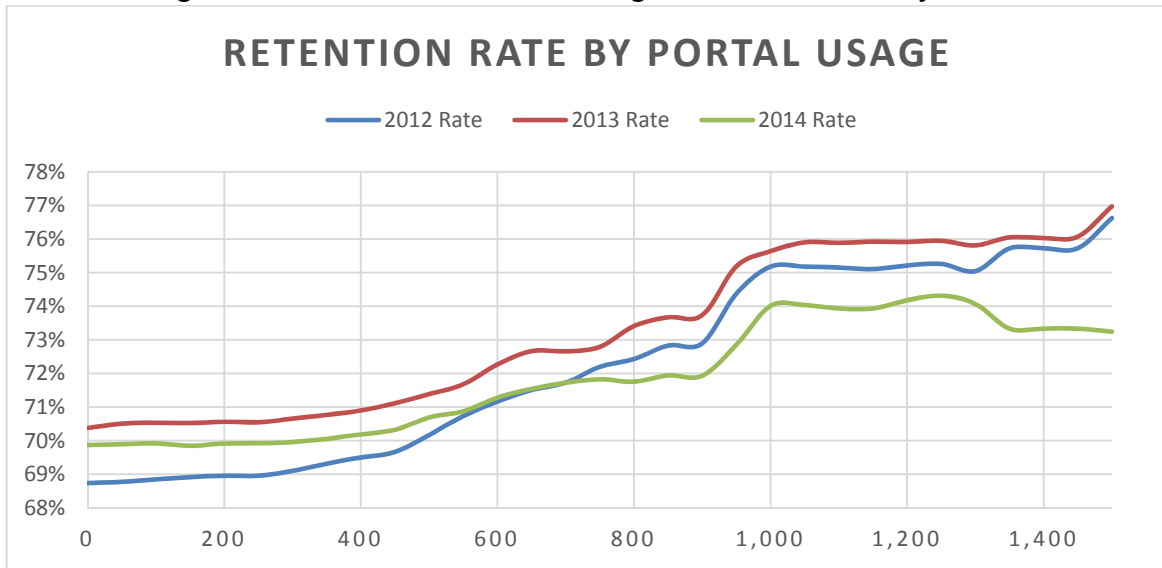
The graph further indicates that most of the retention increase is achieved when students have at least one instructor who had 1000 or more portal page views during the three-year study period. Table 1 lists the percentage difference in the retention rates each year between students whose instructors did not use the portal and students who had at least one instructor who interacted regularly with the portal, meaning the instructor had at least 1000 portal page views during the three-year study period.

Table 1. Difference in Student Retention Rates

Retention Rate	2012	2013	2014	Average
No Views	68.7%	70.4%	69.9%	69.7%
1,000 Views	75.2%	75.6%	74.0%	74.9%
Difference	6.4%	5.3%	4.1%	5.3%

The 2012-2014 data reveals that retention rates among first-year, full-time students who had at least one instructor with 1,000 or more page views within the portal averaged 74.9% - an average increase of approximately 5.3% compared to students whose faculty who had no portal page views.

In the 2014 VSU report, "Data Driven Student Portal for Improved Student Success," Andy Clark, Brian Haugabrook and Barrie Fitzgerald analyzed portal data from the 2012-2013 academic year. This report included two significant findings that demonstrated a statistically valid relationship between faculty use of the portal and both student academic success and student retention:

1) Faculty who had at least 100 portal page views had a 6.3% higher pass rate and a 4.9% higher retention rate than those who had fewer than 100 page views.

2) Of the faculty who set at least five intervention flags, the pass rate was 10.2% higher than the pass rates of the faculty who set fewer than five flags. The pass rate also affects the retention rate since students who pass their courses are retained at a higher rate than those who do not.

These studies project an increase in retention of approximately 5% among first-year, full-time students who have at least one instructor who actively uses the portal. Page views and number of flags set appear to be good indicators of faculty engagement in the portal. While clicks on the computer do not in themselves increase retention, by setting performance and attendance flags, faculty members leverage a robust system of interventions that supports the faculty member's desire to help his/her students be successful in the classroom. This robust system of intervention does increase retention.

Despite the fact that the interventions triggered by portal use helps students achieve more academic success in their courses and aids first-year, full-time student retention, faculty use of the portal still remains relatively limited. In order to reach our projected retention rate, we must enhance the ease-of-use of the Success Portal and promote its use among faculty. While not all faculty will heavily use the portal, it is important to remember that the increase in retention is achieved when students have "at least one instructor" who is actively engaged in the portal, so it is not necessary for all instructors to be heavy users. This makes the Success Portal Initiative highly likely to succeed.

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan is comprised of two major areas: (1) technical modifications to the portal and (2) promotion of portal use among faculty. Since the implementation plan involves more people than the current Success Portal Committee, the first step in the implementation plan is to add to the committee to ensure that all of the stakeholders in the portal are represented. Meetings between Information Technology (IT) staff and representatives from portal users – faculty and relevant student services staff – are critical for determining what aspects of the portal need to be altered and the degree to which proposed alterations are technically feasible. Making the portal appealing and easily usable for faculty must be an important priority. Technical training on how to use the portal will be available and a communication campaign at department head meetings, academic department meetings, and college faculty meetings will promote use of the portal. The faculty must be the target of a promotion about the benefits of the portal for students as well as how they can easily employ it in their role as instructors and advisors. Effective promotion of the portal will require a different set of partners on campus, such as Creative Design, in order to produce high quality media, such as promotional videos.

In addition to training and communication, faculty members also need motivation and encouragement to use the portal. Gift-certificates and VSU merchandise linked to participation in the portal or events associated with it will be offered. The retention data

points to measures of faculty portal use that provide a positive effect on student retention. Table 2 shows a sample of incentives based on this benchmarked use of the portal.

Table 2. Data Informed Incentives.

Portal Use Benchmarks	User Classification	Historical Outcome	Sample Incentives
Initial Login	Initial/Exploratory	Not measured	Blazer USB bracelet
At Least 100 Views	Moderate User	+6.3% Pass Rate +4.9% Retention	VSU logo water bottle, handbag, umbrella
At Least 5 Flags Set	Moderate User	+10.2% Pass Rate	VSU logo coffee container, leather notepad holder
At Least 1000 Views	Power User	+5.3% Retention	VSU Dining Dollars, red polo shirt with VSU logo, entrance in raffle
At Least 50 Flags Set	Power User	Not measured	VSU Dining Dollars, red polo shirt with VSU logo, entrance in raffle

While communicating the need for portal use will motivate some faculty and rewards will motivate others, some faculty need to see portal use as a university-recognized teaching activity for reporting in their annual activities in order to validate its worth. To recognize the validity of portal use as a teaching activity on campus, at the end of each semester, faculty will be provided data that shows their portal page views and number of flags set at the end of each semester as well as certificates that honor "Power Users" of the portal. Faculty can benefit from this information as they can use it as supporting evidence of their engagement in quality teaching along with student opinions of instruction, peer evaluations of teaching, etc. It is important, however, to not over-interpret the data to indicate that someone who is not a heavy user of the portal is not an excellent teacher. Portal data would simply be one more potential piece of information that a faculty member could use to give greater insight into their pedagogical practices.

After university-wide implementation, the committee will partner with the Office of Institutional Research to assess the effectiveness of the Success Portal Initiative as well as its impact on campus resources. Since we expect an increase in faculty portal use, the working capacity of the Student Success Center and Centralized Advising may be exceeded as these offices intervene with more students.

Table 3 below provides a timeline for the Success Portal Initiative.

Table 3. Implementation Plan and Timeline.

Time	Task	Description

Jan. 2017-July 2017	Confer with Consultant	Study all processes related to the success portal and make recommendations related to the implementation plan and implementation leadership.
August 2017*	Committee Formation	Add to the success portal committee to include all stakeholders, including technical and promotion specialists as well as representatives of all users of the portal. All areas of student intervention need to be included. Hold initial meeting.
Sept. 2017-Feb. 2018	Committee Meetings	Determine and make appropriate technical modifications to the portal as well as training modules for portal use. Develop effective marketing/promotion campaign materials with promotional videos, quality communication, etc.
March 2018	Beta Test New Portal, Vet the Promotion Campaign	Beta test the new portal with select faculty and staff to provide final input to technical modifications and training modules. Externally (to the committee) vet the promotion campaign.
April 2018	Final Modifications	Make final technical modifications to the portal, training modules, and promotion campaign materials.
May-July 2018		
Aug. 2018	University-wide Implementation	University-wide communication and promotion campaign. Honor initial faculty users of the portal. Provide certificates to faculty who attend training to use in their annual activity reports.
January 2019	Assessment of Faculty Use of the Portal	Assess faculty use and honor faculty based on the benchmarks set for one-semester use of the portal. Provide certificates to faculty "power users" as well as usage data to faculty for their annual activity reports. Study the effect of faculty portal use on Fall semester grades. Also, study the effect of increasing portal use on the working capacity of the Student Success Center and Centralized Advising.
January 2020	Assessment of Retention	Study and report one-year Fall semester first-time, full-time retention rates for faculty using the portal as well as overall university retention rates.

August represents month one of implementation. January 2017 may be month one, depending on the availability of resources and the President's desired timeline.

The implementation plan is based on no new internal faculty or administrative positions as well as no external costs. However, the planning performed for this proposal revealed two important pieces that are missing when using this framework. First, thoroughly identifying all

stakeholders in the web of people associated with the Student Success Portal and student intervention is very difficult. This means that some people and costs may be left out. We recommend that an external consultant study our organizational structure, implementation plan, and costs to ensure a successful implementation. Second, determining who leads the process was problematic. Senior leadership is needed to move this project forward. A role such as "Director of Retention" is greatly needed at VSU. The Director of Retention would oversee the Success Portal as well as facilitate other retention efforts across campus.

Estimated Costs

Costs related to the Success Portal Initiative include computing costs (IT), promotion costs, immediate human resource costs (Student Success Center), and potential long-term human resource costs (Student Success Center, Centralized Advising). Promotion costs include campaign materials, such as videos and pamphlets, as well as incentive materials for faculty. Information Technology (IT) has already received an Innovation Grant to cover the cost of big data storage, which provides the hardware infrastructure needed for future improvements and customization of the portal. According to IT, they have the staffing capacity needed to participate in the committee work and make the technical changes agreed-upon by the committee as in the suggested timeline. In addition, they have no budgetary needs in relation to materials, for example training materials, related to the portal innovation. Similarly, Centralized Advising and the Office of Institutional Research reviewed the proposal and reported that no additional financial resources are needed for the first year of the implementation plan. Creative Services requires no additional staffing, but does need to include money for printing costs.

The first-year budget needs are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. First Year Budget Summary.

Item #	Budget Item	Description	Cost
1	Incentive Materials	Incentives for faculty use of the portal (USB Blazer bracelets, FLEX dollars, raffle, certificates, etc.).	$19,000
2	Student Intervention Staffing – G.A.'s	Two Graduate Assistants Fall/Spring and one during Summer to handle increased student interventions in the Student Success Center beginning during the semester of university-wide implementation (tentatively Fall 2018).	$15,000
3	Creative Services Staffing	Promotion campaign, including videos, pamphlets, web site, etc. to promote use of the portal.	$0
4	Creative Services	Videos, pamphlets, web site, etc. to	$4,000

	Materials	promote use of the portal.	
5	IT Staffing and Materials	Technical modifications to the portal and related training and training materials .	$0
6	OIR Staffing and Materials	Evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative on retention and grades. Provide portal use data to faculty.	$0
8	Centralized Advising Staffing and Materials	Student intervention.	$0
9	Reassigned Time for Success Portal Chair	One course per semester at $2,476 per semester ($4,952 per year) covered by part-time faculty member for reassigned time for Success Portal Chair.	$4,952
10	Success Portal Committee G.A.	Graduate Assistant to help with the communication campaign, evaluation, web site, dissemination of information.	$9,000
11	Long-term Student Intervention Staffing and materials	The needs analysis for increased staffing needs beyond the two Graduate Assistants will be conducted during the semester following initial university-wide implementation.	$TBD
12	Director of Retention	Oversee the Success Portal and other campus retention initiatives	$TBD
13	Consultant	Study the structure and cost associated with the Success Portal and make recommendations	$TBD
	TOTAL		$51,952

Redefining Advising, a Sub-Committee of the 70/80 Taskforce Report

September 27, 2016

Committee Members
Chairperson—Alicia Roberson, Director of Centralized Advising
Marci Marshall, Director of the PASS Center for the College of Nursing and Health Sciences
Rozelle Slaymon, Director of the Student Advising Center for the College of Business Administration
Karen Rubin, Director of the Advising Center for the College of Education and Human Services
Mark Smith, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
Michael Schmidt, Associate Dean of the College of the Arts
Mike Savoie, Dean of the Honors College
Erin Shaw, Student Representative from Student Government Association
Debbie Paine, Faculty Senate Representative
Rudy Prine, Arts and Sciences
Theresa Grove, Arts and Sciences
Casey Kennedy, Business Administration
Mark Wills, Business Administration
Joshua Rodefer, Education and Human Services
Shirley Andrews, Education and Human Services
Christy Yates, Director of Operations and Special Projects—Ex Officio
Stanley Jones, Registrar—Ex Officio
Gerald Williams, Director of Career Opportunities—Ex Officio
Keisha Roberts, Information Technology—Ex Officio
Barrie Fitzgerald, Direct of Institutional Research—Ex Officio
Ryan Hogan, Director of Admissions—Ex Officio

Overview – Current Advising Structure

The current structure of advising at Valdosta State University (VSU) is a decentralized model with significant variations across colleges. Freshmen are advised in Centralized Advising through 30 earned hours, at which point they are transitioned to the department or college of their major. The Colleges of Business Administration, Education and Human Services, and Nursing and Health Sciences have college level advising centers. Students are advised in these centers until they are admitted to a program of study at which time they are assigned a faculty advisor. In the Colleges of the Arts and Arts and Sciences, students transition from Centralized Advising to faculty advisors. The College of Arts and Sciences has both designated faculty advisors who receive reassignment time in their departments to advise students and departments who share the advising load amongst all faculty.

For the purpose of our committee work, members were asked to submit concerns and best practices that could be utilized by anyone in any advising role, regardless of the structure in their particular unit. The responses were redacted and coded, during which four themes emerged: structure, concerns specific to certain individuals, overall concerns, and best practices. The concerns and best practices are listed in Appendix A. After submission of the concerns and best practices, the committee was provided literature related to advising and the report completed by the consultants from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). The results of the codified feedback, literature, and NACADA report informed the discussion that led to the following recommendations from the sub-committee.

This report will outline recommendations from the committee regarding best practices that should be implemented universally, a timeline for implementation, and the impact of advising recommendations on retention.

Recommendations of Best Practices for Universal Implementation

Below is a list of best practices in advising that the committee recommends for implementation in all advising relationships regardless of advising role. These recommendations are in response to the NACADA report, best practices currently in place within units at VSU, or are supported by the literature. These recommendations can be implemented regardless of organizational structure or advisor type, making immediate implementation possible.

1- Consistent documentation practices

The committee believes one approach to addressing inconsistencies with advising is to develop consistent documentation practices through the use of "notes" and the "planner" in DegreeWorks. This allows accessibility of advice across advising units, departments, and faculty. Additionally, the information within DegreeWorks is available for anytime access to students. The need for paper folders remains for documents not maintained in current technological tools. The committee also recommends continued research for a solution that utilizes current resources to move towards electronic document capture.

2- Consistent assessment practices

To address concerns of consistency identified in the NACADA report, in alignment with literature, and to expand current best practices taking place in some departments on our campus; the subcommittee recommends a consistent assessment practice that includes yearly internal audits of advising documentation and a yearly review of DegreeWorks, Program Checklists, and Program Maps to ensure accuracy and consistency of application of requirements across tools. Edits for DegreeWorks should be submitted to degreeworks@valdosta.edu. Updated program checklists and program maps should be provided to all advising personnel working with students within the degree program. Additionally, websites with the aforementioned documentation should be updated.

3-Minimum of one annual meeting including all advisors for a degree program

To address concerns submitted regarding our current advising structure and to expand a current best practice within some departments, it is recommended that a formal yearly meeting be held in which representatives from Centralized Advising, faculty advisors, professional advisors with colleges, secretaries and department heads meet to review curriculum and professional standard changes that impact advising. This recommendation also supports the maintenance of consistency and addresses concerns expressed regarding communication, as well as fostering a collaborative relationship among all who advise students.

4-Integration of Centralized Advising Liaison into the departmental websites

To increase effective and consistent communication to students regarding assignment of advisors, academic departments should list the Centralized Advising liaisons' information on the departmental websites regarding advising. This aligns with a best practice that already exists within some departments on campus. It also fosters collaboration and assists with students' transitions between advisors.

5-Welcome to the department email to each new major

Departmental communication to students upon declaration or advisor transition has been challenging for some areas. Based on model practices on our campus and the literature, this best practice will address increasing effective communication with students. In this best practice, department heads will email new majors and students with a change in advisor notifying the student of the change. This would include information regarding who the new advisor is, an overview of the department's advising structure, and expectations for the advisee. The new advisor will be copied on the communication to ensure they are aware of the new advisee. This communication should take place when a student transitions from Centralized Advising to a Department, department to department, college advising center to individual faculty advisor, or any instance in which an advisor is assigned a new student. Appendix B has a template already in use by a campus department.

6-Yearly mandatory majors meeting including all advisors and students in a degree program

This recommendation directly addresses the concern by faculty that a centralized advising structure creates a barrier to establishing a relationship with students prior to earning 30 hours. To increase interaction between students and faculty, and faculty with professional advisors, it is recommended that yearly mandatory major meetings take place for each degree program. This meeting should include all majors, all advisors, departmental secretaries, and the department head. Freshmen attendance will help address the concerns of faculty feeling disconnected from students in the first 30 hours, and create opportunities for information sharing and the establishment of mentoring activities. This best practice also addresses the need for improved communication and consistency identified in both the NACADA report and data from the subcommittee. These types of meetings are already taking place in some areas and are supported by the literature.

7-Provision of training to access program of study and program map for each student

All students should be provided a program of study and program map. This can be handed to the student by the academic advisor or the advisor can show the student where to access this information online.

8-"Lifting of flags" to make a student eligible for registration is completed in the presence of the student during advisement

It was brought to the attention of the subcommittee through data submitted that some advisors are handing off a list of students advised to be lifted by a departmental secretary or in some cases the advisors are mass lifting flags prior to appointments with students. The subcommittee recommends a best practice of making students eligible to register during the advising appointment or at the conclusion of email communication with those who need an alternative to face-to-face advising. This recommendation reflects best practices on our campus that the committee believes would support student success and reduce advising errors.

9-Mandatory advisor training for all employees involved with the advisement of students

To ensure consistency and improved communication, the subcommittee recommends required training for all advisors. This training would cover implementation of the best practices recommended in this report. Additional training through on-demand video series should also be developed. See Appendix C for a sample training outline. The initial training would include employees currently on campus in an advising role; departmental secretaries, department heads, faculty advisors, professional advisors, and graduate assistants. After this initial rollout to current advisors, advising training would become a part of the onboarding requirements for new employees who are required to advise. In addition to this initial training, the subcommittee would encourage the formalization of departmental training for those advising within the colleges and departments. This department specific training would be developed with assistance from the individual responsible for overseeing advising at VSU (see recommendation below).

10-Senior leadership to address structure

While recommendations for structure changes are outside the purview of this committee, it is recommended by the committee that senior leadership review the current structure of advising and either affirm its continuation or implement revisions. The advising process, in any iteration, will be more successful with endorsement by senior leadership. In support of the NACADA report recommendation, the subcommittee concurs that a single person or office to unify the coordination of advising would further strengthen advising and implementation of the recommended best practices across campus.

Timeline (numbers correspond to recommendations cited above)

Fall 2016

- Develop senior leadership driven communication plan for the best practice implementation. (10)

- Establish a timeline for assessment practices, formal communication among advisors working with students within a particular degree, and mandatory meetings with students. (2, 3, 4, 5, 6)
- Begin development of mandatory advisor training and identify topics for on-demand video training. (9)
- Schedule advisor meetings for each academic department to be held spring 2017. (3)
- List advisors on departmental websites. (4)
- Schedule mandatory major meeting for pilot departments in spring 2017. (6)
- Research an electronic solution for the storage and access of advising related forms such as major change forms, waivers, and course substitutions. A protocol will need to be established prior to implementation once a solution is identified. (1)

Spring 2017

- January - Complete development of mandatory advisor training. (9)
- February - Provide advisor training for current employees. From February onward, all advisors will be expected to utilize recommended best practices. (1, 5, 7, 8, 9)
- Hold department advisor meetings. It is recommended this take place in April to ensure all updates to the upcoming academic catalogue have been completed and advisors are receiving the most up to date information as they prepare for next orientation season. (3)
- Hold mandatory majors meetings with pilot departments, inviting all other department heads to attend to see what options they might want to utilize in their own meetings. (6)
- Schedule mandatory major meetings for the next academic year. (6)
- Begin protocol of sending welcome emails to students being assigned an advisor. (5)
- Department Heads should plan and schedule recommended audits. (2)
- Develop videos for on-demand training topics. (9)

Academic Year 2017-2018

- Incorporate mandatory advisor training into all new employee training with roles in advising. (9)
- Identify faculty in each college to participate in training new faculty within their respective departments. (9)
- All departments will host a mandatory major meeting. (6)
- All recommendations will be implemented. (1-10)

Impact on Retention

Advising is among key strategies for retaining students (Hanover, 2015 and White, 2015). Research further indicates advising is most impactful when combined with other retention strategies. Advising serves a key function of retention by providing access to information needed to persist to degree completion. It is anticipated that undertaking these recommendations will set a standard expectation for advising interactions and documentation that can be used to build upon in launching future retention strategies.

Given that retention is affected by many concomitant interventions, it is extremely difficult to assert a specific retention target that can be attributed solely to these advising recommendations. However, we can look at the success of other interventions that similarly leverage technology, documentation, and consistent participation across disciplines and infer that the advising recommendations may have a similar impact on out student population. Another 70/80 Task Force committee will be making recommendation regarding Portal usage, but in extrapolating from their data provided by Institutional Research, we recognize that use of this tool has seen a corresponding decrease of first year students on academic probation from 31.7% in fall 2011 to 22.3% the following fall when the Student Success Portal was first implemented. In year two of the Student Success Portal, that number fell to 17.7%. In fall 2014 and 2015 the percentage of freshmen on probation after the first term was around 14%. This is an example of faculty, advisors, and student support services collaboratively impacting specific factors with direct relationship to persistence and retention. The recommended best practices regarding advising, when implemented and assessed with consistency, have potential to make this same kind of impact through an increase in communication and consistency.

References

Drake, J. K., (2011). The role of academic advising in student retention and persistence. *About*

     Campus. 16(3). 8-12. doi:10.1002/abc.20062

Hanover Research. (2015). Strategies for improving retention. Arlington, VA: Author.

White, E. R., (2015). Academic advising in higher education: a place at the core. *The Journal of*

     General Education, 64(4), 263-277. doi:10.5325/jgeneeduc.64.4.0263

Appendix A

Data from the Sub-Committee
Concerns:
- Transfer students (data)
  - Applying credits
  - Course substitutions
  - Online students (data)
- Core requirements
- Inconsistency within departments & across units
- Staying informed of curricular changes or new degree requirements
- Student 'fit' within major

- 'Ownership' of advisees
- Not meeting with advisees until junior year
- Long-term planning of progression to degree
- Students knowing course sequencing
- Providing adequate notice of testing and professional credential requirements
- Advisor availability
- Students who don't follow advice
- Being upset with student who do not try to succeed
- Contacting students is difficult
- Dealing with non-academic issues (metal health, financial concerns, etc.)

Best Practices:
- Time & Scheduling
    - "Registration Advising" as well as fostering a continuous advising relationship (White, 2015)
    - Extended time slots for registration advising meetings
    - Group advising meetings
- Departmental secretaries advising
- Mentoring into the profession/discipline (Drake, 2011)
- Follow-up emails after advising
- Creating and inviting environment
    - Seating
    - Use of alternative locations
- Providing tools & checklists
    - Program of Study/Degree Checklist
    - Program Map (sample schedule for all four years)
    - Career information
    - Advising prep/readiness guide
- Review course load and performance to foster success
- Lift flag in the student's presence
- Monthly 'wellness' checks
- Training for advisors (ex. Master Advisor Series) (White, 2015)
    - Format could be changed
    - Might be a way to implement best practices
- Teaching students how to be advised (Drake, 2011 & White, 2015)
    - How to contact your advisor and transition to a new one
    - Expectations
    - Use of tools
    - Letters of recommendation
    - Campus resources
- Formalize how degree changes are communicated to all advisors.
- Have someone available at 7 a.m. during registration to answer phone and email questions.

- Use of consistent documentation
  - Advising folders (paper versus electronic)
  - DegreeWorks
  - The Portal
- Be prescriptive in advising style when the academic program isn't flexible
  - When there are many stacked prerequisites
  - Mandatory courses that are offered once a year or every other year
- Formalize transition between advisors

Appendix B

Sample email regarding advisor

New to the Department:

From: Department Head
Date: Monday, June 6, 2016 at 5:49 PM
To: New student
Cc: New advisor; Departmental Secretary
Subject: Art Faculty Academic Advisor Assignment Information & Updates

Hello New student name -

You are listed as an Art Major *(Art, Art Education, or Interior Design)* enrolled
in classes within the VSU Department of Art. Since you reached 30+ hours of coursework,
we are transitioning you from Centralized Advising to the Department of Art. We have
assigned you to an Art Faculty Academic Advisor. This email contains some general advising
information & updates.

NEW Art Faculty Academic Advisor Information:
Name: Kyoung-Im Park
Office Location: UC2011
Email: kpark@valdosta.edu
Office Phone: 229-293-6269
http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/arts/art/our-team.php

Department registration tips, advising forms, and degree check-sheets are available in the Art
office (FA1070A) and online to download/print (in pdf or Word format).
http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/arts/art/advising-and-curriculum-information.php
Additionally, you can access and review your academic records in BANNER or
DegreeWorks at any time, through your MyVSU account.

*Academic advising takes place during the mid-term of each semester – Beginning of
October & March, you should meet with your advisor each semester at this time.

Please feel free to contact your Art Faculty Academic Advisor at any time, or contact the Art Office at 229-333-5835; we are here to assist you. Enjoy your summer break; we look forward to seeing you in the Department of Art this fall semester.

New to the Institution:

Hello New Student Name,

We met in the May 25th VSU Advising & Orientation session – Welcome to VSU!

Now that you are listed as an Art Major *(Art, Art Education, or Interior Design)* and enrolled in classes within the VSU Department of Art, we have assigned you to an Art Faculty Academic Advisor.

This email contains some general advising information & updates.

NEW Art Faculty Academic Advisor Information:

Name: Abigail Heuss

Office Location: UC2117

Email: awheuss@valdosta.edu

Office Phone: 229-333-5834

http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/arts/art/our-team.php

Department registration tips, advising forms, and degree check-sheets are available in the Art office (FA1070A) and online to download/print (in pdf or Word format). http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/arts/art/advising-and-curriculum-information.php

Additionally, you can access and review your academic records in BANNER or DegreeWorks at any time, through your MyVSU account.

*Academic advising takes place during the mid-term of each semester – Beginning of October & March, you should meet with your advisor each semester at this time.

Please feel free to contact your Art Faculty Academic Advisor at any time, or contact the Art Office at 229-333-5835; we are here to assist you. Enjoy your summer break; we look forward to seeing you in the Department of Art this fall semester.

Appendix C

Training Outline

- Advising Mission at Valdosta State University
- Brief Overview of Advising Structure
    - Current Structure
    - Transition Emails
    - Major Meetings
    - All Advisor Meetings
    - Identification of Liaison within Centralized Advising
- Expected Documentation Practices
    - DegreeWorks
    - Folders
    - Transition Emails (recommended to be sent through the portal)
- Tools
    - Portal—list of advisees, email communication, referral to student services
    - Academic Advising Handbook located on the Academic Affairs website
    - Opportunity for further training: Master Advisor Series
- Registration Best Practices
    - Lift flag in the presence of student or at conclusion of email communication regarding course registration
    - Provide a program of study and program map or direct student to the location on the website with this information for the student's major
    - Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for each appointment
    - Advising is a continuous relationship in which students may need assistance outside of the traditional "advising week". This needs to be communicated to students through email regarding your office hours and how to schedule an appointment.

Freshman Seminar Proposal

Student Services and Engagement Sub-Committee
(70/80 Task Force on Retention)

Valdosta State University

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October 1, 2016

Introduction

In the Summer of 2016, Interim President Kelli Brown charged the 70/80 Task Force on Retention to choose one or two initiatives from the original report and actions items list submitted to the President by the Task Force for further development and implementation. The Task Force unanimously voted to include an initiative that was suggested by the Student Services and Engagement Sub-Committee to implement a mandated Freshman Seminar course as part of graduation requirements.

The Student Services and Engagement Sub-Committee members along with other members of the 70/80 Task Force and volunteer faculty, staff and students formed a working group to develop this proposal. The group focused on investigating past Freshman Seminar offerings at VSU, researching Freshman Seminar offerings at peer institutions, and making recommendations on the future design and delivery of the Freshman Seminar at VSU.

This document contains the Task Force's findings, and is organized as follows:

I.   A summary of past Freshman Seminar options at VSU
II.   A summary of Freshman Seminar options at other institutions
III.   A summary of recommended models and learning objectives
IV.   Evaluation Plan
V.   Implementation Plan

I.   Summary of Past Freshman Seminar offerings at VSU

In 1984-1985, John Gardner came to VSU to help organize the freshman orientation course (VSC101). Soon after, President Hugh Bailey and Vice President Louie Brown proposed that all freshmen Undecided majors would be required to take VSC101. This class would be taught by faculty as a part of their regular course load each term. Faculty were resistant to this idea, resulting in VSC101 being taught by two part-time instructors. Course planning, recruiting, and training were later given to one of the part time instructors who became the full-time Coordinator for the program. The Coordinator recruited faculty to teach with the incentive of a $500 travel stipend. There was not sufficient interest by faculty to teach the course, therefore a part-time adjunct was hired in 1992. In January 1998, this adjunct was made full-time. During the transition from the quarter to semester systems and VSC becoming Valdosta State University, learning support was reorganized and those instructors, along with the two then current VSC101 instructors, became full time VSU1101 faculty. Two of the former learning support faculty were brought to the department, which was named Office of Academic Student Instructional Support (OASIS) and a Director was hired. There were four full-time faculty teaching VSU1101 at this point.

In 1999, the Freshman Year Experience was created and housed under OASIS. The seminar course was taught each fall and spring semester as a part of this program. VSU1101 was a 2-hour credit course that counted as an elective credit towards graduation requirements. The original VSC101 was an orientation course. When VSU1101 was created, it was designed as a true first year success seminar course with academic rigor. Fall 2013 was the last semester that VSU1101 was taught as a part of the Freshman Learning Community program. Two Vice Presidents concluded that VSU1101 could no longer be offered due to Complete College Georgia because it did not count in a core area and not all majors require

elective credit. This resulted in the elimination of all four full-time faculty positions. One faculty member was moved to the Math Department, one was moved to African American Studies, one Assistant Professor was re-classified as Senior Academic Advisor, and one Associate Professor was re-classified as a Senior Academic Advisor. Once this occurred, perspective courses were used in the FLCs instead of the first year seminar course.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, the proposal was made to Academic Committee for the creation of a Critical Thinking perspective course to be used as a cornerstone class for the learning communities in place of VSU1101. This proposal was denied due to the assumption that it was simply a re-packaging of VSU1101.

II. Summary of Freshman Seminar Offerings at Peer Institutions

Freshman Seminar opportunities are available in a variety of formats nationwide at colleges and universities in effort to assist incoming students transitioning from high school to college and to ultimately increase retention of first year students. This committee found that Valdosta State University is currently the only comprehensive institution in the University System of Georgia that does not offer a Freshman Seminar class. Although the committee examined various models nationwide, the primary focus was on peer institutions within the university system to explore best practices for Freshman Seminar offerings. The institutions researched were Kennesaw State University, University of West Georgia and Georgia College, all of which have freshman retention rates over the latest national average of 72.1% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016). This section briefly describes the Freshman Seminar offerings at these institutions.

Kennesaw State University

Average First Year Retention Rate: 77% (US News and World Report, 2016)

Class: KSU 1101 Traditional Seminar, KSU 1111 Globally Focused Seminar,
                  KSU 1121 Community Engagement Seminar, KSU 1200 Leadership Development
                  Seminar

Coordination: Department of First-Year and Transition Studies

Credits: 3

Components: Life Skills, Strategies for Academic Success, Campus and Community Connections,
                Foundations for Global Learning

Requirement: Graduation requirement for all Freshman, Must take class or be in learning
                community first semester

Limitations: 25 students per class

Summary: Kennesaw State University offers four different versions of First-Year Seminar, all with
                 a focus on key components and basic learning outcomes. All Freshman must take one of

the four courses in the first semester or join a learning community as part of graduation requirements. Candidates for teaching the class must hold at minimum an earned Masters or terminal degree in Education or any of the general education disciples. Applications to teach the classes are accepted through the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies department. Kennesaw State has received national recognition for their delivery of First-Year Seminar.

University of West Georgia

Average First Year Retention Rate: **72% (US News and World Report, 2016)**

Class: UWG 1101

Coordination: Currently under Student Affairs – Moving to Academic Affairs

Credits: 2 credit hours towards a degree

Components: Transitional skills, Health Maintenance, Time Management, Career Opportunities, Campus Involvement

Requirement: Elective, but encouraged. 95% of students take this course or learning community

Limitations: 25 students per class

Summary: University of West Georgia offers UWG 1101 to ease the Freshman transition from high school to college life and to provide Freshman information about campus resources.   All Freshman are encouraged to take the course or to join a learning community. Candidates for teaching the class must hold at minimum an earned Master's degree. This course is currently coordinated by Student Affairs and Enrollment management, but is being moved to Academic Affairs and remodeled to be college specific. The new course will be mandatory for Freshman. University of West Georgia is part of LEAP, Liberal Education America's Project, and this initiative has helped them determine the change will assist in increasing retention.

Georgia College and State University

Average First Year Retention Rate: **86% (US News and World Report, 2016)**

Class: GCSU 0001

Coordination: Academic Affairs

Credits: 1 credit hour graded course

Components: Campus Resources, Academic Skills, Time Management, Self-Management

Requirement: Freshman requirement first semester to graduate

Summary: Georgia College and State University offers this course as a required component of Freshman students during their first semester. Course is designed to assist students in transitioning to college life and to provide information within their major department to help them achieve their goals.

III.   Recommended Models and Learning Objectives

Class: VSYou 1101 Freshman Seminar

Coordination: Academic Affairs; Department of First Year Programs

Credits: 2 credit hours towards a degree

Components: Transitional skills, Life Skills, Learning Styles,
Time Management, Career Opportunities, Major Exploration, Critical Thinking, Global and Interdisciplinary Learning, Campus Connections

Requirement: Mandatory for all first-time, full-time freshmen entering VSU, regardless of declared major.

Limitations: 25 students per class

Summary: The committee proposes that Valdosta State University will offer VSYou 1101 to facilitate the transition from high school to college for first year students. Students entering VSU should be required to take the course in one of two ways during fall semester: 1) Students may elect to take VSYou 1101 as a stand-alone course. 2) Students may elect to join a First Year Learning Community (FLC) related to their major or interest. VSYou 1101 should be used as the cornerstone class in all FLC options. The following groups of students should be exempt from taking VSYou 1101: 1) Students who are true transfer students, coming from another institution of higher education who have earned 30 credit hours or more. 2) Students transferring from another institution of higher education who have taken a first-year seminar course at the intuition from which they are transferring.

VSYou 1101 should be housed under Academic Affairs, specifically in the Department of First Year Programs. The Director of First Year Programs and an Advisory Committee comprised of faculty and administrative staff will oversee the course planning and implementation and provide training and oversight for the teaching of the course. VSYou 1101 can be taught by faculty members interested in teaching the course as a part of their regular course load, or as overload at the discretion of their home department. VSYou 1101 can also be taught by administrative staff that have earned a master's degree or have completed at least 18 credit hours of graduate-level coursework in their program of study.

Primary Objective
The main objective of the first year seminar course is to promote academic success and therefore improve retention and progression of first-year students.

Course Description

VSYou 1101 Freshman Seminar should be open only to first-year, first-semester college students. This course is intended to be an introduction to life-long learning with emphasis on critical thinking, transitional and life skills, global learning, and academic success strategies. This course includes topics such as learning styles, time management, note-taking, global and interdisciplinary learning, professional communication, making campus connections, and adapting to college culture.

Course Objectives

Education is the gateway to opportunity. This course will help students fulfill their potential as learners by empowering them with the ideas, strategies, and skills that can lead to success in school, on the job, and in life. Students will:

1. Evaluate how education promotes success
2. Analyze their personal learning style
3. Demonstrate goal setting and time management skills
4. Use critical thinking to help solve problems and make decisions
5. Learn how to take lecture notes effectively and efficiently
6. Become engaged on campus socially and connected to University resources
7. Learn to apply these skills in their declared major program

IV. Evaluation Plan, Cost, and Projections

Evaluation Process

The effectiveness of the first-year seminar will be measured similarly to the First-year Learning Communities effectiveness report that is generated by the Office of Institutional Research (See Attachment _). The following is the timeline of when the effectiveness can be assessed for the new freshman entering in fall semesters:
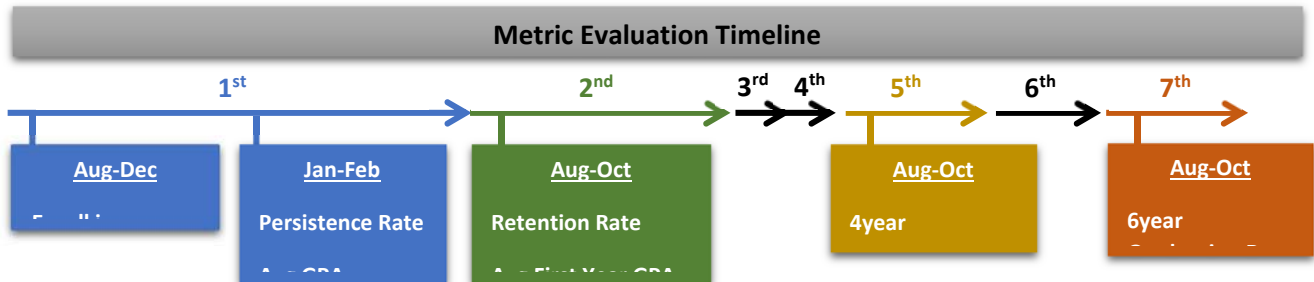
Cost

For the two credit hour freshman seminar, the approximate student credit hours (SCH) generated in an academic year should average 3,251. This would generate an average amount of $556,845 in tuition only.[1] With the course only enrolling a total of 25 students, there would need to be approximately 67

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[1] Tuition and Fees. http://www.usg.edu/fiscal_affairs/tuition_and_fees.

sections offered in an academic year (59 for Fall, 4 for Spring, and 4 for Summer). With the 67 section, this would need approximately $102,222 to cover the cost of instruction for the courses.[2] With the cost of staffing is $141,654.[3][4] The total expenses averages $248,877, which is a net of $307,969.

Expenses	AY1415	AY1516	AY1617
Instructional Cost			
Course Instructors	$ 158,700	$ 147,200	$ 154,100
Staffing Cost			
Director	$ 88,274	$ 88,274	$ 88,274
Salary	*$ 61,178*	*$ 61,178*	*$ 61,178*
Benefits	*$ 27,096*	*$ 27,096*	*$ 27,096*
Support Staff	$ 50,980	$ 50,980	$ 50,980
Salary	*$ 30,589*	*$ 30,589*	*$ 30,589*
Benefits	*$ 20,391*	*$ 20,391*	*$ 20,391*
Graduate Assistant	$ 2,400	$ 2,400	$ 2,400
Other Cost			
Operation	$ 5,000	$ 5,000	$ 5,000
Total Cost	**$ 305,354**	**$ 293,854**	**$ 300,754**

Revenue	AY1415	AY1516	AY1617
Enrollment			
New Freshman	1,703	1,550	1,624
Fall	1,557	1,385	1,459
Spring	72	77	77
Summer	74	88	88
Sections			
Sections (25 students each)	69	64	67
Fall	63	56	59
Spring	3	4	4
Summer	3	4	4
Generated Hours			
SCH Generated (2hr course)	3,406	3,100	3,248
Tuition Generated	**$ 564,715**	**$ 540,020**	**$ 565,802**
Net	**$ 259,360**	**$ 246,166**	**$ 265,047**

[2] Cost of instruction formula: $\$2,300/3SCH \times 2SCH \times Number\ of\ Sections$

[3] Salary for the Director of First Year Experience was obtained from CUPA salary report (position number 412120). There was no support staff salary information in CUPA, so the salary was placed at 50% of the director's salary.

[4] Benefits include 6.2% for FICA, 1.45% for FMED, 14.27% TRS, $13,548 for PPO, and $138 for Life Insurance.

Impact and Projection

In analyzing the impact on retention data was collected on new freshmen undecided students who had enrolled in VSU 1101 their first semester and those who did not enroll. The first analyzing a five fall semester one-year retention rate of the undecided students who enrolled in VSU 1101 from Fall 2006 to Fall 2010. The second

With the previous course mainly being offered to undecided majors, five fall semesters retention data of new freshman who were undecided was gathered to determine the impact on retention VSU 1101 had on the undecided majors. Of the 2,584 undecided students from 2006 to 2010, a total of 1,452 (0.562) enrolled in VSU 1101 their first semester. For those who enrolled in VSU 1101 the overall one-year retention rate was 0.739 or above with an overall rate of 0.760. In determining the significance of the retention rate between the students who enrolled versus those who did not enroll, a chi-square test was conducted. The results were found to be significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 2{,}584)=34.311$, $p < 0.001$, odds ratio = 1.6740 (95% OR CI 1.4097, 1.9878) (See Attachment 1 for statistical output).

Retention Rate of Undecided Students by VSU1101 Enrollment
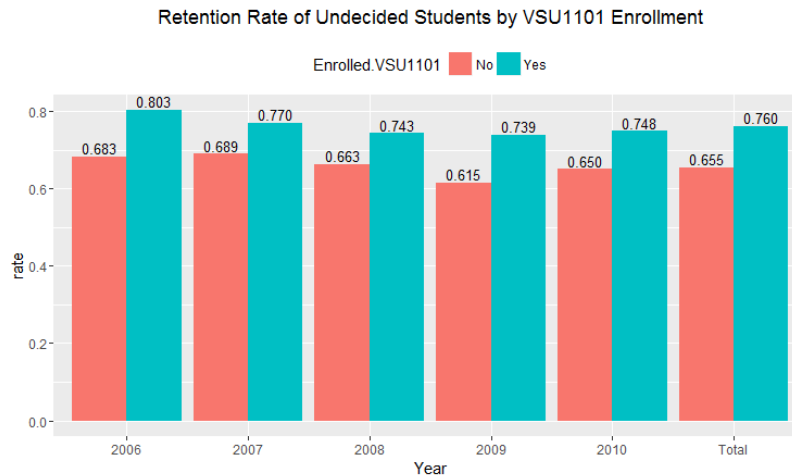
Additionally when analyzing the potential impact that VSU 1101 has on graduation, results show that undecided students who enrolled in VSU 1101 had a higher six-year graduation rate when compared to the undecided students who did not enroll within their first semester. With the exception of 2007, the graduation rates are at least 5.5% or higher. Overall the graduation rate difference between those who enrolled versus those who did not enroll is 8.1%. In determining the significance of the six-year graduation rate between the students who enrolled versus those who did not enroll, a chi-square test was conducted. The results were found to be significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 2{,}584)=16.9580$, $p < 0.001$, odds ratio = 1.4052 (95% OR CI 1.1968, 1.6500) (See Attachment 1 for statistical output).[5]

6yr Graduation Rate of Undecided Students by VSU1101 Enrollment
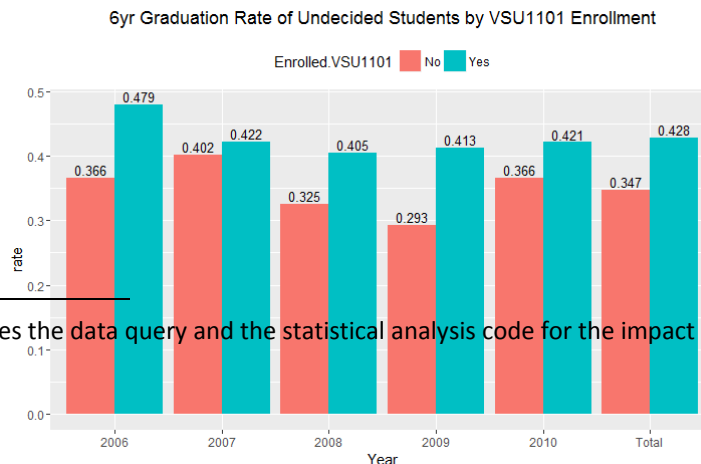
[5] Attachement 1 provides the data query and the statistical analysis code for the impact on retention

Implementation Plan

Reorganization is recommended to move First-Year Programs under Academic Affairs and create a position of Director of First-Year Programs reporting to the Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs. The area should also include a support staff of one Academic Services Professional and one or two graduate assistants. According to Enrollment Management 60 sections of the seminar class would be needed to support the current average incoming freshman class. Approximately 30 of these classes should be covered with current FLC faculty and staff members. Eight full time instructors that teach the seminar class will be necessary. The second semester, the instructors teaching just the seminar class should work with probation and suspended students.

Currently, Centralized Advising staff covers 14 sections of perspectives for the First Year Learning Communities. Once the seminar is implemented, they should teach that course instead. The recommendation is that Faculty, administrators and qualified staff be invited to teach. No faculty member should be forced to teach the class. Qualified staff should be defined as holding a master's degree. Depending on how many current faculty, administrators, and staff are interested in teaching sections of the first year seminar, it is possible that eight full time instructors are necessary to cover the additional 46 sections (of the 60 total) needed to serve all students. Since the committee agrees that all students need to take the seminar course in fall term, the newly hired instructors should be responsible for the following during the spring term: teaching sections of VSYou 1102 for students placed on academic probation, oversight of the BEST2999 for the Blazers Expect Success Timeline (BEST) program for first-time suspensions, and academic coaching.

Once the Director of First Year Programs is in place, an advisory board should be created for the first year seminar. The Advisory Committee should consist of faculty representatives from each College. It is the recommendation of the committee for the President and the Director of First Year Programs to meet with Deans and Department Heads to decide the following information: where the first year seminar counts in the curriculum requirements, FTE count, work load hours, and its relation to promotion and tenure for faculty who teach the course.

In preparation for the advisory board, the current Coordinator for First Year Programs will review old syllabi from VSU 1101 courses taught in the past. She will get feedback from current FLC instructors. The outline will be a guide for the Director to use as a tool to establish the seminar outline. The Director, support staff and Advisory Committee will make the syllabus template for all instructors who teach the

seminar class. The template will allow for each instructor to have Academic Freedom and the ability to foster academic and social integration. A proposed timeline is outlined below.

PROPOSED TIMELINE

Fall 2016 (pending proposal approval; November-December):

- Hire or identify Director of First Year Programs/Seminar and all support staff

Fall 2016 (as soon as possible):

- Submit course change and proposed catalogue change to mandate Freshman Seminar course

Fall 2016 (December) or Spring 2017 (January)
pending proposal approval and timeline of selecting support staff:

- First Year Seminar Advisory Board is selected by Director/Coordinator and President.

Spring 2017- (January):

VI.   Summary

The committee recognizes the need for development and implementation of a Freshman Seminar as part of efforts to increase first year student persistence at VSU and has identified key components in this report that should be considered in the development of a course, VSYou 1101, similar to offerings at other institutions with successful freshman seminar programming. The committee also understands that that Freshman Seminar endeavors must be strongly linked to other campus programs such as orientation, welcome week events and other student life activities to deliver a consistent message to new student populations in helping them develop an early sense of belonging at VSU. The committee also acknowledges that in order to increase student persistence and urge the "15 to finish" concept, retention efforts cannot stop after the first year and must continue through a well-developed and marketable four year retention strategy.   Therefore, along with the restructuring of First Year Programs and in effort to correlate all of the necessary campus efforts, the committee suggests consideration in the reorganization to include a strong retention component such as an Office of Retention that could develop, coordinate, and administer the overall retention package.