MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY
## BILLINGS
Access & Excellence

Report of the
2014-2015 Student Success Committee:
Recommendations to the University Community

Submitted to Chancellor Mark Nook

October 1, 2015

Key Area:

Gateway Courses

High DFWI Courses

Developmental Education

Structured Learning Assistance

General Education

Student-Centered Teaching and Practices

Key Area:

Holistic, Multi-Tiered Advising

Early Alert System

Advising Training and Procedures

First Year Seminar

Yellowjacket Learning Community
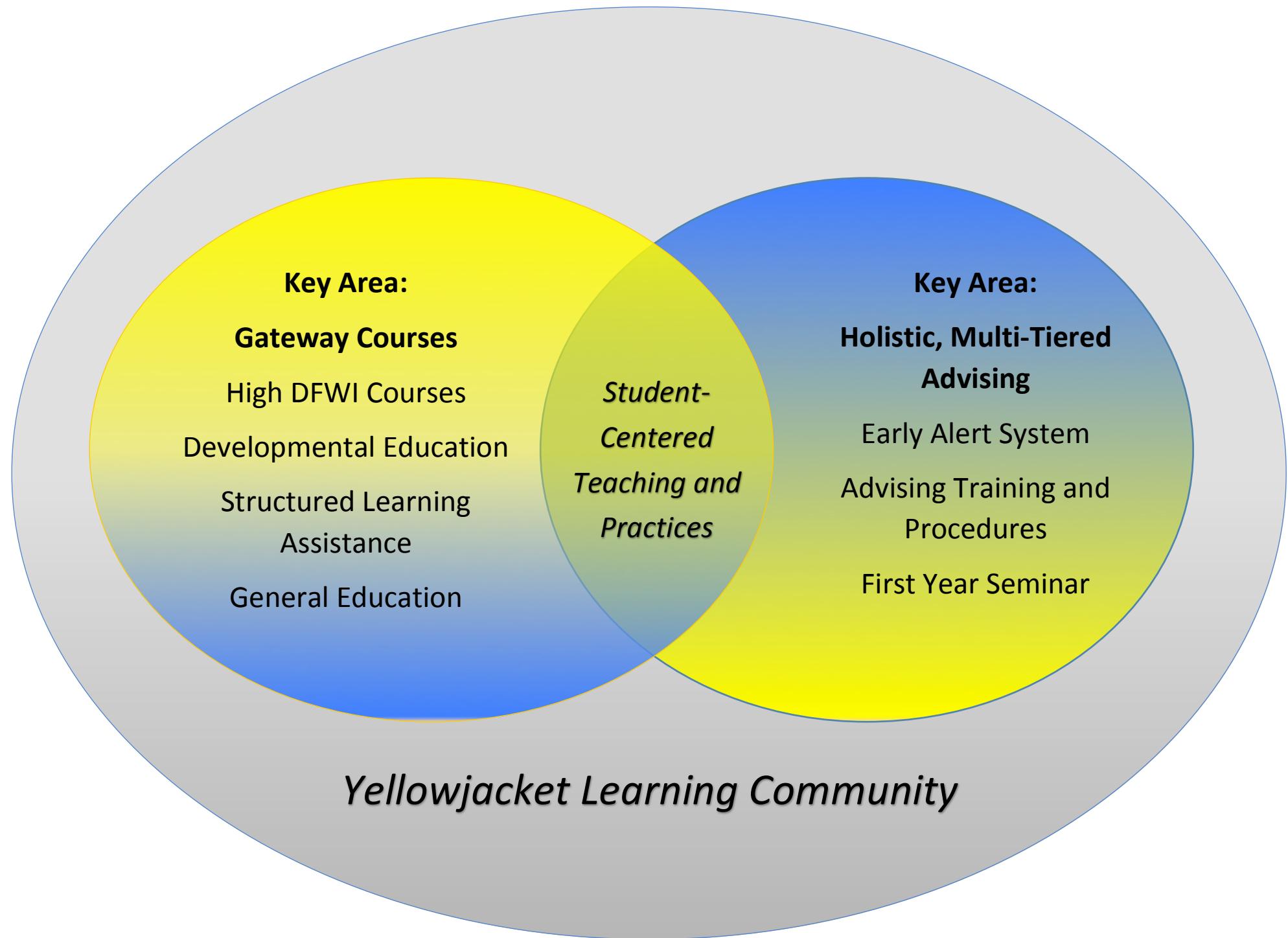
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Student Success Committee (2014-2015)

CONTEXT

Over the past year, the Student Success Committee (SSC) has researched and analyzed best- or promising-practices to bolster student success and student retention at MSU Billings. The Chancellor charged the committee to provide answers to two questions:

1. What are the major areas in which our university could make the biggest gains in improving the success of our students?
2. What are the programs, processes, and cultural changes we could implement that would have the biggest positive impact on the success of our students and university?

In the process of responding to the Chancellor's questions, the SSC articulated an educational philosophy that underwrites each of the recommendations: a student-centered, or a learner-centered, approach to student success, best implemented through micro learning communities. Each of the recommendations below tackles a specific problem and suggests the creation of a unique "*Yellowjacket Learning Community*" (YLC) to improve student learning and success. The committee supports an academic learning-communities concept that is small-scale, faculty-initiated, and student-centered to provide linkages between students and the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs on campus. These linkages will be the impetus to cultural change across campus, leading to ownership among all stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the committee researched more than a dozen areas of intervention, our recommendations are sharply focused on two key areas: Gateway Courses and Holistic, Multi-Tiered Advising. These two areas are touchstones for a number of closely related issues. The committee has organized them in short- and long-term levels of response.

(1) Key Area: Gateway Courses

Short Term Foci: Addressing High DFWI Courses (see page 4 below)
Enhancement of developmental education, through linked or co-requisite courses & student cohorts (see page 6 below)

Long Term Focus: Integration of Structured Learning Assistance programs into the curriculum (see page 7 below)
Revisions of the University General Education program (see page 9 below)

In the short term, we recommend scaling up the ongoing paired/linked/co-requisite courses that bind developmental education courses with General Education college-credit courses to create *Yellowjacket Learning Communities.*

Longer-term foci of this initiative include potential revision of the General Education Program, integration of Structured Learning Assistance into the gateway curriculum, and a rededication to integrity and innovation in online education. This initiative is supported by the current university commitment to working with the John N. Gardner Institute on the "Gateways to Completion" program.

(2) Key Area: Holistic, Multi-Tiered Advising

Short Term Focus: Development of a faculty-initiated, MSUB-tailored early alert system (see page 10 below)

Long Term Focus: Improved, streamlined advising procedures and training (see page 13 below)
Revisions to the First Year Seminar (see page 15 below)

The most important short-term focus for holistic advising includes investment in, and full implementation of, an early alert system for use by faculty and professional advisors. More long-term foci of this recommendation involve implementation of peer mentoring models, re-examination of the place of the First Year Seminar in the freshman experience, and an analysis of training and procedures for both faculty and staff advisors.

CONCLUSION

These recommendations resulted from collaboration among representatives from across the university and focus on areas worthy of further attention in pursuit of student success. All involved were in support of the proposed initiatives and strategies.

The SSC researched proposals beyond the two recommendations above, including Technology and online education, Adult transfers and learners, Community relations/affairs, Campus culture, and the Campus experience. More information and can be found on the SSC SharePoint site (https://sharepoint2010.msubillings.edu/sites/StudentSuccessCommittee/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx).

Following this Executive Summary are research briefs detailing the primary recommendations. The Committee is available to answer any questions that may arise from this report, and we look forward to future initiatives that aim to improve our students' success at MSUB.

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High DFWI Courses

Student success at the University begins with success in the foundational courses, typically found in the General Education core. Successful completion of the General Education core, in fact, has implications far beyond simple completion of the students' academic careers. Students' success in their first semesters also has a profound impact on students' personal and professional futures. In fact, student success at the foundational level has an influence beyond what may be the impact of most other courses in terms of persistence and retention. Therefore, the experience a student has in the introductory college classes can have a significant influence on the course of that student's adult life.

Dissatisfaction with, and low performance in, developmental education courses and the General Education core is a serious problem at colleges and universities nationwide.[1] Perhaps the clearest bellwether of this success—or the lack thereof—is found in the DFWI rates in the foundational, gateway courses and in the developmental education program. DFWI rates are the rates at which students in these courses receive grades that require the student to repeat the course (a D, a failure, a withdrawal, or an incomplete that is not completed).

A significant element of tackling the issue of DFWI rates involves a significant amount of study and analysis. Among the steps of that analysis are identifying the barriers to student success in these courses, engaging the faculty in acknowledging this as an issue with significant retention implications, and beginning to find solutions to this problem.

GATEWAYS TO COMPLETION:

Central to the efforts at MSUB to address courses that have traditionally high DFWI rates is the ongoing work with the Gardner Institute's Gateways to Completion program. The University has contracted with JNGI to participate in the "G2C Comprehensive" program, which includes a robust course analysis/transformation process as well as participation in the G2C Analytics Collaborative and the G2C Teaching and Learning Academy.

The basic unit of analysis for the JNGI work is the Gateway course, defined as:

1) **Foundational** in nature – foundational courses may be non-credit bearing developmental education courses and/or college credit-bearing courses;

2) **High-risk** – as measured by the rates at which D, F, W, and I grades are earned across sections of the courses considered for the G2C work; and,

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[1] Horn, L., Peter, K., and Rooney, K. 2002. *Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Institutions: 1999-2000* (NCES 2002-168). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, < http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002168.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

3) **High-Enrollment** – as measured by the number of students enrolled across sections of the courses considered for the G2C work.[2]

COURSE REDESIGN:

Among the proven efforts to achieve a change in the institution's approach to student success and retention is a commitment to course redesign. Sample methods of successful redesign are provided in the literature, particularly the work of the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) course redesign initiative. NCAT has been working at course redesign for years and is "dedicated to the effective use of information technology to improve student learning outcomes and reduce the cost of higher education." The NCAT website includes detailed reports of dozens and dozens of successful redesigns, and lists the courses redesigned by discipline.[3] Many provide models MSUB could follow for specific courses (most are Math/Algebra, Statistics, Chemistry, and Psychology). NOTE: there are **no** Montana institutions on the NCAT redesign lists, so MSUB could be a pioneer in this effort.

Course redesign will require:
- o intentional selection of courses that would benefit from redesign following clear criteria,
- o full-throated administrative support from the Chancellor to the Chairs, with the most important support from the Deans and Provost for the initiative,
- o concerted attention to the budgetary realities of course redesign, and
- o thorough assessment through reduced DFWI rates, student attainment of learning outcomes, and student satisfaction.[4]

The scholarship clearly notes that continued attention will need to be deployed in sustaining the redesign.[5]

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Fully engage the campus community in the JNGI Gateways to Completion program.

2. Sustain this commitment to redesign or reform five courses through a three-year process:
   a. Year 1: engaging in the Analytical Collaborative through Institutional Research to identify appropriate gateway courses, plan and prepare for redesign/reform,
   b. Year 2: implement the redesign/reform, and
   c. Year 3: assess the impact of the implementation.

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[2] John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, "Gateway Courses Definition," < http://www.jngi.org/gateway-courses-definition/>, accessed 9/30/15.

[3] John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, "Project Descriptions sorted by Disciplines," <http://www.thencat.org/PCR/Proj_Discipline_all.html>, accessed 9/29/2015.

[4] Education Advisory Board, "Course Redesign: Minimizing Drop, Failure, and Withdrawal Rates," EAB Custom Research Brief (2010), <https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-Insights/AAF/Custom/2010/10/Course-Redesign-Minimizing-Drop-Failure-and-Withdrawal-Rates.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

[5] See Figure 1, Appendix 2 below.

3. Support faculty development through involvement in the G2C Teaching and Learning Academy.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Invest in, and commit to, course redesign of gateway courses (courses in the short-term that are not selected to be part of the G2C initiative).

2. Regularly assess the success of course redesign and commit to expanding the program based on successes, or to re-examine redesign if assessment of the redesigned courses does not achieve institutionally-determined success metrics.

Developmental Education

"Educational Packages" Or Combined Course Offerings

It is widely acknowledged that many students placed in developmental courses fail to attain college-level credit or to advance to gateway college coursework within reasonable timeframes, contributing to a lack of degree completion and extended degree completion timeframes.[6] MSUB has had a retention rate of around 55% for students one developmental course away from college-level and around 45% for students two or more developmental courses away from college-level. Thus, there is room for improvement.

PLACEMENT

MSUB currently uses COMPASS scores for placing students into their initial writing and math coursework, and students with low literacy scores are placed into developmental reading. COMPASS will be discontinued in December 2016, and a statewide taskforce has been formed to develop recommendations for the MUS system post-COMPASS. The taskforce will give its recommendations by December 2015 with implementation planned by August 2016.

MSUB's English Department has also developed a written "challenge test" for students who score "99" on COMPASS and would like to bypass the gateway college-level course, WRIT 101. This local test has potential to be modified for placement into or above WRIT 095 (developmental writing) as well.

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[6] Charles A. Dana Center, Complete College America, Inc., Education Commission of the States, and Jobs for the Future. (2012, Dec.). Core principles for transforming remedial education: A joint statement. *Complete College America.* Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/docs/STATEMENTCorePrinciples.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

REFORM MODELS

Various programs at MSUB have implemented many of the recommended practices for developmental education. Such locally implemented models include:

- Accelerated co-requisite writing coursework that waives the WRIT 101 pre-requisite in exchange for co-enrolling in WRIT 095. Students take the two courses together as a 6-credit block. Students from WRIT 095 take WRIT 101 together as a cohort but are integrated into a larger class of WRIT 101 students.[7]
- Modularization of M 098 that combines Introductory and Intermediate Algebra in a 5-credit mastery sequence. This permits student credit attainment at multiple stages of coursework and allows students to stop out and return without re-taking entire semester-long courses. This model draws upon the recommended practices of "mastery learning" and "structured learning."[8]
- Linked enrollment in RD 101 with BIOH 201—Anatomy and Physiology or PSYX 100 to assist students with passing gateway courses. This follows the recommended practice of contextualizing developmental coursework to increase the relevance and applicability of basic skills instruction and improve student success in college-level courses.[9]

All of these models help to quickly engage students placed in developmental coursework with college-level courses and credit attainment through either co-enrollment or acceleration.

STRUCTURED LEARNING ASSISTANCE and COHORTS

Other interventions try to assist students placed in college-level coursework. One such approach is structured learning assistance (SLA), which provides guided group study time outside of regular class meetings that may be assigned in lieu of developmental coursework or as a "just-in-time" intervention for students falling behind in gateway classes. Some interventions also seek to specifically address non-cognitive issues and build student support networks and self-efficacy. For instance, learning communities, linked courses or other models create student identity and connect students to the campus community.

ORGANIZATION OF COURSEWORK

One promising practice that can combine acceleration and holistic support is the grouping of three or more classes into an "educational package."[10] This creates a supportive cohort of

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[7] Cho, S., Kopko, E., Jenkins, D., and Smith Jaggers, S. (2012, Dec.). New evidence of success for community college remedial English students: Tracking the outcomes of students in the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). *Community College Research Center,* <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/ccbc-alp-student-outcomes-follow-up.html>, accessed 9/30/15.

[8] Schwartz, W. and Jenkins, D. (2007, Sept.). Promising practices for community college developmental education: A discussion resource for the Connecticut Community College System. *Community College Research Center Teachers College, Columbia University*, <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/promising-practices-developmental-education.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

[9] Perin, D. (2011). Facilitating student learning through contextualization: A review of evidence. *Community College Review*, (39)3, 268-295. DOI: 10.1177/0091552111416227

[10] Schwatrz and Jenkins, Ibid.

students who tackle developmental education together and would align with the Complete College America recommendations for structured schedules, 15-credit loads, and guided pathways.[11] Such a practice draws upon research that supports the benefits of learning communities as well.[12] Note: the research suggests that enrolling in combined coursework may be particularly difficult for part-time or evening students. The University may also need to consider how best to address the needs of international students in these reforms.

EDUCATIONAL PACKAGES

Currently the reform model interventions operate rather independently. Consultation with the Developmental Education Department at City College suggests piloting a cohort of students who simultaneously enroll in the existing accelerated models and combine these with additional courses in an "educational package" with the express intent of building a learning community. Appropriate courses would include:

- M 090 or 095
- WRIT 095 with co-requisite enrollment in
- WRIT 101
- Another college-level general education course with high success rates

Additional steps to address students who need to take developmental coursework in more than one area could include supplemental assistance models (studio or small group tutoring) which may or may not be taken for developmental credit (or "lab" credit) to assist students with succeeding in college-level coursework.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continue with current modularization and acceleration reforms to include scaling up these efforts to provide more course offerings.

2. Consider structured learning assistance or other co-requisite support for gateway classes in conjunction with evaluating placement criteria to pilot college-level placement with support as an alternative to developmental coursework.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

1. Expand opportunities to help students proceed as cohorts in "educational packages."

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[11] The Game Changers. (2013). *Complete College America*, <http://www.completecollege.org/gameChangers.html>, accessed 9/30/15.

[12] Bloom, D. and Sommo, C. (2005, June). "Building learning communities: Early results from the Opening Doors Demonstration at Kingsborough Community College." *MDRC*, <http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_36.pdf>, accessed 9/29/15.

> "If colleges and universities mean what we say about the importance of critical thinking, communication, liberal education, and life-long learning, we will do a better job of creating programs that teach these things to all students, regardless of their major. And we will make sure that those programs have as many resources and as much institutional prestige as any major course of study."[13]

There has been a great deal of scholarly research and activity in recent years on the topic of General Education. This work has, to a large degree, been sparked by organizations such as the Lumina Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the American Association of Colleges and Universities. Much of this scholarship had focused on program design. Some general design principles include:

a. **Proficiency**: Gen Ed must be based on explicit learning outcomes, and the program and courses should lead to portable, demonstrable proficiencies "through problem-centered work on significant issues."[14]

b. **Agency and Self-Direction**: Gen Ed should empower all students to bring portable, demonstrable proficiencies to bear in their lives inside and outside the university. The program should also enable all students to recognize and understand the capacities (both intellectual and personal) that they are developing through the program that will help them reach their goals.[15]

c. **Integrative Learning and Problem-Based Inquiry**: Students should develop their proficiencies through integration of curricular, co-curricular, extra-curricular, and prior learning experiences, and should be prepared to demonstrate those proficiencies through application of them to issues and problems "relevant to their interests and aims and where a full understanding of the problem requires insights from multiple areas of study."[16]

d. **Equity**: Gen Ed programs should be designed and implemented to address equity issues inherent in the modern higher education system. Equity-mindedness focuses faculty and administration on the traditional inequalities of outcomes between students of differing ethnic, socioeconomic, disability, and age groups in higher education. Gen Ed should empower all students—regardless of their backgrounds—to succeed in their pursuit of their academic and life goals.[17]

e. **Transparency and Assessment**: All of those involved in the General Education program—students, faculty, staff, administration, and the community—should be aware

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[13] Austin, Michael, "General Education Reform: Five Suggestions from the Front Lines,"<http://ivn.us/2013/07/24/general-education-reform-dispatches-from-the-front-lines/>, accessed 9/30/15.

[14] General Education Maps and Markers: Designing Meaningful Pathways to Student Achievement (Washington, DC, American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2015), 13.

[15] Ibid., 15.

[16] Ibid., 17.

[17] Ibid., 19.

of the proficiencies developed through the program. Also, both students and institutions should be able to point to their achievements in the program as evidence of those proficiencies.[18]

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The university must actively participate in the John N. Gardner Institute's Gateways to Completion program already mentioned above.

2. With insights and perspectives gained through the G2C program, the re-examination of the General Education program must by scaled up to include the entire General Education curriculum.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The administration should charge the General Education Committee to undertake a thorough, ground-up, multi-year process of reconstructing the General Education program at MSUB.

2. This redesign should be founded on best-practices as identified by organizations such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities, EAB, and the National Center for Academic Transformation.

3. The revised program must be based fundamentally on the University's mission, motto, core themes, and the program's learning outcomes, and result in a curriculum that integrates academic, co-curricular and service learning through coherent pathways and Problem-Based Inquiry.

Early Alert Systems

FOUR TIERS OF EARLY ALERT

The key to effective early alert systems is early identification coupled with aggressive response. At-risk students rarely self-identify or seek out services, so it is up to the University to identify and connect students with necessary services. Another key is partnership between Student Services and Academic Affairs: "Evidence suggests that these synergistic relationships are most effective when information is actively shared …in order to mount a coordinated response."[19]

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[18] Ibid., 21. See also "The GEMs Design Principles for General Education," <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/gems/gmsge_p3_designprinciples_flier.pdf >, accessed 9/30/15.

[19] Venit, E.P. (2008, August). *Improving Student Retention through Early Intervention*. Education Advisory Board (Custom Research Brief). Washington DC, <https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-

(1) Pre-course Tier:

        Possible approaches include automated **pre-enrollment alerts** based on a custom Freshmen Risk Survey[20] and other factors such as:
                first language
                employment (work obligations, schedule)
                dependents
                aptitude test scores
                high school GPA
                parental education levels

        We also recommend automated **pre-course alerts** based on student information, including:
                previous faculty alerts
                MSUB GPA
                success in previous courses
                academic probation

(2) Course Tier

        We recommend that any early alert system be faculty-initiated, with alerts generated by professors based on an early assignment within the first five weeks of the course: what we call **The Window**.

        For high-risk (DFWI) courses, multiple checkpoints may be useful.[21]

        The early alert system should be designed as a combination of easy, fast drop-down menus for **common alerts** and a free-form, open space for qualitative **write-in alerts**.

        Following a faculty-initiated alert, the system should coordinate with other units. The student should be contacted through a course management system, email, and perhaps other forms of communication. The alert will also automatically notify the student's advisor and the appropriate contacts for support: foreign language, tutoring, developmental education, counseling, student health, social worker, financial aid, study skills, etc.[22]

Insights/SAF/Custom/2008/08/Improving-Student-Retention-Through-Early-Intervention.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15, 3.

[20] See Venit for examples.

[21] Krase, Hilary and Nyatepe-Coo, Ehui (2012). *Identifying and Supporting Academically At-Risk Students in Canadian Universities*. Advisory Board Co. (Custom Research Brief). Washington DC, <https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-Insights/SAF/Custom/2012/02/Identifying-and-Supporting-Academically-At-Risk-Students-in-Canadian-Universities.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15, 4.

[22] See Figure 2, Appendix 2 below for an example of an "alert network."

(3) Advising Tier

> The long-term strategic goal of the early alert system is to track and support student success semester-to-semester and year-to-year by improving the quality of academic advising.

> **Early-alert-informed advising** can head off alerts before they happen by steering students into developmental education courses, emphasizing prerequisites, involving departmental chairs, and encouraging departmental affiliation.

(4) Withdrawal Tier

> The reasons for withdrawal from the University are overwhelmingly social, personal, health, military, financial, rather than academic: "[L]ess than one percent of students withdraw because of academic ineligibility."[23] However, "support networks" are key to retaining students.[24]

> If students do withdraw, we recommend exit counseling and "simplified forms to increase the likelihood of re-enrollment."[25] This is an area where MSUB is already successful, but a space for innovation and growth integrated into the early alert system.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Creation of an early alert system at MSUB, combined with simplification of early alert procedures and interface to increase faculty participation.[26]

2. Creation of pilot programs for the early alert system focused only on select high DFWI courses (perhaps the Gardner Institute courses) and first year courses, with selected and engaged faculty who can represent the system to the entire faculty for full implementation.[27]

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

1. Assess the early alert system annually through student, faculty, and staff feedback, as well as internal data in the system, to make adjustments year-to-year.

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[23] Nelson, John and Thomas, Allison (2012, October). *Strategies to Identify, Understand, and Prevent Student Withdrawal*. Education Advisory Board, Academic Affairs Forum (Custom Research Brief). Washington DC <https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-Insights/AAF/Custom/2012/10/Strategies-to-Identify-Understand-and-Prevent-Student-Withdrawal.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15, 6.

[24] Ibid., 10.

[25] Ibid., 6.

[26] See Figure 3, Appendix 2 below for examples of how institutions use Early Alerts.

[27] Edmonds, Lauren and Garaci, Lisa (2013). *Implementing Early Alert Systems*. Education Advisory Board, Student Affairs Forum (Custom Research Brief). Washington DC,< https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-Insights/SAF/Custom/2013/04/Implementing-Early-Alert-Systems.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15, 15.

Exploration from this committee includes best practices and techniques in career and academic advising, roles of professional and faculty advisors and intrusive advising in support of student success.

CAREER AND ACADEMIC ADVISING

Cost-effective approaches to student success include structuring student course and major decisions, personalizing support for off-track students, and integrating career and academic advising.[28] Degree maps and electronic tools can be helpful for advisors to integrate this information into advising sessions with students.

Degree maps with mandatory milestones toward degree completions and structured curriculum paths for pre-major students can help students stay engaged and on track for their degree even if they choose to change their major. It may also help advisors to identify students who are off-course so the advisors can intervene appropriately.[29] Most importantly, these plans or maps can empower students to be self-sufficient to learn about degree requirements and plans of study and allow advisors more individual time with students to build relationships. [30]

ROLES OF PROFESSIONAL AND FACULTY ADVISORS

Professional and faculty advisors are often organized by department curricula rather than student caseload. When students change majors, they may be shuffled between various advisors, get conflicting advice, and lack personal connection.[31] One way to alleviate this problem is to assign advising caseloads based on student migration patterns and provide professional development for each advisor on a related set of majors based on historical trend data of majors students may flow among.[32] It is helpful for a student to have as few advisor changes as possible.

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[28] The Advisory Board Company (2012). Elevating Practice for Degree Completion and Career Success. *University Leadership Council, Education Advisory Board*, <http://www.eab.com>.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Godow and Zellner, The Advisory Board Company (2012). Organizing Centralized Academic Advising Services and Considerations for Transitioning to a New Model, *Custom Research Brief*, <https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-Insights/AAF/Custom/2012/01/Organizing-Centralized-Academic-Advising-Services-and-Considerations-for-Transitioning.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

[31] The Advisory Board Company (2014). A Student-Centered Approach to Advising: Redeploying Academic Advisors to Create Accountability and Scale Personalized Intervention. *Education Advisory Board: Academic Affairs Form*, <https://www.eab.com/research-and-insights/academic-affairs-forum/studies/2014/a-student-centered-approach-to-advising>, accessed 9/30/15.

[32] Ibid.

Professional and faculty advisors both serve key roles in working with different types of students and can be deployed based on academic risk factors which may include predictive modeling as well as leading indicators (e.g. collection of ID card, scheduled meeting with an academic advisor, attendance at mandatory events) to occur early in the semester.[33]

Advisors must have access to risk factors and be trained appropriately to use the data. Professional advisors are typically most effective in working with high-risk and medium-risk student as they can offer the extra individual coaching and assistance that is necessary for those students. Faculty advisors can best serve in a mentoring role for low-risk students and can be helpful in helping disengaged students make a connection with academic and professional resources.[34]

A "hand-off model" (professional to faculty advisor) works best for accessed-focused public institutions looking to provide support to undeclared student while containing the cost of professional advisors.

A centralized "total intake model" works best for accessed-focused public institutions with resources to provide professional advisor support to all incoming students.[35]

A "total intake model" is the more expensive of the two options.[36]

INTRUSIVE ADVISING

The literature indicates that intrusive advising techniques improve retention, GPA, call attendance, time management, and study skills.[37]   Intrusive advising is time-intensive, expensive, and must be resourced appropriately.

Advisors must know the student's history well and be persistent in outreach, and the communication should always be positive and not punitive. Communication is not "one size fits all" and may need to be done via phone, email, postcard, letter or other communication. At one institution, one third of students contacted responded to an email, one third to a letter, and one third to a branded "We Care" postcard.[38]

Even when students meet with an advisor, they may be overwhelmed and not fully understand next steps. It may be helpful for advisors to assist students in setting goals, providing deadlines, writing and assisting students directly with appropriate referrals, and using technology to help students to understand next steps.[39] As part of an intrusive advising model, it may be valuable to add success coaching methods for first-year students in academic difficulty by leveraging other

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] The Advisory Board Company (2012). Elevating Practice for Degree Completion and Career Success. *University Leadership Council, Education Advisory Board*. Retrieved from http://www.eab.com

[36] Ibid.

[37] LeMaster and Wernicke, The Advisory Board Company (2012). Intrusive Advising for At-Risk Students, *Custom Research Brief*, <https://www.eab.com/~/media/EAB/Research-and-Insights/CCF/Custom/2012/11/Intrusive-Advising-for-At-Risk-Students.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

students as coaches.[40] Advising technology can help advisors to facilitate effective and high-impact advising. Centralized note-taking and early alert systems can help multiple advisors understand a student's advising history quickly and allow for consistent advising for students.[41]

Advising Improvements to advising maximize the impact of all existing services.[42]

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continue with transition of merging Advising and Career Services.

2. Continue to maximize student, professional advisor, and faculty advisor use of DegreeWorks through centralized note taking and plans of study.

3. Purchase and implement an early alert system with faculty-initiated alerts; use as central tracking system.

4. Identify additional risk factors throughout various student populations and apply interventions through the first year and beyond, including more intrusive advising.

5. Clearly define roles of professional and faculty advisors and align with student populations; provide professional development and resources.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Incorporate a peer advising/coaching program.

2. Build degree maps in DegreeWorks to include milestones.

3. Consider specialized maps for pre-professional majors or deciding students.

First Year Experience and

First Year Seminar

There is no question that the first year seminar is a high impact practice in higher education. More research has been done on the first year seminar than on any other course in higher education. Institutions across the country have implemented various types of formats and models with positive retention outcomes including persistence from first semester to second semester,

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[40] The Advisory Board Company (2012). Elevating Practice for Degree Completion and Career Success. *University Leadership Council, Education Advisory Board*. Retrieved from http://www.eab.com
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

persistence from first year to second year, persistence to graduation, and improved academic standing.[43]

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR MODELS

Below are first year seminar models from colleges and universities across the United States starting with most widely used.[44]

- Extended orientation seminars 41.1%
- Academic seminars with generally uniform content 16.1%
- Academic seminars on various topics 15.4%
- Professional or discipline-based seminars 3.7%
- Basic study skills seminars 4.9%
- Hybrid seminars 15.3%

A more recent survey reported similar findings with nearly forty percent of institutions offering an extended orientation seminar. Academic seminars with various topics or uniform content together were nearly as popular as the extended orientation model.[45] Currently at MSU Billings, there are two courses integrated into the first year experience: A&SC 101 College Success Strategies (offered at City College) and A&SC 111 First Year Seminar (offered at the University). Both can be characterized as an extended orientation model.

Nearly six in ten institutions required more than 90% of their students to take the first year seminar. Institutions reported academically underprepared, students within specific majors, and students enrolled in developmental or remedial courses as those groups who were most required to take the course.[46]

TOPICS AND COURSE OBJECTIVES

The top three topics in first year seminars by level of importance were campus resources, study skills, and academic planning/advising. Critical thinking, time management, and writing skills were in the top six listed.[47] The most important course objectives for the institutions surveyed are listed below.[48]

- Develop academic skills 54.6%
- Develop a connection with the institution 50.2%

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[43] Cuseo, Joe (n.d.). The Empirical Case for the First-Year Seminar: Promoting Positive Student Outcomes and Campus-Wide Benefits, <http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/OFDSS/101%20FYS%20Research/FYS-empirical-evidence-10.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

[44] National Survey of First-Year Seminars (2009). *National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*. Retrieved from www.sc.edu/fye

[45] National Survey of First Year Seminars (2012-2013). *National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*. Retrieved from www.sc.edu/fye

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] National Survey of First-Year Seminars (2009). *National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*. Retrieved from www.sc.edu/fye

- Provide orientation to campus resources and services 47.6%
- Self-exploration/personal development 28.5%
- Create common first-year experience 23.3%

In addition to building a strong foundation for students, a first-year seminar may have outcomes beneficial for the good of the institution across student affairs and academic affairs including promoting curriculum development, stimulating instructional development of the faculty, building campus community and promoting professional partnerships across different divisions or units of the college, as well as enhancing institutional awareness and knowledge among faculty, staff, and administrators.[49]

Even with all of the research that points to positive outcomes, there has been no one model that is proven above the rest. It is recommended that institutions choose a seminar to fit them, connect learning and program outcomes, invest in initial instructor professional development and ongoing support, and connect FYS to other educational initiatives and practices such as a common book, civic engagement, residential life, or living learning communities.[50]

SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Assign a group of stakeholders from Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to review the existing model including curriculum, outcomes, and assessment data.

2. Identify peer institutions and compare first year seminar programs to the MSUB first year seminar to determine the best fit for MSUB students; study models including extended orientation models, academic seminars, professional or discipline-based seminars, basic study skills seminars, and hybrid seminars.

3. Continue with enhancements of the current model, or develop new curriculum.

LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATION:

1. Expand the first year experience with a multi-tiered model to serve the range of at-risk students as well as high achievers and honors students; consider whether the seminar should be required for some or all first-year students.

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[49] Cuseo, Joe (n.d.). The Empirical Case for the First-Year Seminar: Promoting Positive Student Outcomes and Campus-Wide Benefits. Retrieved from webs.witchita.edu

[50] Padgett, Hunter, Kilgo (2011). Innovations in the First-Year Seminar: Additional Evidence. NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://sc.edu/fye/research/research_presentations/files/FYS_NASPA_2011_I.pdf>, accessed 9/30/15.

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APPENDIX 2: CHARTS AND GRAPHS

Figure 1

Faculty Present Results to Peers	Faculty members can frequently be unreceptive to non-faculty members (e.g., administrators or staff from a teaching and learning center) who attempt to introduce pedagogical innovation. However, contacts at **University C** observe that, at the least, faculty will give their peers a hearing. As a result, this institution asks faculty members who have been involved in successful redesigns to serve as advocates to other faculty members. For example, these faculty members deliver presentations at department meetings to demonstrate the results that they can achieve through a redesign.
Department Chair Commits to Spread Redesign	In order to sustain course innovation at **System D**, initiative leaders frequently obtain a commitment from the department chair and/or the dean that if an initial section of a redesign is successful, the department will apply the redesign to the remaining sections of a course. While some faculty remain opposed, with the full backing of the dean and the leadership of the initiative, the department chair is typically able to push the redesign through.
Entire Course Participates in Initial Redesign	The NCAT recommends redesigning all sections of a course; the support of faculty members, department chairs, and deans is a prerequisite for the NCAT to lend its expertise to a redesign. However, several contacts maintain that forcing through a redesign in this way would be unproductive and generate even more resistance.

"Course Redesign: Minimizing Drop, Failure, and Withdrawal Rates," EAB Custom Research Brief (2010),
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Figure 2
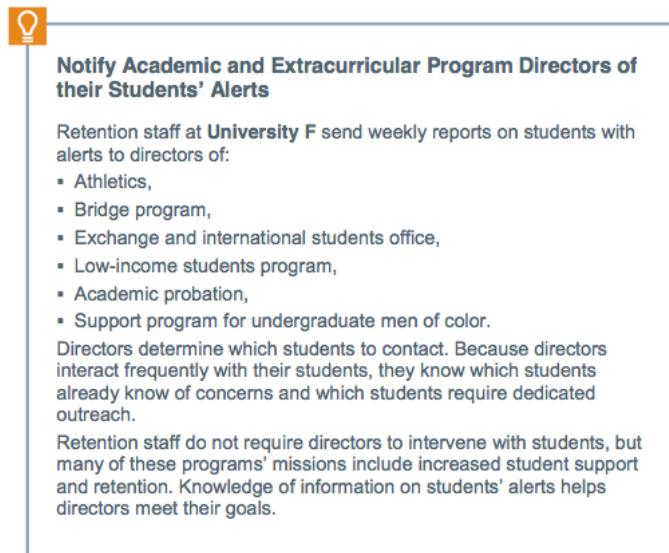
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Affairs Forum (Custom Research Brief). Washington DC: pg. 12.

Figure 3

Features of Student Retention Software at Contact Institutions

	University A & University C	University B	University D	University G
Software Used	MAP-Works	Banner	Starfish	Student Tracking and Retention System (STARS) (Banner-based)
Internally developed or Vendor-based	Vendor-based	Vendor-based	Vendor-based	Vendor-based but highly customized
Data sources analyzed	• Survey results • Student demographics • High school performance	• Academic records • Financial standing	• Academic records • Financial standing • Student demographics • Student socialization	• Academic records • Financial Standing • Student demographics • High school performance
Integrated early alert system	No	No	Yes	Yes

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Withdrawal*. Education Advisory Board, Academic Affairs Forum (Custom Research Brief). Washington
DC: pg. 11.