Student Success Collaborative
Information and Implementation Guidebook
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Introduction

This document introduces the purposes and use of the Student Success Collaborative (SSC) advising platform at Western Washington University.

The central purpose of the SSC is to increase the retention and graduation of Western students by improving student achievement. We also expect that the SSC will help shorten time to degree and keep more students in good standing with federal and state financial aid requirements.

Use of the SSC helps fulfill two of Western’s Strategic goals:

- Expand student access to rigorous and engaging baccalaureate and graduate education.
- Serve as a model for institutional effectiveness, innovation, diversity, and sustainability.

Western was one of 22 universities in the initial cohort of the SSC beginning in January 2013. It is now one of more than 100 institutions nationwide using the platform.

Western Washington University is a proud, publicly-purposed institution with a reputation for excellence. We honor diverse backgrounds and perspectives and take pride in being an inclusive, student-centered university. Our students are engaged and embody what makes Western unique: Active Minds, Changing Lives.

Western believes that higher education should be both accessible and affordable and that anyone with a dream and desire to obtain a college degree should be afforded that opportunity.

Fortunately, Western has a strong record of successfully supporting students towards graduation. A university retention initiative led by the Division of Enrollment and Student Services in the 1990s effectively raised the freshman retention rate from 80% to 85%—roughly where it remains today; graduation rates followed the improvement in retention and now hover near 70%. Retention and graduation rates for students of color, first generation and low-income students are also comparably high and have steadily improved. As of 2013, those rates are more than 10% higher than those of our Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) comparison schools.

However, we all know students who are not in the 70% of those who graduate. More importantly, a greater percentage of students who drop out of Western now leave with debt they may struggle under for years. Consequently, a growing consensus that we should initiate a second retention and graduation initiative has emerged. Some feel that we are “good” but could be “great.” Others feel we need to take more responsibility for supporting the students we recruit to campus. Both perspectives, however, share the view that we are not yet working as effectively as we could to retain and graduate our students.
Fortunately, a national consensus is also forming around what additional steps colleges and universities can take to improve the retention and graduation of their students. In 2013, for instance, the National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, representing the nation’s five largest college and university associations, published An Open Letter to College and University Leaders: College Completion Must Be Our Priority. A "renewed call for collective and immediate action" to increase graduation rates, this initiative included a research summary of three most proven and recommended approaches colleges and universities can take to improve student achievement. These approaches include: (1) changing campus culture to boost student success, (2) improving cost-effectiveness and quality, and (3) using data to boost success.

In keeping with these priorities, a variety of committees at Western reviewed a range of advising and data collection tools used at other institutions to increase retention and graduation rates. This review, which ultimately involved more than 100 faculty and staff, led to a broad consensus to join the Student Success Collaborative.

In December 2012, Western committed to a three-year pilot of the SSC, with advising implementation beginning in fall 2013 with early adopter workgroups. Early adoption workgroups included the College of Business & Economics, Huxley College of the Environment, the College of Fine & Performing Arts, the Academic Advising Center, and Student Outreach Services. CHSS and CSE are working on success marker development and expect to be part of the project implementation for academic year 2014-15.

The SSC combines technology, research, and predictive analytics to help institutions positively and proactively identify and support students. The SSC provides a number of tools and approaches to help universities improve their services to students. These include tools to help departments and colleges adjust their curriculum to improve graduation, and tools to help administrators identify where resources will make the most impact.

In addition, the SSC is a data application tool that mines Western’s data warehouse to reveal the correlates, pathways and course sequences characteristic of our successful students. These correlates are operationalized to provide practical tools and information to assist advisors in their efforts to increase student success.

Most importantly, the SSC provides data and information to assist advisors in 1) rapidly identifying those students who most need their assistance, 2) accurately pinpointing their advisees’ strengths, and 3) listing the success markers they must meet to remain on track for graduation and highlight those most likely to prove challenging. With limited staffing and resources, this information should assist advisors in scheduling their time, prioritizing appointments, and supporting students. For instance, the platform can alert

**About the Student Success Collaborative (SSC)**
advisors when a student makes a small deviation from a recommended pathway or course sequence, permitting the advisor to help the student to get back on track before larger more indelible deviations, such as course failures, occur.

Western was in the first cohort of universities to pilot these tools with the SSC. Homegrown versions of this approach had already been shown to be very successful at Florida State, which saw its graduation rate rise from 70% to 78%, and Arizona State, which increased its freshman retention rate from 77% to 84%. Universities in the SSC beta group, such as Georgia State, also reported favorable results.

For more information about SSC, visit the Education Advisory Board website at http://www.eab.com/National-Collaboratives/Student-Success-Collaborative

The SSC is believed to provide a broad range of benefits that may serve to improve our support to students in a variety of contexts. However, two circumstances make the SSC a particularly good match for Western.

First, the SSC provides advisors with a tool designed to assist undeclared students in their major selection process. This tool, the “Major Explorer” highlights majors that aid an advisor in quickly identifying additional majors of possible interest and which play to a student’s academic strengths and potential career aspirations.

Relative to students at other universities, Western students delay major selection by almost a year. At the time of pilot adoption, our internal analyses demonstrated that delays in major selection correlated with delays in graduation, and with a higher than average risk of dropping out.

This chart, for instance, compared our retention rates with those of other high-performing public universities. As demonstrated, we stand apart from such peers in the number of students we lose between the sophomore and junior year.

WWU Retention Rates 2011

Issues Unique to Western at the Time of Pilot Adoption

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Major declaration predicts that a sophomore will return to remain on track to graduate in his or her junior year. Indeed, the dropout rate for undeclared sophomores is 11%, more than double the rate for declared sophomores. At schools like Georgia State, advisors have found the major matcher enormously helpful in their efforts to assist students in the major selection process. We hope the tool can assist our advisors in a similar way, thereby keeping more students at Western and on track to graduate.

Second, Western has developed a significant differential in its graduation rates for low-income students. This differential is greater than that of the other state universities in our system, and greater than that predicted by academic ability.

6-Year Graduation Rates: WWU

Because this differential is greater at Western than at other public universities in our state, it is likely that it is caused by factors that exist at Western. Consequently, we expect that changes in the support we provide low-income students may help to correct it. Currently, for instance, low-income students receive academic and social support largely when they ask for it by seeking out an advisor or tutor. Those offices which do reach out to low-income students often struggle to identify which students are in the most need of their support. Importantly, we also struggle to reach students early, when counseling and advice can make the most difference. By establishing predictive success markers for each major, the SSC provides notifications that alert advisors as soon as a student veers from the degree paths successful students take. Based on this information, the advisor can contact the student to identify the challenge the student faces and establish a plan for meeting it.
While Student Outreach Services works directly to help support low-income students at Western, our hope is that this effort becomes a campus-wide initiative, with academic departments and programs actively participating.

**Access to the SSC**

You have been given exclusive access to the platform with an expectation that you will not share your login information with others to access the platform. Value Leaders for each early adopter workgroup will identify who in their areas has permission to gain access to the platform. An e-sign form will be used to initiate access to the platform. The SSC staff member assigned to provide access to the platform will not do so until the user has completed the e-learning modules and other training required and the Registrar’s Office has communicated the appropriate permission.

The intention of these restrictions is to ensure that each person with access to the platform is a professional with a “need to know” of any confidential information it provides, and with the training and expertise to act on that information so as to enable, encourage and support our students.

**Use of the SSC**

The SSC platform is a tool that provides you with a generous amount of information to help inform your conversations with a student. Like any tool, it is only as useful as the person using it.

It is an expectation that as an authorized user, you will utilize the information available to you to support students as they find and navigate through their educational pathway, to help find them assistance needed for academic success, and to aid them in fulfilling their dream of a college education.

The use of this tool should always be used with a focus on a student’s needs and dreams. This tool is not meant to be nor should it ever be used in a prescriptive fashion to discourage a student—even unintentionally. For instance, when the platform predicts that a course will be challenging for a student, that information is enabling to the extent that the advisor uses it to help the student prepare for and meet the challenges of the course.

Of course, Western students and their advisors already know what courses prove challenging in each major, and what kinds of grades predict future difficulties in a particular course of study. We have always trusted our advisors to use this information in a proactive, enabling manner. Not surprisingly, then, advising approaches currently used at Western provide useful guides and models for ensuring that the SSC tools are also used in enabling manners.

While a variety of advising models are used at Western, the emphasis is on the use of *developmental* rather than *prescriptive* models. In other words, advising is guided by questions designed to encourage self-understanding and problem solving on the part of the student rather than deciding for and telling a student what to do.
In one such model, Appreciative Advising, advising sessions typically include the following stages:

1. The advisor builds rapport with the student, establishing a positive first impression.
2. The advisor asks open-ended questions designed to help learn about the student’s dreams, strengths and skills.
3. The advisor assists the student in creating a plan for moving ahead or solving the problem.

Other approaches include Coaching and Developmental advising. All of these approaches are characterized by positive questions that focus on the student’s strengths and goals.

Consider a student who is struggling to be admitted to the College of Business and Economics and who finds they don’t enjoy their classes. This student may not know that they don’t need to be a business major to work in business. To learn about the student’s dreams and strengths, the advisor might make inquiries like the following:

- What would you like to achieve in this visit?
- What are you trying to accomplish by selecting this major?
- Tell me why you chose this field of study.
- Tell me what you are good at.
- What are your hopes and dreams for your future?

Inquiries such as these provide a larger context and the “big picture” of a student’s situation and provide the advisor with more information with which to counsel the student.

Similarly, inquiries like the following focus on the student’s strengths and problem-solving strategies the student develops on their own with the advisor’s assistance.

- What have you thought about doing to fix this problem?
- What have you done in the past to overcome similar problems?
- What do you see as possible next steps?

An inquiry-focused advising session does not prohibit the advisor from providing information in a straightforward fashion. Here, for instance, are examples of how SSC information about course challenge level might be shared with a student:

- Based on what we know from past students, most students find it difficult to take these two courses at the same time.

This kind of information can also be paired with questions:

- We have a wealth of information from past students about the kind of pre-major experience that sets students up to be successful. For instance, we find that students who do well in this pre-major course
go on to be successful in the major. It seems that understanding the course content makes future classes easier. That makes it one of the most important classes you will take. What can you do to make sure you are successful in it?

Of course, most Western advisors are expert in these kinds of discussions and have always known what courses are hard and what kind of grades predict future success in specific majors. The advantage of the SSC is that it provides this information sooner, when small corrections can make larger differences. For instance, whereas an advisor might have previously been notified only after a student had failed a slate of courses, the advisor can now review notifications when a student receives a low passing grade in an introductory course that predicts failures down the line. Based on this information, the advisor can work with the student to increase the likelihood of success in these courses.

The term "at risk" came into use after the 1983 article "A Nation at Risk," published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In the traditional use of the term, students considered "at risk" were those statistically more likely than others to fail academically. The SSC uses the term to identify students who are not on track to graduate in their major. As a pilot institution charged to help shape the SSC, we are working to see this language changed. As many faculty at Western have argued in print, use of the term “at risk” is associated with deficit assumptions that have proven oppressive for students from historically underserved populations. We believe that alternative language, such as the “challenge level” of a course or major, would be more appropriate and enabling.

Fortunately, and despite the current use of “at risk” in its platform, the SSC is programmatically grounded in more enabling educational research paradigms—paradigms which followed previous research on “risk.” This research, which emphasizes resilience and achievement, begins with the assumption that educational data is most enabling when it highlights the correlates of achievement and success. The SSC does this by mining our data warehouse to identify the course sequences and characteristics of our successful students. Achievements which best predict success in specific programs are called “success markers” and programmed into the platform’s alert system. The system highlights student progress relative to each success marker with a color coded system (red, yellow, green), with alerts sent to advisors as they wish (at yellow or red, for instance).

Examples that might trigger an alert include poor performance in an introductory or major course that predicts later success, not registering for a course within a recommended sequence or those successful students take, registering for a low credit load, remaining undeclared with a high number of credits, and so on. The idea, once again, is to identify and assist a student who
Developing Best Practices

Assessment is most valid when kept as close to the level of interaction as possible. Moreover, the contexts in which advising occurs varies greatly from one program to another. Consequently, we expect that use of the platform may evolve to differ somewhat across programs. One program may find they benefit from the notification component of the program, using it to more quickly identify which students to reach out to, but that the predictive difficulty tool does not suit their purposes. Another program may find the major matcher the most useful component of the platform. The SSC may revolutionize the way advising occurs in one context but lead to few changes in another.

Mindful of these differences and the expertise of our advisors, we believe it to be counterproductive to prescribe one set of “best practices” for use of the tool from the outset. Instead, we charge each program to follow three guiding principles, and to meet frequently to discuss your experience with the goal of developing best practices of your own.

The guiding principles are to use the platform:

- To identify the students who most need your assistance.
- To help students successfully find and navigate their educational pathway.
- To help students find the assistance they need to be successful.

Regarding your own discussions of the tool, our hope is that each program will eventually draft its own set of best practices, relative to the needs of its students, and share these with other programs in our larger sessions. In this way the pilot years should yield general practices, grounded in the University mission and the expert work of our advisors, while also respecting the right of each program to control its use of the platform. We will also work to provide sharing sessions across universities so that we can learn from and contribute to the use of the platform in other institutions in our cohort.

Entering Notes in the Platform

At any time, any authorized user within the SSC Platform may add a note about a student to the student’s profile in order to track their progress with the student, record additional information about the student’s performance, or remind themselves about future reminders or alert changes.

The most recent notes will be displayed on the student profile, allowing users the most updates to advisor/staff interaction with a student.

Remember: Notes are an official part of a student’s education record.

Ideally, notes are entered so that other users across the institution also have a sense of who is interacting with a student and for what reasons. However, there may be reasons you wish to enter private information, to edit your notes after entry, or even remove a note. Please be aware that all notes

Sample Codes to Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CON</td>
<td>contacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPT</td>
<td>appointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLK</td>
<td>walk-in</td>
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<tr>
<td>REF</td>
<td>referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REG</td>
<td>registration</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
entered will be saved, even if they are not available for the author or other users to view in the platform.

Here are some suggestions in regards to entering notes into the platform:

- Record only information necessary to inform the next conversation with the student, whether with you or another advisory (e.g., date, reason for visit/outreach, recommendations, next steps).
- Be succinct, factual, and accurate, using standard shorthand codes (sample codes are provided).
- Don’t reveal the student’s personal details or other information not appropriate to a permanent record.
- Don’t record comments that are subjective, opinionated, and/or not documentable.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), passed by Congress in 1974, protects the confidentiality of student records against disclosure to third parties and guarantees access to those records by the student. At Western, we are all stewards of our students’ records and with that have a responsibility to ensure that this information is handled with care and in a secure manner.

FERPA allows the university to release certain “directory information,” which may include the student’s name, local address and phone number, whether the student is enrolled, dates of attendance, degrees earned, and most recent previous institutions attended. However, Western Washington University is more restrictive, releasing to third parties only whether the student is currently enrolled, dates of attendance, and degrees awarded. For students who have requested a confidential block through the Registrar’s Office, no information is disclosed, not even whether the student is enrolled.

When a student enrolls in a postsecondary institution, rights of access are transferred from the parents to the student. Thus parents who wish to have access to their students’ educational information must present a written, signed and recently dated consent from their student for each request.

Western students have 24-hour computer access to their own educational record via Web4U and therefore students and parents are encouraged to dialogue about appropriate and respectful sharing of educational information within the context of their relationship and recognition of the adult standing of the student by the university.

Individuals whose work requires access, such as university faculty and staff and government officials who work to improve instruction, also are allowed by FERPA to view student records.
For more complete information about FERPA and Western’s Student Records Policy, consult Appendix E of the University catalog.

**Academic and Career Development Services** is comprised of three units which provide services to assist students to integrate academic planning and career decision making and achieve academic success:

**Academic Advising Center**  
*Old Main 380, MS 9029*  
*Tel. 650-3850*  
*advising@wwu.edu*

Academic Advising Center staff clarify academic requirements and policies, assist students with course selection and scheduling and help students to establish educational goals and effectively plan a program of study and make timely progress to degree completion. The Center also assists students who experience academic difficulty.

**Career Services Center**  
*Old Main 280, MS 9002*  
*Tel. 650-3240*  
*careers@wwu.edu*

The Career Services Center offers a full range of services to support students and alumni in assessing their interests and abilities and establishing personal career goals. The Center assists students seeking internships in order to gain career-related experience and offers programs and services to support individuals seeking career employment or admission to graduate or professional education programs following completion of their studies at Western.

**Tutoring Center**  
*Wilson Library 280, MS 9029*  
*Tel. 650-3855*  
*tutoring.center@wwu.edu*

The Tutoring Center provides tutorial assistance for GUR courses, with an emphasis on entry level math and science. The Center also assists students to enhance key study skills such as time management, test taking, note taking and textbook comprehension.

**Counseling Center**  
*Old Main 540, MS-9052*  
*Tel. 650-3164*

The Counseling Center assists Western students to optimize their educational experience and lifelong well-being by providing personal counseling services uniquely focused on the needs of students.
Dean of Students Office
Viking Union 547, MS-9106
Tel. 650-3450

The Dean of Students’ office is responsible for the overall supervision and management of the university’s student programs and the facilities and activities of the Viking Union. The Dean of Students oversees and provides leadership to student programs and the Viking Union, and serves as the primary advisor for the Associated Students Board.

disAbility Resources for Students
Old Main 120, MS-9019
Tel. 650-3844
drs@wwu.edu

Through DRS, Western provides admitted or prospective students with disabilities an equal opportunity to access all aspects of University life. DRS is committed to providing services and programs that foster student development at all levels: intellectual, emotional, physical, and social.

Financial Aid
Old Main 240, MS-9006
Tel. 650-3470
Financialaid@wwu.edu

Financial Aid strives to reduce financial barriers to learning by providing eligible students with financial assistance through grants, scholarships, loans, and work study and student employment programs.

Math Center
Bond Hall 211A, MS-9063
Tel. 650-3813
Kim.ragsdale@wwu.edu

The purpose of the Mathematics Center is to encourage mathematical thinking. The Center provides tutoring in mathematical subjects including calculus, linear algebra, statistics, and differential equations. The Center is staffed by the Math Fellows, an exceptional group of undergraduate students chosen by the department because of their performance in mathematics and their desire to help others succeed. The Math Fellows are trained to teach good problem-solving techniques and guide the learner through the process of building mathematical understanding.

New Student Services/Family Outreach
Old Main 300, MS-9016
Tel. 650-3846
nssfo@wwu.edu
The New Student Services/Family Outreach office is committed to assisting students with their transition to the University and Bellingham community. In addition, special orientation events and weekends provide family members and parents an opportunity to become more informed about Western.

**Office of Student Life**  
Viking Union 506, MS-9105  
Tel. 650-3706

The Office of Student Life is comprised of Student Conduct and Student Assistance Services. Staff is responsible to adjudicate alleged violations of the Student Rights and Responsibilities Code, and handles inquiries regarding academic grievances, hardship withdrawals, non-medical leaves of absence, and other requests for general assistance. The office is dedicated to supporting the learning and development of students, and creating an environment that fosters student success and graduation.

**Registrar’s Office**  
Old Main 230, MS-9008  
Tel. 650-3430  
Registrar.Office@wwu.edu

The Registrar’s Office prepares the academic schedule, administers the registration and graduation process, and maintains and preserves academic records. The staff can help students with questions concerning registration, course requirements, add/drop, graduation requirements, and veteran’s benefits.

**Student Health Center**  
Campus Services, Level 2, MS-9132  
Tel. 650-3400

The Student Health Center at Western is a primary care medical clinic with a specialty in college health providing a broad range of affordable health care to eligible students.

**Student Outreach Services**  
Old Main 387, MS-9019  
Tel. 650-7443  
sos@wwu.edu

Student Outreach Services (SOS) is committed to supporting the educational needs of first generation, non-traditional, and multicultural students. SOS advisors provide students with personalized academic advising, assistance in the development of their educational plan, positive intervention for those in academic risk, and helpful referral services to
academic departments and support resources. The SOS office is committed to academic success, retention, and graduation.

University Residences/Residence Life
Edens Hall, MS-9195
Tel. 650-2960
reslife@wwu.edu

Students in University Residences enhance their Western Experience in diverse and inclusive communities that foster active learning, leadership, social responsibility, civic engagement, and effective citizenship: supported by a high quality, attractive and sustainable campus environment.

Writing Center
Wilson Library (across from Zoes)
Tel. 650-3219
writing.center@wwu.edu

It is the mission of the Western Washington University Writing Center to equip writers with the confidence and strategies to engage in the writing process by providing academic support to writers of all disciplines and abilities.

The Writing Center meets this mission by accommodating the highly individual needs of each writer with a pedagogy which promotes sustained learning by focusing on issues of meaning, involving writers in reflection of their own work, and building collaborative, peer relationships.

Appreciative Advising
http://www.appreciativeadvising.net/

Coaching
http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-as-coaching.aspx

Developmental Advising

NACADA (National Academic Advising Association) Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources
http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse.aspx

Visit the Education Advisory Board website at www.eab.com for access to custom research reports pertaining to a variety of topics, including academic advising.

To access reports, login to the website where you can explore by topic using the search bar in the upper right hand column.