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INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes assessment data regarding Western’s use of the Student Success Collaborative (SSC), an advising platform created by the Education Advisory Board (EAB). The purpose of this assessment is primarily summmative in that data was gathered to inform decisions regarding whether to extend Western’s participation with the SSC. To this end, the First Year Experience Advisory (FYE) committee sought to triangulate its findings by collecting data from multiple perspectives.

Specifically, the committee collected the following:

I. Quantitative data regarding utilization, and descriptions of the use of the platform on campus,

II. Qualitative data gathered in focus group discussions among users in each pilot area, and

III. Survey data gathered from each user.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Western was one of 22 universities in the first 3-year pilot of the SSC that began in January 2013. Western adopted a model that included five campus pilot workgroups (all voluntary): Student Outreach Services (SOS), the Academic Advising Center (AAC), Huxley College of the Environment, the College of Fine and Performing Arts (CFPA), and the College of Business and Economics (CBE).

The long-term goal of the pilot is to increase the retention and graduation of Western students by improving student achievement.

By the Numbers
(as of 4/22/15)

10,655
Work List Views

6,922
Student Notes Entered

5,324
Student Interventions
(based on ADV status changes)

1,358
Watch Lists Viewed

465
Emails to students from directly within the platform

11
Targeted Campaigns in AY14/15 – 4 in progress

Preliminary Results from 7 Targeted Campaigns

1,583+
Students Contacted

366+
Students Advised

52+
Students with Measurable Positive Outcomes (e.g. major declaration, increase in GPA, decrease in predicted risk, improving GPA to good academic standing)
UTILIZATION AND USE OF THE PLATFORM

As expected, utilization started slowly when the pilot was first launched in October 2013. As users began to experience more benefits as a result of key improvements to the design, functionality and content on the platform, both the number of users and the amount of utilization has been steadily increasing.

To date, more than 80 individuals have been trained and activated as users in the platform with 68% of users accessing the platform within the past 30 days. As you can see from the data below, Western is also outperforming other institutions in the founding cohort, both in terms of the number of users and the average number of log-ins.

Utilization went to a new level with the start of the 2014-15 academic year when pilot groups began planning and implementing targeted campaigns. The use of these campaigns enabled the pilot workgroups to move to a proactive outreach model by isolating and focusing campaigns on sub-populations of students with shared academic factors (e.g. number of credits, declaration of major status, GPA range).
A total of eleven campaigns were identified for this academic year, four of which are still in progress. Below are some examples of the types of campaigns being run and early results.

**Workgroup-Specific Targeted Outreach Campaigns and Strategies**

Examples of Our Ongoing Efforts to Improve Student Success

- **CFPA**
  - "Off Path" To identify students delaying courses or accumulating excessive credits to shorten time to degree.

- **ACDS**
  - High Performers To outreach regarding declaration of major and improve overall retention of this population

- **Huxley**
  - Moderate Risk To contact sophomores and juniors in a declared major within the college at moderate risk of non-completion.

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**FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES**

In March 2015, each of the pilot areas was asked to consider and respond to 7 focus-group questions concerning their use of the platform and their recommendations regarding its future at WWU. Student Outreach Services (SOS), the Academic Advising Center (AAC) and Huxley each held team meetings among their users, discussing and responding to the questions collectively. SSC users in CBE and CFPA responded to the questions individually and submitted individual responses. Responses are summarized below.

1. **Has use of the platform allowed you to better identify, contact and serve the students most in need of your assistance?**

   Four of the five pilot areas answered “yes” to this question, with CBE providing a mixed response.

   Within CBE, two users reported that the platform was no more useful than other campus systems while a Chair reported that “the platform has made it easier to support a variety of students that I may need to help in my role as department chair.” A fourth user reported that the platform helped her to identify and outreach to students “quickly, accurately, and efficiently.”
AAC noted that “The platform has made it much easier to identify and contact students.” Other areas noted that the platform makes it easier or “more convenient” to track students and “to determine which students are in most need of assistance.” The ability to create and export watch lists of students, and the platform’s e-mail function for contacting students, was praised as fast and convenient.

The three CFPA respondents all answered “yes,” with one faculty member responding “Yes! Emphatically Yes.”

Pilot areas also praised the notes function for providing information regarding how others are serving particular students and to “help advisors learn more about what students’ needs are.”

2. Has use of the platform permitted you to serve a greater number of students?

Two areas (SOS and Huxley) reported that they have a fixed number of advisees and did not seek to use the platform to serve a greater number of students, though they did find that platform allowed them to be more “efficient” and “having the option to do targeted emails to specific groups of students is highly beneficial.”

AAC reported that the platform has permitted them to do “considerably more outreach.”

As with question 1, CBE users were mixed on this question. In the most favorable response, one CBE user said the platform permits her to “spend less time pulling reports and more time actually advising.” Other CBE respondents indicated “I am able to serve the same students with Banner, BI Query, Web4U, and Information System Reports” and “When advising majors, an unofficial transcript works best. SSC has a close duplication of the transcript, but it is not as good.”

Each of the CFPA users reported that the platform permitted them to serve more students.

3. Has the platform allowed you to complete tasks you could not previously accomplish, or to complete them in a more thorough or efficient manner? Please explain.

Four of five pilot areas responded very positively to this question, noting that the system increases efficiency by permitting quick access to student information. SOS noted that the ease of this access helps them to be more efficient in preparing for advising appointments. AAC responded similarly, noting “The platform makes it possible for AAC to conduct outreach campaigns that would otherwise be very difficult and time-consuming,” and that the analytics “allow us to identify students that we wouldn’t previously have recognized as being ‘off path’.”

Within CBE and CFPA all but one user responded affirmatively to this question. A Chair noted “the system allows me easier access to transcript information,” and that the notes section and sorting functions are useful. Other users noted that the platform speeds access to student information and that the system allows them to create work lists, reminders, and to make
student appointments in ways that would not be possible otherwise. The respondent indicating “no” added the following comment: “It has allowed me to make notes on students which I have come back to a couple times. This is a useful function, however, these notes are public to all SCC and therefore I only include generic information. I have come back to notes realized how vague they are and had to look up email conversation with them. I am able to do high quality advising with Banner, BI Query, and Information system reports and email notes rather than with SCC. I think the main issue my college has with advising is how to catch low GPA students early SCC can help with this, however, so can BI Query.”

Note: In September 2014, EAB updated the notes feature to allow users to make either a public or a private note. Private notes can only be viewed on the platform by the individual who wrote the note.

4. What is your judgment about the value of the platform, relative to your efforts to achieve the goals and objectives you originally established for its use?

Three of the pilot areas responded positively to this query, one did not respond, and one (SOS) reported that the platform is not yet functional with respect to their original goal. Three positive comments noted that completing program goals has been facilitated by the ease with which chairs, advisors and program managers can identify and contact students and create work lists. Users noted that these functions permitted earlier and more accurate identification of students in need of assistance and, more generally, saved time.

5. In what ways, if any, does the platform help you serve students that is an improvement or added benefit over systems such as Web-4-U, Banner, etc.?  

Two users felt that the platform had no impact on their ability to serve students noted the following: “I have only used SCC 20-25 times, but, I have not found a tool that is not accomplished by our other systems. I actually prefer look at WWU transcripts directly and figuring out advising issues with this single document” and “Banner is not a snapshot platform – I don’t have an overview of the student in the way I do with this platform. I also don’t have information about what the student is doing with other advisors or if the student has ever been advised.”

In general, all pilot areas responded positively to this query, noting that the system is faster and simpler to use than Banner and Web4U, that the system is easier to learn to use, and that the platform permits access to a range of information previously accessible only with multiple systems. One chair noted that the platform allows her to perform tasks she previously had to ask her program manager to perform.
6. If WWU were to commit to using the platform for 5 more years, what plans would you have for additional uses of the platform or campaigns to conduct?

Two pilot areas said they hoped continued use of the platform and the addition of new features that expand data tracking and reporting capabilities would allow them to discontinue use of AdvisorTrac. This would save them time and the effort of working with two separate systems to monitor student use of services. AAC noted that they would like to make better use of the career information the platform provides when advising students.

Overall pilot areas noted that they would use the platform to further expand their outreach to students in order to advise more students, to advise students earlier, or to make advising more personal and continuous. Several specific groups were named as targets for additional advising who could be served via the platform, including high credit Running Start students, and recipients of specific scholarships. In some instances these expansions in services would require modifications to the platform which have been requested, such as the ability to create watch lists by entering W numbers directly.

7. Do you recommend that WWU commit to the SSC platform for 5 additional years?

The feedback from one of five pilot areas (CBE) was not in support of continuation though the feedback was mixed. Within CBE one user said yes, one said maybe, and two said no, with one of those respondents indicating “I would rather spend the time and energy in updating and improving our college specific information system which can accommodate any custom field we want analyzed and learning more Bi Query to make reporting easier.

The remaining pilot workgroup areas were in support and indicated “yes” to this question. More specific feedback is included in the following text:

Huxley: “Absolutely, we should continue with the platform for the additional 5 years. The importance of being able to identify at risk of not graduating and reach out to students with intentional advising is monumental. SSC provides the ability to access all kinds of information on an individual student in a user-friendly way. To get the same information with the other available software would require opening multiple databases (Banner and Web4U and in-house Excel lists). Many of the services and information offered through the SSC platform are not available through Web4U and Banner.”

AAC: YES “AAC advisors are in favor of retaining the SSC platform for a number of reasons. Lacking the staffing to employ a mandatory advising model for the undeclared students we serve, we need to ‘work smart’ and leverage our resources to identify and reach out to the students who are in the most need of support. The platform provides a highly efficient way to do both of these things. In the past year we have done four very successful outreach campaigns which allowed us to connect with students who were in need of advising but who had not sought out help on their own. The platform also allows advisors to create watch lists which make it easy to monitor and stay in touch with students of concern. The ability to share advising notes is another feature advisors value. Through the use of shared notes we have come to create an
advising community/network on campus sharing information and working together to support students. In short, the platform allows us to do things that would not be possible or would be very difficult/time-consuming to do via other systems.”

SOS: “The SOS advisors unanimously recommend that WWU commit to the SSC platform for 5 additional years. The advisors think it is a useful tool to learn about individual students after viewing the notes of other advisors. The platform also helps advisors coordinate services as a university. We would like to stop using AdvisorTrac if we commit to using the platform for another 5 years. The more people who use the platform, the better of a tool it will be.”

CFPA: Program manager: Yes; Faculty member: “YES PLEASE!!! If others would try it they would come to realize its advantages”; Department Chair: Yes.

USER GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

The third component of the assessment plan involved a user group survey which was sent to all Western users with access at the time the survey was launched in April 2015. The survey, developed by the First Year Experience Advisory Committee, consisted of 10 questions intended to take users 10 minutes or less to complete.

The purpose of the survey was to identify the primary roles of users, their frequency and typical purposes for use, to gather feedback on the benefits and capabilities of the platform as compared to other existing tools (e.g. Web4U and Banner) at Western, and to provide input on the continued use of the platform for 5 additional years.

A total of 75 users were sent a copy of the survey. Forty (40) users responded for an email response rate of 53.3%; 39 of 40 users completed the survey for a percentage completion rate of 97.5%. Below is a summary of the results broken down by each question. The title of each section reflects the majority response for each question(s).

■ SSC USERS INCLUDE FACULTY, STAFF AND ADMINISTRATORS

The majority of respondents using the platform self-identified as staff advisors (45%) or administrators (25%). Chart 1 provides a breakdown of responses. The percentage of respondents in each category is representative of the breakdown of total users with access to the system at the time the survey was administered.
What is your primary role as a user of the Student Success Collaborative? (n=40)

- SSC IS USED FREQUENTLY
  Use ranged from daily to less than once a quarter, with 3 respondents (7.5%) indicating they do not use the tool. Those not using the tool cited the following reasons:
  - “I have not had the time or a cheat sheet available to make it worth my while so I’ve been doing advising the ‘old fashion way’. If you could send me a cheat sheet on how to find information quickly I may try to tackle it again.”
  - “In trials I have not found it useful.”
  - “My job role has changed, and I no longer have the need to use the tool.”

More than three-quarters of respondents (77.5%) indicated they use the platform daily if not weekly. Chart 2 provides a breakdown of responses.
SSC SERVES MULTIPLE PURPOSES
Users cite that they are using the SSC platform for these major purposes: to review individual student information for advising purposes (69.44%), to enter notes about a student (52.78%), or to identify and outreach to subsets of students (47.22%). Table 1 provides a breakdown of responses by all options available to respondents. Respondents did have the option to reply to multiple purposes, including an open-ended reply (see responses below).

Table 1
What do you typically use the SSC platform to do? (Check all that apply) (n=36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Use</th>
<th>Respondent %</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review individual student information for advising purposes</td>
<td>69.44%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter notes about a student</td>
<td>52.78%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and outreach to subsets of students, such as high-achieving, struggling students, undecided students</td>
<td>47.22%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional and programmatic research</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other* (see below)</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage enrollment and inform course scheduling</td>
<td>13.89%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and outreach to pre-interest students</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other: Discuss academic progress with students on academic warning and students I come in contact with through administrative parts of my job; Emergency management; I don’t generally use the tool; I haven’t yet, but plan later this quarter to use the platform to reach out to high-achieving students. I also have used SSC as a shortcut to contact information; Look up W#; Research on individual students to support my supervisor; Send follow-up notes to students.

THE MAJORITY OF USERS FIND IT MORE USEFUL THAN EXISTING TOOLS
Users were asked to compare the benefits and capabilities of the SSC platform with existing tools, such as Web4U and Banner, at Western. In five out of six comparisons, the majority of users strongly agreed or agreed (see shaded boxes in table 2) that the platform was more useful in completing their work than other existing tools at Western. Table 2 summarizes user responses by question.
Table 2
*Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.* (n=36)
The table includes both percentage and total count.

Scale: SA/A= Strongly agree/Agree combined, SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NE=Neither agree nor disagree, D=Disagree, SD = Strongly disagree, N/A=Not Applicable

**Compared to other existing tools, the SSC platform...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA/A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>NE</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...allows me to work more efficiently than I could without it.</td>
<td>80.55%</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...allows me to work more effectively than I could without it.</td>
<td>72.23%</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...enables me to better identify and reach out to the students most in need of my assistance.</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...enables me to serve more students than I otherwise could.</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...permits me to more quickly see a comprehensive report of a student’s academic progress.</td>
<td>83.33%</td>
<td>72.22%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...is more helpful to me in my work to help students succeed in their classes and graduate.</td>
<td>69.44%</td>
<td>36.11%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*THE MAJORITY CONSENSUS IS CONTINUATION*

Users were asked the following question: *Do you recommend that WWU commit to the SSC platform for 5 additional years?* This timeframe for continuation was selected to allow time to examine data trends involving students over a six-year period.
Four out of 36 users indicated that we should not continue with the pilot, providing the following reasons:

- “Academic advising is not my main responsibility so I don’t spend a lot of time on ANY administrative system. Unfortunately that means I don’t have a big stake in getting used to something completely new. I don’t feel SSC provides a big enough pay-off beyond what we already have to warrant the expenditure or the effort to get the whole campus on board.”
- “The advising tools already exist with Web4U. The platform is useful for identifying groups of students and doing outreach.”
- “There are frequent inconsistencies between the SSC platform and what I can just as easily recall in Banner or BI-Query. We have so many tools at our disposal as part of our core SIS that I do not understand why SSC is valuable. It seems to me that a much more conservative investment in some quality BI-Query training would go a long way.”
- “When advising majors, the best tool is an unofficial transcript. The SSC tool is better than ‘nothing’ but is a poor substitute for a transcript.”

The majority of users (88.89%) recommend WWU commit to using the SSC platform for 5 more years.

**DISCUSSION**

Together with a university’s graduation rate, the first-year retention rate is one of the two most cited indicators of institutional quality. In order to be retained, a student must be sufficiently successful and engaged in university life and work. Consequently, the retention rate is widely used as a proxy for both student satisfaction and quality.

The first-year retention rate is also a key economic indicator. If you retain a student you retain their tuition over the next three years. If a retention initiative like the SSC leads to the retention of a typical first-year student the ROI over the next three years is $24,000.00. Retain a non-resident and the return is $57,000.00. The annual cost of the SSC platform is $115,000 which is currently being funded through enrollment fee reserves. Under this model, if we retain just 5 in-state students a year the system pays for itself; greater retention rates means even greater savings.

However, retention has other impacts. Each time we lose a student we have to admit a student to replace that student. In years with lower retention rates, such as we have recently experienced, we are more challenged in admitting a cohort of students large enough to replace our graduates and the students we have lost. More importantly, when we retain a student we help that student, and their family, to retain the investment they have made in Western.

**WESTERN’S UNIQUE CHALLENGES**

Western is a very successful university but it faces unique challenges in retention that led us to join the SSC. In order to place the assessment data presented in this report in a meaningful context, we would like to return to these challenges and to briefly discuss whether the SSC has helped us start to address them during this pilot phase.
Western’s ratio of pre-major advisors is 1/563. The industry standard is 1/350. The discussions that eventually led to participation in the SSC began with concerns in Enrollment and Student Services about maintaining and/or improving upon recent retention levels and finding a proactive means of outreach with various student sub-populations given advising staff levels. Facing student loads that are much higher than the industry standard, ESS staff sought to serve more students and, specifically, to identify the students most in need of their assistance, and to proactively contact those students to provide assistance early, before a raft of failures has begun.

The assessment data presented in this report suggests that, with respect to these concerns, the SSC has been successful, permitting most users to serve more students, to proactively identify those students most in need of their assistance, and to efficiently reach out and contact them, permitting referral to services via e-mail and face-to-face follow-up visits with students most in need of assistance.

Sophomore Retention
Like most universities, Western’s major retention loss is between the first and the second year – generally around 15%. However, Western also loses more sophomores than is typical (an additional 10%) while maintaining more juniors and seniors than is typical at other institution. More specifically, we know we lose sophomores who have not declared a major at a greater level than those in a major and on path for completion. Knowing that, AAC hoped the SSC would help them to more efficiently identify these students, to reach out to them to provide advising, and to assist them in selecting and declaring a major. This is a targeted campaign for that sub-population in this academic year.

Changes in the composition of our student body, and their major interests, make it difficult to reliably determine the impact of the SSC on major declaration. However, the AAC, which is responsible for most of the pre-major advising at Western, reports that the tool has also helped them in this regard as the SSC has permitted them to specifically target high-credit sophomores and to efficiently contact them.

The Loss of High-GPA First-Year Students
The SSC data via its predictive workbooks identified a striking pattern in Western retention rates, most specifically the risk of non-retention for first-year students whose GPAs approach 4.0. Whereas we had expected to focus use of the SSC on students in the “murky middle” (students with a GPA between 2.0 and 3.0) we have recognized that retention for high-achieving students also has the potential of improvement through intentional outreach methods. To this end, AAC has initiated a targeted campaign in the spring 2015 quarter to contact all first-year students with GPAs between 3.6 and 4.0 with the goal of assisting these students with major declarations, helping them feel attended to, and of acquainting them with the many opportunities Western provides in research, career and internship placement, and in applying for distinguished fellowships.

The Low-Income Graduation Differential
Western is a very good university for low-income students as our graduation rates for such students are comparably high. However, the differential between graduation rates for PELL-eligible students is consistently around 8% - the largest differential in the state. Consequently, we hoped participation in the SSC would help us to better serve these students and to support them as they progress to graduation.
While it is too early to track graduation rates for the relevant cohorts of low-income students, we find it notable that advisors in SOS, the office which provides dedicated outreach and service to low-income and other historically underserved students, are among the most enthusiastic supporters of the platform. Responding to the focus group questions, the six SOS advisors were unanimous in requesting that we sustain participation and in reporting that the platform has helped them to be more efficient and better prepared for their advising appointments. We find SOS a particularly important voice in this assessment because 1) SOS advisors see a higher percentage of low-income students than do other advisors, and 2) they have a longstanding record of success with historically underserved students. Indeed, for AY 2012 and 2013, new first-generation and low-income students served by SOS were retained at rates (88% & 89%) substantially higher than the larger campus (82%).

Other advisors also report that the SSC has helped them to assist low-income and other historically underserved students as a consequence of the earlier outreach it permits. For instance, whereas the pre-major advisor in CBE previously contacted students only after they declared a CBE pre-major, she used the SSC to begin advising for enrolled students with a CBE interest. This placed her in contact with many first-generation students who mistakenly thought they should take as many of their CBE foundation courses as they could each quarter, creating course schedules that virtually guaranteed low grades and course failures. Intervening with these students, she was able to help them create more balanced (and typical) course schedules, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would be able to remain eligible for financial aid and be admitted to the college. “Without the SSC,” she reported, “I would not have advised these students in time to catch these schedules. And because of the SSC I now know to watch out for this pattern.”

It is an open question whether the poor course schedules these first-generation students had were the result of institutional bias or of a simple differential in resources and advice. Regardless, the SSC permitted this advisor to identify and correct for this situation, and to share the knowledge she learned about this pattern with other advisors. In this way the SSC has already had an impact on the kind of differentials in advising, course schedules and advice that lead to differentials in rates of graduation for low-income and first-generation students.