Student Success Collaborative (SSC) Pilot Initiative:
Assessment Summary

May, 2014
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GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Student Success Collaborative (SSC) is a product developed by the Education Advisory Board (EAB) to help universities improve advising and other student services. The program includes 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. Western elected to participate in a three-year pilot of the SSC.

The SSC provides a data application tool that mines Western’s data warehouse to reveal the correlates, pathways and course sequences characteristic of our successful students. Progress data derived from these correlates is combined with existing student performance and transcript information in a simple advising dashboard designed to help advisors rapidly 1) identify those students most in need of their assistance, 2) pinpoint each student’s needs, and 3) proactively contact the student to arrange advising or other student support services. The dashboard also provides a variety of practical tools permitting advisors to coordinate their services with other offices, to build work lists of advisees, to leave notes and reminders for themselves, and to run simple data warehouse queries. A separate dashboard, and additional tools, are provided for chairs.

SSC Objectives

The central purpose of the SSC is to increase the retention and graduation of Western students by improving student achievement. Objectives for the development of the assessment plan, as identified by Western’s First-Year Experience Advisory Committee, include:

- Increase the percentage of students declaring a major by the end of their sophomore year.
- Utilize data to help inform a student’s course selections and reduce time and credits to degree.
- Utilize alert notifications to identify students at moderate and high risk levels to graduate and provide early intervention to reduce the likelihood or mitigate the impact of poor scholastic standing for students most in need.
- Improve communication and coordination of service delivery and increase efficiency among advisors via information (e.g. student status, notes) documented in the platform.
- Provide data to departments that assists chairs in making curricular changes that improve student success.

Ensuring Student Privacy and Fair Treatment of All Students

One of the earliest concerns cited in the implementation of the SSC was in regards to access to and privacy of student information and ensuring that users understood the intended purposes of this information in aiding a student to be academically successful. Several steps are in place to ensure that users gaining access to the system fully understand their responsibilities in regards to this data. This first begins with an e-sign for user acceptance.

WWU ENGAGEMENT WITH SSC

Western Washington University is one of 22 schools in the first cohort that launched January 2013.

Ninety-eight schools are now in some stage of SSC implementation with more being regularly added.

WWU has 44 current unique users with access to SSC.

Monthly logins to the platform have more than doubled since January 2014.

The ease of access to quick summary information about a student’s academic history and performance is the benefit most commonly cited by users.

Our dedicated consultant has made five site visits to Western since January 2013 to provide training and support with success marker development.
access. This e-sign process includes approval by a supervisor, associate dean or one of the SSC project managers and acknowledgement from the requestor that they will comply with the Code of Responsibility for Security and Confidentiality of Records and Files and the SSC Guidebook. In addition, users are required to complete a series of online modules and assessment (total completion time of 45 minutes) aimed at understanding the functionality of the platform and an on-campus training (1 hour) in which the guidebook is discussed, platform functions are reviewed, and users engage in hands-on practice using the platform and understanding the student data.

In addition to user access, a successful implementation of this pilot project requires that features and functionalities being added to the platform are done so in a manner that is mindful of a student's privacy and in compliance with Western's responsibilities under FERPA and Policies on equal opportunity and nondiscrimination. The Value Leader team partnered with the Registrar and Education Advisory Board staff to develop a data request protocol outlining the steps required when there is interest in adding any student information, attributes, characteristics or other personally identifiable data to the existing SSC application tool. This protocol was reviewed and signed by all parties involved in its development.

A second concern raised about the implementation of the SSC was that its use might inadvertently disadvantage students of color or frame their rates of retention and graduation in problematic terms. Campus-wide discussion of the need to improve our diversity climate and our support of students of color did inform the decision to join the SSC, and Student Outreach Services (SOS), which provides advising and support to some of Western's students of color, is a pilot participant. However, the platform does not identify students by race and none of the pilots’ use of the platform varies by the race or ethnicity of the students they serve.

**Utilization**

As expected, utilization statistics have been slowly growing as more users gain access to the system, as new features are released that make use of the platform easier and more intuitive, and as users begin to experience the benefits of using the platform. As of end of March, 2014, there were a total of 44 activated users, of which 52% were active users in that month. As there are many types of administrators with access to the site and for different purposes, EAB staff have indicated it isn’t expected that schools will see monthly user rates of 100%, but they do recommend schools reach and maintain at least 60% active users per month. Average logins for March totaled 7.3 logins per user.

In January, 2014, a number of new features were released that improved the user experience with the platform. Following that release, monthly logins more than doubled in February and March. A second release at the end of April, which has a number of functionalities current users have expressed interest in, is expected to result in even more frequent log-ins and higher utilization rates.

Of those institutions in the founding cohort, the most recent utilization data indicates that since the January release Western is mirroring the log-in and utilization rates at other campuses. The platform is primarily used by staff advisors and academic chairs in the pilot areas.

**Western Engagement with the Collaborative**

Since implementation began in January, 2013, EAB staff have been on site for consultation, platform training, and assistance with student success marker development a total of five times. Success marker development is completed (with some revisions underway) in the three pilot colleges. EAB staff have also met with faculty and associate deans in CHSS and CST and are working on success markers. A strategy to develop success markers for Woodring College of Education is still under discussion.

Western has also been represented in many ways with training and product development opportunities provided by the Education Advisory Board. This has included participation in several collaborative-wide webinars to learn how other institutions are using the platform (Developing a Data-Driven University, How We Can Help: Integrating SSC into the Advising Process, Members’ Perspectives on Evolving Advising Models, and Reengineering Developmental Math), participation in a specialist program (five advisors), attendance at the inaugural summit in
Washington, D.C. (two value leader team representatives) and representation on the Product Advisory Council (one value leader team representative).

**Plans for Next Year**

Value Leaders will continue to implement the SSC in their colleges/departments – focusing on ways to use the information for more proactive outreach with students and to increase utilization. The process of developing and improving success indicators will also continue. Based on requests from chairs, we are extending retention efforts to use the platform to better identify and serve high-performing students. One of the patterns the platform has identified is that high-performing students are at risk of non-returning in some colleges. Earlier identification of such students may help departments to reach out and engage these students so that they do not transfer. Chairs have also asked for tools to enable them to quickly aggregate student progress in required prerequisite courses. We expect utilization to continue to expand as the platform is improved to include data enhancements like these, specific to the needs of users at Western.

**YEAR 1-2 ASSESSMENT REPORT: BACKGROUND**

**SSC Assessment Plan**

The First-Year Experience Committee (FYE), an advisory committee of faculty and staff charged to help coordinate and assess the university’s retention efforts, is responsible for the assessment of the SSC on our campus. The SSC assessment plan and timeline was designed by the FYE committee and carried out by the Value Leaders in each of University’s initial campus participant areas: Huxley College, CBE, CFPA, Student Outreach Services (SOS), and Academic and Career Services. Assessment results were collated and summarized by Sara Wilson and Steve VanderStaay and approved by the FYE committee.

**Timelines and Purposes of the SSC Assessment Plan**

Years 1-2 (January 1, 2013 – December 31, 2014)

The purpose of SSC assessment in the first two years of the pilot is primarily *formative* in that data is sought to inform decisions about how to improve use of the platform to increase student retention and graduation rates.

Year 3 (January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015)

The purpose of SSC assessment in the third year of the pilot is primarily *summative* in that data gathered will be used to inform decisions regarding whether to continue to participate in the collaborative.

**Year 1-2 Plan**

In keeping with the formative purposes of the assessment of the platform in years 1-2, and in order to maximize learning opportunities, the assessment will be largely qualitative and grounded in verbal reporting from each of Western’s five designated participants:

- Huxley College
- College of Business & Economics (CBE)
- College of Fine & Performing Arts (CFPA)
- Academic Advising & Career Services
- Student Outreach Services (SOS)

To begin the assessment, each participant area was asked to discuss among its users:

- How they have used the platform.
- The features of the platform that have emerged as most and least useful in their work.
- The technical features of the platform that they would like to see further improved.
- Their plans for use of the platform in year two (second academic year).
• Tentative judgments about the value of the platform, relative to their goals, objectives, and mission.
• Whether use of the platform has allowed them to better identify and provide outreach to those students “off-path” to graduation or to serve more of those students in greatest need.
• Anything else they wish to report out about their experience with the platform and/or pilot project.

This first task was completed in late winter and early spring. Value leaders met in an expanded meeting of the FYE Committee to report out to the larger group their responses to the above questions. Quantitative data regarding utilization of the platform was also shared at this time. The assessment findings were organized and collated; a summary of these findings was submitted to the value leaders and FYE committee for approval. This summary comprises the last section of this report and is attached below.

Year 3 Plan
The Year-3 assessment will include the qualitative process described above, but with a more pointed emphasis upon the extent to which Western participants believe continued use of the platform would help them to achieve the program goals and objectives, and their goals and objectives. In keeping with the summative purpose of the Year-3 assessment, we also plan to survey participants anonymously on these issues. Moreover, the report will include University performance relative to the following metrics:

• percentage of sophomores who have declared majors
• retention
• time to degree
• graduation rates
• utilization of platform

An assessment report of Year 3 will be issued in May, 2015. The report will conclude in a recommendation to the Vice Presidents regarding whether Western should continue to participate. The report will be shared with the Faculty Senate, which will issue its recommendation to the Vice Presidents.

YEAR 1-2 ASSESSMENT REPORT: FINDINGS

The following sections summarize the participant area’s responses to the formative assessment questions that were accumulated during late winter, early spring, 2014. Where possible, the summaries distinguish the pattern of staff and faculty responses. Where comments are unique to a particular participant area, such as Student Outreach Services (SOS), the area is identified. The responses to the question concerning “tentative judgments about the value of the platform” are reported out for each participant area.

How have Western participants used the platform?
Preparing for advising appointments was the most frequent response from staff advisors to this question. Advisors reported that they find the “Overview Tab” an efficient way to become acquainted with a student’s academic performance and progress toward graduation. While most of this information is available through other portals, the SSC’s snapshot of repeated, failed, or W courses, as well as attempted credits and GPA trend, is “more user friendly and easier to access than the advisor tools provided by Banner, WEB4U or AdvisorTrac.” This saves time and provides a more comprehensive portrait of a student’s situation. Advisors also reported that they use the ‘Notes’ feature to coordinate advising across offices. Because Western students are not assigned a single advisor, this feature facilitates coordination and consistency. Finally, the reminders feature helped advisors keep track of “to dos.”

In addition, advisors in SOS used the platform to create watch lists of students with GPAs below 2.0. They also used the platform to monitor student progress and to stay in contact and make appointments with the student to “advise and discuss academic success strategies.”

A departmental advisor reported that her chief use of the platform was to track, contact, and make advising appointments with pre-majors who have had a hold placed on their registration due to poor performance.
The most frequent response from faculty in the participant areas was to use the platform to track and advise students not meeting minimum GPA standards in the major and to “determine what might be the issues that contribute to the academic problems.” For instance, a chair noted that the platform allowed her to readily see if a student’s low GPA was due to courses in or outside of the major. Chairs also used the platform to contact students and make advising appointments. One chair reported that she used the platform to track the progress of these students following the advising appointment and liked to use it to “invite students in to congratulate them on their academic progress since our last meeting.”

What features have emerged as the most and least useful?

**Most useful:** All users reported that the easy access the platform provides to the full range of student progress and performance data is the platform’s most useful feature. “You can get academic histories as well as an abundance of progress information for multiple students,” was a representative comment.

**Least useful:** Many users reported that the risk colors, risk score analysis, and alerts were the least useful feature of the platform. One chair noted, “The ‘why’ behind the risk notifications requires some sleuthing” and that she was better able to determine the “why” behind student difficulties by simply using the data screens and her own judgment. In addition, staff advisors noted that the progress features were not useful for undeclared students.

The technical features of the platform users would like to see further improved.

Staff and faculty users reported that they would like print-friendly screens, the ability to export work lists, and more data about transfer students. Specifically, departments would like to see which CTC prerequisite courses at which CTCs adequately prepare students for the majors.

Plans for use of the platform during summer orientation and next academic year.

Advisors and chairs alike said they would like to use the platform to become more proactive, reaching out to students earlier. Many users also noted that they would like to become more acquainted with the platform’s functionality.

Initial judgments about the value of the platform:

*Huxley*

“The platform is a helpful communication tool among the different student services on campus. It’s useful to be able to see what services students have received and to be able to reinforce what they have been told at other offices.”

“The platform conveniently organizes student information in one very readable page rather than forcing one to use several different sources in Banner and Web4U.”

“The platform makes my responsibilities of enrollment management more streamlined.”

*CBE*

CBE participants reported that there was a general consensus that the process of academic registration holds used in conjunction with high-risk identified students as identified by SSC worked extremely well. It brought students in for advising appointments who might not have otherwise appeared. Specific users within CBE reported the following initial judgments about the value of the platform:

Chair 1: “With respect to the program objectives, I don’t think that the SSC is doing an effective job of addressing the objectives. However, it may be too early to judge. Also, it may be that I am missing some helpful features of the system.”

Chair 2: “There is great value in this platform. It provides easy-to-read outcomes for students and readily provides details that used to take time to retrieve.”
Administrator 1: “Only a preventative action like not being able to register will cause students to declare their majors earlier. More staff would be needed if proactive advising is to be implemented.”

Administrator 2: “It is a good visual tools that will help me track some notes and detailed student information. However, for major advising I still use a WWU transcript … I think the tool is more useful for pre-major advising or general student advising. The notes section is a great tool to help save time. I wish that I was using it proactively, running reports on at-risk students and providing intervention advising, however I have not had time to run such lists and contact these students …“

Pre-major advisor (this individual has left WWU for another job; however, she liked the system and used it to identify students at risk of not being admitted into the major and to advise them.

CFPA

Chair: “This tool makes enrollment management much easier and more streamlined. It takes me at least half the time to complete my quarterly updates on student progress than it previously did using Web4U and I do not need to ask my administrative assistant to run GPA reports, major lists, etc. It makes it possible to be proactive if a student is having difficulties.

We do not over-enroll the major because of the consequences of time-to-degree and resource availability. The SSC helps me identify students who elect to take two years to complete all the 300-level courses rather than one year. These students do ‘muck up’ annual seat requirements. The system makes it easy to find and track these students.”

Faculty Program Director: “In my area I advise 37 dance majors. I know them individually; I see them often. For Dance the platform is of very limited value. For the University as a whole, for the average student and especially for large departments, I think it could prove very valuable.”

Academic Advising and Career Services

“AAAC staff see the platform as valuable because it provides a uniform way for advisors across campus to communicate and coordinate efforts. It also has the potential to help us reach out to students in a more efficient and effective manner. The analytics allow us to identify students in need of our services who otherwise might not be identified as at risk.”

Student Outreach Services

“The continuous improvements made by EAB to the platform have been significant and made it easier to ‘want’ to use the tool for retention purposes and to better serve our students with easy-to-access information. A visual example is the overview page showing student progress.”

“The platform has useful features that are relevant to the work we do in Student Outreach Services.”

“We serve first-year students so, until they move into their second quarter, there isn’t as much information that is useful. After they take more courses and have a stronger academic history at Western, the platform becomes more relevant.”

Has your use of the platform allowed you to better identify and serve students “off-path” to graduate, or to serve more of those students in greatest need?

Three of the five participant areas answered this question affirmatively, noting that the ease with which the platform makes data available, when combined with its functionality for making work lists, reminders, notes and for contacting students, helps them better serve students in need. SOS and CBE reported mixed responses. In CBE some users found the system helped them while others preferred to use CBE’s student information system. SOS advisors reported that the system did not help them in their work with new students who had not yet taken courses at WWU. A response noted here—and in earlier questions—was that participants would like to use the platform to better identify and serve students “off-path” to graduate but do not have time or sufficient staff to do so.