

Undergraduate Student Success Team Recommendations to Improve Retention, Graduation Rates, and Time to Degree at UC Santa Cruz

Executive Summary

April 22, 2013

The Undergraduate Student Success (USS) Team was formed in December 2012 to develop recommendations for improving undergraduate retention, graduation rates, and time to degree at UC Santa Cruz. We define success also to include preserving access to and achievement of equitable outcomes while maintaining the quality of our undergraduate education. The team began by reviewing a broad array of both UCSC and externally generated research and reports on student success (see Resources on the [Success website](#)) as well as focus groups with UCSC advisors and faculty and staff input. This review resulted in two immediate actions for your consideration.

TWO IMMEDIATE ACTIONS REQUIRED FOR PROGRESS

A common thread throughout the team's discussions of high priority initiatives was the need for focused and sustained high-level administrative commitment to durable institutional change. The committee feels that, in the absence of such a commitment, any efforts to improve student success are likely to be poorly coordinated across campus, half-hearted in their implementation, and doomed to being quickly forgotten.

Action 1: Appoint a limited-term "Champion" to catalyze rapid reforms.

Create a 2 to 3 year term Faculty Special Assistant position that reports directly to the CP/EVC. This "Champion of Undergraduate Success" is charged with identifying and shepherding campus-wide reforms to improve retention, graduation, and time to degree while maintaining or improving equity and the quality of undergraduate education. At present, piecemeal efforts compete for limited resources and place unprioritized demands on units such as Institutional Research, Information Technology Services, Enrollment Management, Advising, Colleges (Academic, Student Life), and Retention Services, as well as academic programs and the divisions. To properly orchestrate efforts campus-wide, the Champion must have the respect and attention of all these units.

The Champion will

- Establish, within three years, enduring structures to prioritize, initiate, coordinate, assess, and improve student success.
- Develop whole-organization processes for resource estimation, project planning, and decision making to streamline and speed initiation of projects that boost student success. These processes must be ongoing, capable of assessing the efficacy of initiatives, and promote continuous improvement.

- Work closely with data analyst(s) and researchers to formulate questions and mine data for answers that inform approaches to student success.
- Launch the most promising USS Team recommendations to optimize impact on student success.
- Maintain and expand expertise in best practices at UC Santa Cruz and other institutions.
- Cultivate inquiry and innovation throughout the organization through information delivery.

Action 2: Expand access to information that will empower students, advisors, programs, and administration to make decisions crucial to student success.

The need to access and analyze data and to automate reporting based on sophisticated data collection has been a consistent theme in every USS Team discussion. Data and analysis are critical in determining which initiatives to pursue and how to prioritize them, and ultimately all of our efforts require some method of evaluation that relies on data. Collecting more reliable data and making better use of existing data are essential for student success.

The team identified critical resource needs in the following domains:

- Data management and analysis, and self-service reports, best pursued within Institutional Research and the Data Warehouse.
- Improvements to the Academic Information System. Additional staff are required to ensure timely completion of identified projects. Improvements in AIS require additional resources in ITS and the Registrar’s office to ensure complete and accurate degree audit and qualification systems that enable student self-advising and automated advising. Additional capability could also integrate major mapping with the degree audit process.
- An analyst focused on using data and systems to develop improvements in methods of advising our students, monitoring their progress, and identifying areas ripe for curricular improvement. A particular focus should be on early student advising and academic support in the colleges, programs, and retention services. Best pursued within the Office of Advising and Honors.

Priority initiatives that require data, tools, or systems not currently available include the following:

- Develop tools for analyzing curricular and other bottlenecks, and engage programs in discovering ways to overcome them. This will ensure that students’ graduation is not delayed because they are unable to access needed courses.
- Identify students who are not on track to meet the qualification requirements for their intended majors in a timely way, and develop outreach and advising strategies to assist students in finding and pursuing an appropriate program of study.
- Identify students who fall short of graduation requirements by a small number of units, and develop outreach strategies to enhance these students’ degree completion rates.

- Use automated systems to facilitate self-advising, push advising, and targeted in-person advising to enhance the effectiveness of our myriad approaches to student success.
- Define predictive models of student success from admissions data to inform admissions selection and for use in first year referrals, possible interventions, and program development.

Beyond these priority recommendations, there were many additional initiatives that rely on existing and in some cases new data. These initiatives will be in the full report.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES AND ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

The Undergraduate Student Success Team analyzed over 350 suggested student success initiatives and prioritized them based on viability, potential benefits and impact, cost, ease of implementation, and similar criteria. This process allowed the USS Team to develop a shorter list of about 80 initiatives that were broken out into 10 clusters. Each of these clusters addresses specific hitches in student success as students move through their careers, from selection to graduation, and corresponding initiatives for improvement.

The full details of these clusters and initiatives will be in the final report. The team wishes to highlight three specific strategies we believe would have immediate impact.

Strategy 1: Increase On-Campus Jobs for Students.

Many circumstances outside of the classroom impact student success. One of the most important of these is the strain of meeting the costs of attending college. The team recommends that the CP/EVC increase the number of on-campus student jobs. Ideally, these jobs should be targeted at vulnerable populations and focused on activities likely to increase success for other students as well: jobs that help the recipients and those they work with. Examples include work study and other jobs for peer academic advisors, mentors, counselors, and tutors and participants in supplemental instruction.

Strategy 2: Engagement with student mental health, alcohol, and other drug issues.

Nearly one quarter of students who leave UC Santa Cruz describe mental health concerns or abuse of alcohol or other drugs among the reasons for their exit. The campus leadership must thus take an active role in addressing issues of mental health and alcohol and drug abuse.

The team recommends that the CP/EVC create a mental health task force to foster shared responsibility for student mental health.

Beyond the expansion of staff and faculty training such as the Mental Health First Aid certificate program, the task force should consider ways to increase peer support, following the successes of

the Student Health Outreach & Promotion (SHOP) and its array of peer volunteer and intern programs promoting health and healthy choices.

Strategy 3: Encourage Development of Degree Paths that Increase Success.

The administration and the Academic Senate share responsibility for student success. While some initiatives require administrative leadership with Senate consultation, others require Senate leadership. This grouping includes initiatives meant to ensure that our curricular structures, including major qualification policies and major structures, are designed for student success.

Chief among these is the development of additional degree choices that can improve success for students who may not intend to pursue graduate school, and the provision of incentives for on-time graduation of ambitious students who may otherwise linger in their undergraduate programs.

The priority recommendations for the Senate to address include:

- Create more degree paths for students who do not intend to pursue graduate studies.
- Develop bachelor/masters programs to entice undergraduates seeking greater depth to complete their degrees in a more timely fashion.
- Promote early warning strategies that notify students when they are in danger of failing a course, giving them adequate opportunity to seek support.
- Work with programs, divisions, and the campus to develop systems to overcome curricular bottlenecks.

TEAM MEMBERS

The USS Team was formed at the request of CP/EVC Galloway in December, 2012, with the exceptional assistance of Linda Rhoads, Special Projects Manager, and Elise McCandless, Analyst.

Elizabeth Abrams, Provost, Merrill College, UE and Humanities

Julian Fernald, Director, Institutional Research, P&B

Daniel Friedman, CPB, Senate and SocSci

Grant Hartzog, Senator, Senate and PBSci

Tracy Larrabee, CEP, Senate and BSOE

Pablo Reguerin, Executive Director, Retention Services, CL

Stacey Sketo-Rosener, Coordinator, Campus Advising, UE

Michael Yamauchi-Gleason, Convener, Council of CAOs, BAS

Richard Hughey, VPDUE, UE and BSOE