Student Success and Advising Workgroup

Report to the Statewide Developmental Education Reform Taskforce:
Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

April 2013
Student Success and Advising

The Developmental Education Reform Taskforce-Student Services and Advising Workgroup was charged to research the current levels and types of student support within the MUS, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the systems, to research alternative/evolving/collaborative approaches to providing support for developmental education articulating the effectiveness and efficiencies of these systems, and to make specific recommendations based on these analyses. The workgroup was further charged to forward recommendations that are relevant to the mission differentiation of the campuses within the MUS. This report follows these major themes.

Current Levels and Types of Student Support with the MUS

The Student Success and Advising Workgroup began its work by surveying MUS campuses and community colleges. Questions were developed to obtain information about current student success and advising services for developmental education students and to elicit information relevant to Complete College America’s (2012) guiding core principles regarding services for students enrolled in gateway courses.

Surveys were distributed to all of the community college and MUS campuses; seven complete surveys were returned. The results represent two community colleges, two 2-year, one 4-year, and two graduate-level institutions. A summary of the survey results are included as an appendix to this report (________).

All of the respondents reported advising, tutoring, developmental math and developmental writing services; however, the levels and types of services and the responsibility for their provision varied widely. Responsibility for student advising and developmental coursework is largely the responsibility of academic departments. Tutoring responsibilities are largely centralized in campus-supported learning centers. Some campuses utilize a mixed model of shared departmental and centralized responsibilities for advising, tutoring and developmental support services. Although administrative responsibilities vary across the system, a number of system strengths and weaknesses emerge from the survey responses.

System Strengths

The following strengths were noted from the survey responses.

- All of the mission-differentiated campuses in the MUS provide academic services for developmental students.
- Enrollment caps and smaller class sizes for developmental math and writing courses are widely enforced (between 20 and 25).
• All campuses report interest in exploring innovative approaches to developmental coursework—more so with math than with writing strategies.
• Lab tutoring and skill development services are widely available to students.
• Faculty members play a central role in advising all students.

System Weaknesses

The following weaknesses were noted from the survey responses.

• Online courses, services, and support systems are not equally available for developmental students.
• Writing and math labs are not equally available.
• Two-year programs have the least available student support and advising services.
• None of the campuses celebrate developmental student successes.
• The amount of dedicated space and staff for developmental students varies widely.
• Few campuses offer linked classes or co-requisite enrollment options.

Alternative, Evolving and Collaborative Approaches

As previously noted, advising, tutoring, developmental math and developmental writing services are widely available throughout the MUS. All campuses deliver specialized academic services for developmental students. The type and level of academic services varies, but all are focused on students enrolled in developmental coursework. An alternative approach is to focus on supports for developmental students placed in gateway courses.

Several of Complete College America’s guiding core principles (2012) emphasize the need to integrate academic supports into gateway courses. The core principles state:

• Enrollment in a gateway college-level course should be the default placement for many more students.
• Additional academic support should be integrated with gateway college-level course content as a co-requisite, not a pre-requisite.

Although all of the Student Support and Advising Survey respondents reported similar levels of available support services for students enrolled in gateway courses, few reported having staff or space specifically dedicated to assisting developmental students enrolled in gateway courses.

Most campuses reported course registration restrictions as a widely used intervention strategy (e.g., students must successfully complete developmental coursework before enrolling in gateway courses). The use of co-requisite enrollment strategies is not a widely used intervention.
The Student Services and Advising Survey focused on academic services; it failed to address the non-academic needs of developmental students. The need to address non-academic services emerged from the open response section of the survey. Respondents stressed the need for developmental services to address case management, financial aid, time management, and career counseling.

**Recommendations**

The Student Services and Advising Workgroup forwards the following recommendations.

- Maintain autonomy of mission-differentiated campuses to determine appropriate compliment of academic support and advising services for developmental students.
- Consider the resource implications of extending developmental support services into gateway courses.
- Support campuses in developing strategies for student support services concurrent with developing curricula responsive to CCA principles.
- Increase resources for student support and advising services in two-year colleges, as these currently do most of the developmental education.
- Dedicate staff and physical space to support developmental education students. Staff includes counseling, financial and academic support, as well as classroom instructors. Physical space includes support centers with sufficient computers/laptops/tablets.
- Consider the resource implications of long-term tracking of developmental student success.
- Further consider the non-academic needs of developmental students and support delivery of non-academic services.

**Reference**


**Workgroup Membership**

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