

# Improving student persistence and completion, part V

**H**aving concluded our attention to which research-based best practices we are embracing as a college as well as within our campus Academic and Strategic Enrollment Management plans in the past M State News, we're going to wrap things up by looking at where we're headed.



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We have a new persistence structure going into place that will accommodate the three persistence initiatives we are currently implementing. Those are: the predictive analytic reporting pilot project, the strengthening of academic advising, and engagement with the Higher Learning Commission's Persistence Academy. Each will add to our overall efforts to strengthen the M State student experience.

## Predictive Analytic Reporting Project with SSMx

Last year, we were invited to apply for a pilot project between Hobson's Student Success Matrix team and the system's research office. Sixteen colleges and universities were accepted into this pilot project. Dr. Carrie Brimhall, Steve Erickson and I attended a training session last October to become oriented with the features of the SSMx system. The system examines seven distinct predictors as they relate to four timeframes within the academic cycle when applied to specific student cohorts, so that we might implement and evaluate initiatives designed to improve student persistence.

We have entered three existing initiatives into this system (first-term AA check-in, academic performance alerts and our orientation-on-demand project: The Source). The SSMx reviewer will provide us with data-informed feedback on the impact the three initiatives are having on student persistence. The SSMx system also will provide us with an analysis of which student groups for which we should design additional initiatives to positively impact the greatest number of students. This project will conclude in FY17, and the work of monitoring initiatives and identifying our greatest opportunities for new initiatives will become part of the Persistence Academy experience.

## Strengthening of Academic Advising

There are plans in place to strengthen both program advising and professional advising. The first workgroup focusing on

program advising is being co-led by Bonnie Peterson and Penny Brynildson, with faculty program advisor representatives serving on that workgroup to identify the roles and minimum responsibilities to be associated with program advising. Having a clear definition for what we mean by "program advising" will help us strengthen that support by not only being able to provide training to faculty program advisors, but also by being able to orient program students to the expectations the program advisor will have of them and to the expectations they may have for their assigned program advisor.

The second workgroup is being led by Shawn Anderson with representation from the professional (staff) advisors. The charge to this group is to move our advising from good to great by exploring alternative advising models and best practices to increase student persistence among the variety of student groups we presently serve. This will result in training opportunities and an organizational structure to support the new model.

## The Higher Learning Commission's Persistence Academy

With our college's acceptance into the HLC Persistence Academy, the work of our existing persistence team will become more tightly focused on the framework of academy activities. Angela Mathers is leading this team, which consists of representation from faculty, institutional research and academic advising. The academy experience is a four-year journey, with the year-by-year structure described by academy materials as follows:

### Year One

*Information and Planning Workshop:* The Information and Planning Workshop prepares the institutional representatives heading the Academy effort to assemble and lead an effective Academy team. The workshop will provide an in-depth view of the Academy, how it works, and the expectations and opportunities associated with membership.

*Data Discovery:* The institution hosts a mentor-facilitated data inventory, via videoconference or on-campus visit, to look at the institution's current data sets on persistence and completion and at the structures in place to assure campus-wide engagement in data analysis and planning. The Academy team's Primary Mentor provides feedback on the state of the institution's data and suggests what data sets should be included in the institution's Data Summary Book.

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*Academy Roundtable:* The Academy Roundtable is a three-day event at which Academy teams begin building their Academy Projects and goals. The Academy Roundtable also provides information on strategies to improve persistence and completion at each Academy team's institution.

#### Year Two

*Midpoint Report:* Each Academy team documents its progress in a Midpoint Report, which is reviewed by the team's Primary Mentor and Scholar, who provide a response to the highlights and challenges of the project.

*Midpoint Roundtable:* The Academy team attends a multi-day Midpoint Roundtable to share progress, seek advice from other Academy teams and receiving in-person mentoring on the next stages of the Academy Project.



#### Year Three

*Third-Year Consultation:* The Academy team's Primary Mentor consults with the institution to review the team's progress, offer suggestions for final efforts to implement strategies and provide recommendations for the team's final year of the Academy.

#### Year Four

*Results Forum:* Academy teams attend a multi-day Results Forum to share accomplishments and findings, compare practices and benchmarks, and define strategies to sustain their new persistence and completion efforts.

*Impact Report:* Each Academy team submits an Impact Report chronicling its work in the Academy and the improvements made to persistence and completion at its institution.

For institutions in the Open Pathway: The Impact Report validates the institution's completion of the Academy and serves as the Quality Initiative Report.

*Consolidated Response:* The Academy team receives a Consolidated Response to the Impact Report from the team's Primary Mentor and Scholar.

*Next month: We'll turn the focus on marketing and the M State brand.*

## Finance and Facilities

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### Budget updates for FY 2017, 2018

#### Fiscal Year 2017:

Now that the enrollments for spring term are accounted for, the Cabinet is in the final stages of bringing the FY2017 budget into balance. Because actual enrollment is lower than what was budgeted, our tuition revenue will be approximately \$820,000 short of projections. The enrollment shortfall was a result of not starting three planned programs last fall and overall enrollment decline. Cabinet members have been reviewing the status of their current year budgets to come up with the reductions needed on the expense side to bring us back into balance. Initial reviews indicate the shortfall can be covered by savings in faculty salaries due to lower enrollment and unfilled vacancies in other areas of the college. Final reductions will be compiled by mid-February.

#### Fiscal Year 2018:

With this year being an operating budget session for the Minnesota Legislature, we are uncertain of the level of funding for the Minnesota State system and M State. That unknown, along with the fact that all of the employee contracts remain unsettled, leads to a very fluid budget process. I have put together several budget scenarios with various allocation levels ranging from no increase to the governor's \$150 million recommendation, as well as the \$178 million board request. We also are including various tuition increases as well as potential personnel contract settlements. As you might expect, those three unknowns cause a large variance



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in our projected budget gap. The worst-case scenario has a budget gap of approximately \$1.6 million, and the best-case scenario has our projected revenues in balance with projected expenses. However, the best-case scenario does not allow for any initiatives, so regardless of funding we will need to do some internal reallocation of funds to keep the

college moving forward. As we move through the next several months, these variables will come into focus, and we will be working with more known amounts.