**A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER**

Drafted by the Writing Sub-Committee as charged by the University College Exploratory Committee

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**BACKGROUND:**

The concept of a collection of resources for freshmen in a single academic unit in a central location was originally proposed by the First Year Experiences (FYE) Committee in 2011. In 2015, the University College Exploratory Committee (UCEC) found that the current call for a University College would be a fulfillment of the 2011 proposal and recommended additional critical pieces.

The Exploratory Committee’s recommendations outlined here are grounded in the research of successful models of University Colleges and student success centers discussed in various articles (Raab & Adam, 2005) and books, such as *Organizing for Student Success* (Evenbeck, Jackson, Smith & Ward, 2010).

**ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED:**

An ongoing problem then as now is one of frequent obstacles to freshmen academic success, retention, and graduation. Most freshmen need intrusive, sustained, coordinated guidance to successfully navigate the first and sometimes even second year of college. This is especially true for first-generation students who often have no frame of reference for university structure and resources and are without families who have conversant knowledge of such.

Obstacles to first-time student success include:

* Lack of knowledge regarding resources for addressing a deficit in academic skills
* Lack of knowledge regarding resources available for transitioning to the academic rigor of college
* Lack of awareness and engagement with academic communities appropriate to individual interests
* Potential inability to identify and implement appropriate solutions to living and learning challenges in college
* Lack of knowledge regarding policies, procedures, and timelines critical to retention
* Lack of knowledge about major and career possibilities that are suited to a student’s interests and skills
* Insufficient guidance through change of major
* Insufficient guidance through medical or financial appeals
* Hurdles in locating financial assistance for tuition, housing, and textbooks
* Hurdles to successfully complete the unwieldy financial aid paperwork
* Lack of a central location for triaging student problems

The effects of these obstacles can be measured in terms of retention numbers, graduation rates, and numbers of students on probation and suspension, and GPAs.

**OPERATIONAL GOALS:**

A primary goal of the proposed Student Success Center (SSC) is to remove obstacles for students (particularly first-time SFA students) to graduation by linking multiple student success initiatives into a unit reporting to a single academic unit head, creating a central space for these services, and establishing collaboration with other student services.

An academic unit head reporting directly to the provost would coordinate the activities of the following: academic advising and degree planning for undecided majors, tutoring, SI groups, academic workshops, freshmen success course content, change in majors, enrollment services for developmental students, and assistance in course registration.

In addition, the SSC would build partnerships with the following key campus units in order to assist in resolving issues, concerns, and challenges for students: Career Services, Residence Life, Registrar, Business Office, Students Rights and Responsibilities, Financial Aid, developmental education programs, the Involvement Center. The key staff of these units might serve on an Advisory Board for the SSC and regularly have a voice in the direction of the SSC regarding those decisions directly impacting their departments.

**OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT**

The overarching goal of the SSC is to create an ongoing, interactive community of practice with staff who share a concern and expertise associated specifically with freshmen success. The SSC “triage of support” increases student success by bringing these stakeholders together in a new structure with streamlined communication among faculty, staff, and students, thereby increasing the opportunity for:

* critical connections for students
* increased awareness of resources
* improved case management approach to individual students
* individual personal attention
* promotion of students’ exploration and discovery of learning
* simplification of processes
* increased involvement of students, faculty, and staff
* consistent guidelines and clear path to success
* minimized frustration
* on-time task completion
* adequate financial assistance

as measured by improved retention, GPAs, and graduation rates and distributed in reports to administration and key stakeholders for input into continuous action plans.

**SCOPE**

As per the last large committee meeting on December 9, 2015, the Exploratory Committee suggests that the SSC be developed in phases:

Phase 1: The UCEC recommends that the Student Success Center unite AARC, SFA 101, Academic Advising for Undecided Students, Texas Success Initiative, Pathways Bridge Program, and GenJacks (for first-gen students) into a single academic unit. Collaboration between the SSC and key campus partners will be critical to the overall success of the center and of students.

Phase 2: At the direction and guidance of the appointed unit head, the UCEC recommends adding Orientation services to the Student Success Center in collaboration with the existing services as identified in phase one. If the Student Success Center is designed mostly for freshmen and if the goal is to house as many freshman services as possible under its umbrella, then it would seem logical that the first contact that the university has with freshmen be carried out by the Student Success Center. The student focus groups conducted for this committee and the statistics and discussion from the text provided to this committee, *Organizing for Student Success* (Evenbeck, Jackson, Smith & Ward, 2010)—in particular p. 13 and much of ch. 4) speak to the need for Orientation to be part of this model.

**SUPPORT OF SFA ENVISIONED STRATEGIC PLAN**

This model of a unit as described would further advance the university’s desire to:

* Support “meaningful enrollment growth”
* Create “a sense of community” for first-time students
* Provide “transformational learning experiences for all students”

Foster an “open, collaborative, engaged” campus culture

**CONCLUSION**

At this time, the UCEC deems its work to be completed and respectfully submits this recommendation to be considered by other entities, including the Academic and Co-Curricular Innovation Steering Committee, which is currently being formed.