UC Merced Academic Advising: Annual Assessment Report
December 2016

Executive Summary

In 2015-2016, the Campus Academic Advising Assessment Workgroup has continued efforts to develop campus-wide assessment of undergraduate academic advising through alignment of advising services and practices and continued work on a multi-year assessment plan. This report focuses on *Goal 1: Promote appropriate progress to degree for native and transfer students*, through the assessment of interventions for students in academic difficulty, specifically those on special probation, and identifies opportunities for further alignment of services to these students.

Data for outcomes of students on special probation identified surprising results that demonstrated a need for closer examination of current special probation interventions:

- Significant variation in the success of students across advising units, terms and cohorts, clearly demonstrating a need for a closer examination of current special probation interventions.
- Resources intensive interventions (e.g. 3 required student meetings per semester) were less successful than those with fewer, more targeted intervention (e.g. 1 required student meeting per semester).

This unexpected result empowered the advising community to consider how coordinated interventions focused on student learning could support the academic success of all students, regardless of their academic program. It also provided the group's first opportunity to utilize a logic model in evaluation of an advising service that now serves as a template for mapping additional advising activities.

The efforts in aligning support for students in academic difficulty demonstrate a continued commitment by advising units to assess the role of academic advising in undergraduate student success. In 2015-2016, the group met monthly and worked to engage the entire academic advising community in collaborative efforts towards service alignment and development of a multi-year assessment plan, but continued to struggle with finding the time to engage in meaningful assessment planning. Continued progress in advising assessment will require guidance on how the work of academic advising aligns with the campus mission and definition of student success, its priority in the work of the unit in which services are housed and a commitment to holistic, campus wide approach to supporting undergraduate students.

In response to last year's assessment, the UC Merced Academic Advising Report and feedback from the *Working Group for Review of Administrative Assessment*, the Campus Advising Assessment Workgroup met monthly to move forward efforts related to collaborative advising assessment. An update on actions related to last year's results are as follows:

In 2015-2016, campus academic advisors implemented a number of changes as a result of last year's assessment:

JumpStart 2016 Program Updates
- Updated student intake form to remove 'undeclared' as an intended academic program/major

Campus Academic Advising Workgroup
- Anticipated completion for Spring 2017: development of campus-wide advising assessment plan
- Creation of logic model for advising activities – academic difficulty, first year advising (draft)

As of this writing, the group has not yet implemented the changes below, but intends to do so in preparation for JumpStart 2017 (early February, 2017):

JumpStart 2016 Assessment Plans
- Acquire 2012 cohort graduation data for analysis to show investigate impact of JumpStart on graduation rate and time to degree
- Evaluate major/minor change denials (see below) to identify additional interventions needed to support academic program declaration

Advising Unit Administrative Updates
- Update major/minor change forms to indicate that an academic plan is required for students who wish to declare a major or minor in Engineering and Natural Sciences
- Establishment of mechanism to track major change denials between fourth and fifth terms, across units

II. Introduction / Background to this Year's Assessment

In 2015-2016, the Campus Academic Advising Assessment Workgroup has continued efforts to develop campus-wide assessment of undergraduate academic advising services. This year, the group focused on alignment of services across the four units including:

- Assessment of services to students in academic difficulty, including creation of a logic model that may be applied to other types of academic difficulty (the primary focus of this report).
- Development of academic advising outcomes for new student orientation/registration.
- Alignment of practices related to academic program changes.
- Creation of multi-year assessment plan, to be completed in early Spring 2017.

In response to the UC Merced Advising Review and PROC feedback on the spring 2016 report, the group engaged the academic advising community in a number of activities meant to affirm the vision, mission and goals for academic advising at UC Merced. These efforts began with a facilitated advising retreat in which the community identified guiding principles/philosophies of and future models for academic advising. These values guided the community's reaffirmation of its vision, mission and goals. After consultation with stakeholders, including peer advisors/mentors and unit leadership, these were finalized in Summer 2016. The UC Merced Academic Advising Vision, Mission and Goals can be found in Appendix A.

2015-2016 Campus Academic Advising Assessment Workgroup Membership:
- Armando Contreras, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA)
- Karla Gonzalez, School of Engineering
- Rosalina Kaji, Undeclared Advising, Bright Success Center
- Erica Robbins, School Natural Sciences
- Co-facilitators: Alisha Kimble, Office of Undergraduate Education and Penny Paxton, Assessment Manager, SSHA

III. Goal Assessed this Year

This year, the workgroup focused on Goal 1: *Promote appropriate progress to degree for undergraduate students,* with an assessment of outcomes for students in academic difficulty. Institutional data has demonstrated that academic standing in the first year has significant impact on measures of achievement, retention and time-to-degree. As academic advising provides primary support of students in difficulty, the group thought it would be useful to examine the outcomes for students subject to special probation interventions in each unit. Data looked at outcomes for students over three fall semesters (Fall 2012, Fall 2013, Fall 2014) at the conclusion of the interventions. Significant variation in the success of students across advising units, terms and cohorts demonstrated a need to more closely examine the effectiveness of current interventions.

IV. Assessment Methods/Strategy

To initially assess the effectiveness of the unit's academic difficulty intervention, the group examined cohorts of special probation students over three years, Fall 2012, Fall 2013 and Fall 2014. Data was gathered from the student information system to assess participants' academic standing (academic probation, special probation or academic dismissal) in the term immediately following the intervention. The results were tabulated based on the academic program of the student at the time of the intervention, rather than the declared major for the prior term in which the student became subject to special probation. This distinction is important given the campus' 'demajor' policy, which allows students to be removed from an academic major and made undeclared. Advisors report that demajored students are often reluctant to switch paths into a more suitable major, which may affect their academic achievement.

Table 1: Special Probation Outcomes by Cohort and Unit provides descriptive data for 257 special probation students across the Schools of Engineering, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, and the Bright Success Center (Undeclared). Undeclared cohorts were "UND-DM" indicates that the student had been de-majored prior to participation in the intervention.

Rather than examining 'inputs' into the intervention (student characteristics, pre-college attributes, major, GPA), the group decided to consider holistically the purpose of the special probation interventions. This involved the development of a logic model for all students in academic difficulty, both academic probation and special probation (see Appendix B), that allowed for establishment of shared student learning outcomes. These outcomes were used to design a common special probation intervention plan – including meeting schedules, student materials and other activities – that was be delivered in Fall 2016.

Table 1: Special Probation Outcomes by Cohort and Unit

Cohort	School	Students on Special Probation	Academic Standing in Following Term:							
			Good Academic Standing		Academic Probation		Special Probation		Academic Dismissal	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
201230	NS	28	13	46%	0	0%	7	25%	8	29%
201330	NS	26	12	46%	0	0%	5	19%	9	35%
201430	NS	21	12	57%	0	0%	1	4%	8	38%
201230	ENGR	15	6	60%	0	0%	3	20%	6	40%
201330	ENGR	9	0	0%	0	0%	3	33%	6	66%
201430	ENGR	28	3	11%	4	13%	16	57%	5	18%
201230	SSHA	7	1	6%	1	6%	3	43%	2	29%
201330	SSHA	8	0	0%	0	0%	2	25%	6	75%
201430	SSHA	7	2	28%	0	0%	5	71%	0	0%
201230	UND-Total	32	8	25%	0	0%	14	44%	10	31%
201230	UND-DM	20	3	15%	0	0%	10	50%	7	35%
201330	UND-Total	22	4	18%	0	0%	11	50%	7	32%
201330	UND-DM	12	1	8%	0	0%	7	58%	4	33%
201430	UND-Total	17	13	76%	0	0%	3	18%	1	5%
201430	UND-DM	5	2	40%	0	0%	3	60%	0	0%

The analysis revealed that students in the School of Natural Sciences tended to return to good standing the term immediately following their term on special probation at a higher rate than their counterparts in the other advising units. Students who were demajored were less likely to return to good academic standing and, in early cohorts, comprised the majority of undeclared student on special probation.

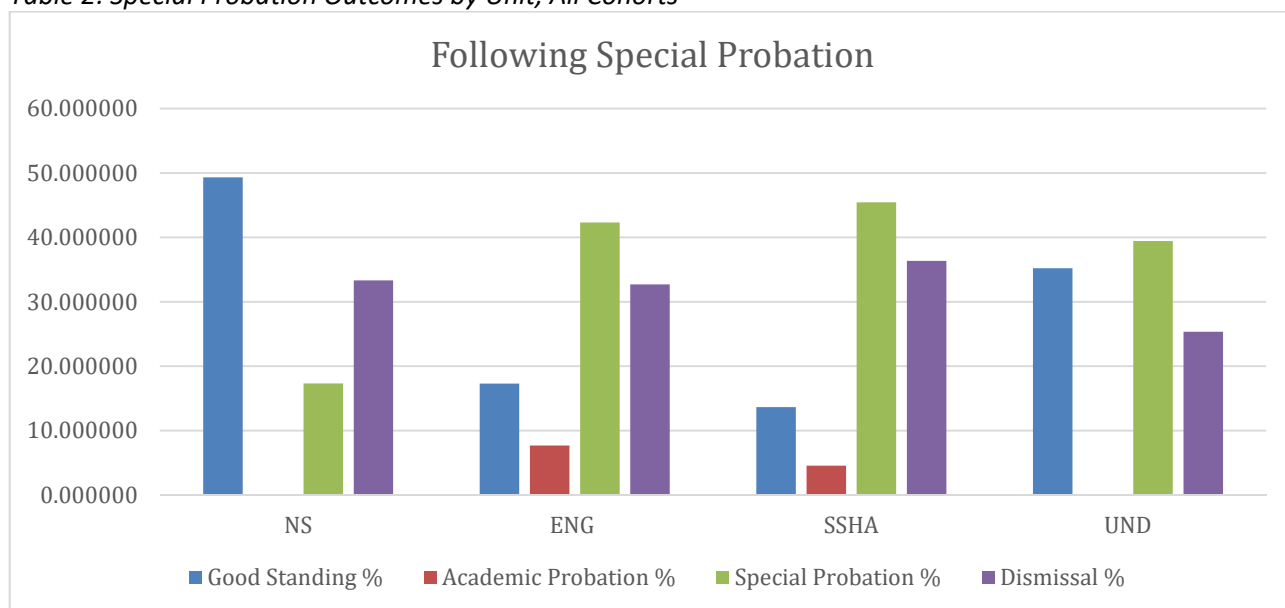*Table 2: Special Probation Outcomes by Unit, All Cohorts*

Table 2 shows that students on special probation were equally likely to be dismissed or continue on special probation in the subsequent term, while some schools continued students on special probation for a second term at higher rates. An approval to continue enrollment on special probation suggests there may have been improvement in the student's academics but not enough of an improvement to remove them from probation.

VI. Conclusions

As this was the first comprehensive examination of academic difficulty interventions, the group did not identify benchmark for results. However, the data did (a) allow individual units to draw conclusions related to the effectiveness of their interventions and (b) demonstrate a need for a common special probation intervention.

Prior to this assessment, three of the four units (BSC, ENGR, SSHA) utilized an intervention program wherein students created probation contracts with their assigned academic advisor. Students on probation in the School of Natural Sciences meet with a specialized staff member through the Excel! Program. Each unit reviewed the data and drew the following conclusions:

> *For School of Engineering, the results show that the current intervention process does notprovide students with a set program to assist them returning to good academic standing within a one term process. Data showed an inconsistency in the efficacy of the current intervention program. Furthermore, when comparing to other units' process, it was noticed that a similar approach was taken to this population as Undeclared, yet the communications tone is stricter.*
> *The School of Natural Sciences concluded it was meeting its intended outcomes with the Excel! Program and would continue its intervention strategy.*
> *For the School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA), the results show that current interventions are not meeting intended goals of supporting students get back into good standing. Additionally, through the data collecting process it was shared that SSHA's intervention strategies differed the most out of all the other units. In particular, noticeable difference in the meeting tone and strict contract guidelines for special probation meetings were major outliers within the interventions.*
> *For Undeclared, the results show that our current student intervention has been improving the most. Similar to the School of Natural Sciences Excel! Program the Undeclared intervention model involves intrusive advising. Undeclared had the highest rate of academic recovery (76% in the 2014 term). However, the statistics also show that the demajored student population continues to need more time to return to good standing. A possible explanation is that demajored students are often reluctant to switch paths into a more suitable major. It is also recommended that we reach out to demajored students sooner, as students need to change their courses immediately after the term that resulted in their demajored status. Currently, demajored students initially meet with their new Undeclared advisor at the beginning of the next term when it is difficult for students to change their class schedule.*

An analysis of the content and number of required meetings for each intervention yielded unexpected results: students who participated in interventions with fewer required advisor meetings were more successful than those with a greater number of meetings. Though a simplistic measure, this conclusion compelled the group to focus on the content and student learning that resulted from the interventions.

Conclusions from this data may be limited by lack of tests of statistical significance, variation in intervention delivery based on staffing changes in individual units, and an inability to control for other student attributes. The cohorts also included all students on special probation, regardless of class level, which could limit

application to level-specific intervention (e.g. first year students). The group may consider altering this approach as it examines the results of the intervention changes at the conclusion of the 2016-2017 academic year.

VII. Actions

In order to better align the academic probation intervention across advising units, members of the workgroup gathered all intervention materials from all units and developed a single collaborative academic difficulty intervention to be implemented in Fall 2016. This collaborative intervention was developed with the SNS Excel! Program as a model. Development of materials will be driven by student learning outcomes and include a common script for the individual meetings, email templates, Academic Support Agreement, Academic Reflection Form with a time management worksheet, and a timeline for actions.

Prior to implementation of the intervention, the Advising Assessment Workgroup hosted a half-day training with all campus academic advisors to calibrate service delivery. This afforded advisors an opportunity to clarify any aspects of the intervention which were unclear as well as gave the workgroup the opportunity to share the rationale of the changes.

The new intervention will be assessed as part of the 2017-18 assessment plan, with data collection beginning in 2016-17. Advisors will be taking scans of the Academic Support Agreement and Academic Reflection Form as part of the data collection. Additionally, students receiving the intervention will be given a post-reflection which will also be analyzed as an assessment of student learning.

VIII. Resource Implications

In order to implement the changes for the Fall 2016 interventions, the workgroup spent time reviewing the previously used materials and worked to blend them into single documents. In some units, additional advisor time will be needed in order to meet individually with each student receiving the intervention throughout the semester. On-going professional development and best practices in the areas of working with at-risk students and students in academic difficulty are needed for the advising staff.

In 2016-2017, staff time will be needed to gather and analyze the data, and to implement program changes for subsequent semesters. Implementation of effective interventions may require a re-distribution of advisor responsibilities to focus on the success of students in academic difficulty.

Finally, if campus wide advising assessment is an institutional priority, support is needed in organizing and supporting the work of the advising assessment group. Facilitation of the group by individual(s) outside of advising, who have a background in program assessment and evaluation and student learning outcomes, is important in the group's efforts to create a collaborative, holistic approach to assessment of UC Merced academic advising.

Appendix A: UC Merced Academic Advising Vision, Mission and Goals

UC Merced Academic Advising Vision: *Academic Advising: supporting the educational journey of our students.*

UC Merced Academic Advising Mission:

UC Merced undergraduate academic advising, in collaboration with the campus community, promotes student success by empowering students to become self-directed learners and decision makers in an environment that is welcoming, inclusive and supportive.

We provide quality academic advising and related services to support students in developing their educational plans and maximizing their university experience.

UC Merced Academic Advising Goals:

1. Promote appropriate progress to degree for undergraduate students
2. Provide students with advising resources and materials that are accurate, current, and understandable
3. Provide interactive advising in formats that meet student preferences and needs in timely and effective ways
4. Provide advising that is reflective of our diverse student populations and unique research environment
5. Facilitate student learning and self-advocacy in relation to reaching academic goals and career plans
6. Support implementation of faculty approved curriculum changes for courses and academic programs

Campus Academic Advising Website: http://advising.ucmerced.edu/

Logic Model for UC Merced Campus-Wide Advising Academic Difficulty Initiative

Theory/ Assumptions

- Student population will not change
- UC Merced's Mission that this is the first student---centered research university of 21 Century
- Students want to be successful
- Students have the capacity to make change
- Students can gain learning they didn't have before
- Change takes time, instruction and practice with feedback.

Resources

- Staff (e.g. program coordinator, tutors, instructors, academic advisors)
- Student Assistants (e.g. Peer mentors, Workshop leaders)
- Space for one---on---one meetings with individual students
- Support of colleagues and leadership
- Training & access to Banner and Cognos
- Access to information about the students
- Equipment: computer, printer, copier, phone, office supplies (e.g. tissue), software
- Tutoring Center (e.g. STEM Center and Bright Success)

Initiative Activities

Notification of Academic probation

Participation in at least one:

1. A course that **empower students** to achieve effective levels of performance within academic, personal, and professional endeavors through the use of proven educational and mental strategies. Also, the course provides opportunities to **develop and practice skills necessary to succeed at UC Merced** and overview of opportunities in research, education, and careers in science (e.g. NSUS 10, NSUS 20 course, USTU 10).

2. **Special Advising** for students on Academic Probation and Special Probation (i. . discuss academic path and create action plan)

Outputs

Increased participation in:

- 1---2 unit course(s)
- Instructors' office hours

GPA of 2.0 in following semester

- Workshops (e.g. peer advisors, career service, Bright)
- Peer mentor/academic advisor advising
- Tutoring services
- Career Specialist advising
- check---in with primary major Academic advisor

Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Seek and use resources to develop the academic skills and resilience needed to succeed at a research university
- Be informed of the minimum academic expectations of UC Merced and know how to calculate the grades needed to meet them
- Identify their academic path and have an action plan for improvement, including development of effective study habits and personal organization skills

Impacts

- Increase student Retention
- Increase Graduation rate
- Decease the amount of time to complete degree

Intended Results

Measureable evidence to determine if outcome achieved

Updated: 9 March 2016