RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR IMPROVING STUDENT SUCCESS

PREPARED BY

The Student Success Steering Committee

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Introduction

Thanks to an institutional commitment and the monumental efforts of many members of the university community, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke has achieved enormous growth over the past 12 years, more than doubling its enrollment from 2998 in the fall of 1998 to 6661 in the fall of 2010. Now UNCP must channel its energy to achieve a new goal. Too many of the students who have come to UNCP for a quality education have left before completing that education. Over these same 12 years, retention rates have never exceeded 72.3 percent. Among the first-year, fulltime students who arrived in fall 2008, only 66.9 percent returned in fall 2009. UNCP’s administration, faculty, and staff have not ignored this problem, but in fact have responded with a variety of initiatives, including advising workshops and a supplemental instruction program. However successful these initiatives and existing programs, such as Freshman Seminar, have been in improving students’ grades and overall performance, retention rates have stubbornly resisted dramatic improvement.

Appointed by Chancellor Charles Jenkins in October 2009, the Student Success Steering Committee has been charged with developing innovative, effective strategies that will ensure that more students who come to UNCP stay at UNCP and leave the institution with the quality education and diploma they sought here. After their initial meeting with Chancellor Jenkins, the 20 members of this committee—faculty and staff representing every relevant part of the university—went right to work, meeting regularly over the course of several weeks to discuss issues and procedures. Early in the spring semester, these same members began meeting separately in working groups to develop initiatives in the areas of academic advising, admissions, first- and second-year programs, student services, and the campus community. Gathering on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, these groups reported back to the larger committee, which generally met every two weeks in the spring.

Furthermore, two members of the committee, Mark Canada and Beverly King, joined Jackie Clark, associate vice chancellor for enrollment management, and Mark Hunt of the Center for Academic Excellence at the national conference of NACADA, the National Academic Advising Association, in February.

The result of this substantial work over the course of six months is the set of recommendations below. Undergirding these recommendations are three core principles:

- **Research-based Rationales**: There is no shortage of ideas for addressing low retention, which is a nationwide problem. Instead of merely gravitating toward the trendiest of these ideas, the members of this committee have examined the research and identified proven solutions. Accompanying each of the recommendations below is a rationale that makes a case for implementing this strategy.

- **Relevance for UNCP**: Recognizing that strategies that have worked elsewhere may not apply to our unique student body, members have considered data from UNCP’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness and have crafted recommendations with our students in mind. In some cases, the committee has called for additional research on proven strategies—such as a
requirement that first-year students live on campus—because current data does not suggest that these strategies would work on our campus.

- **Institutional Commitment:** The impressive enrollment growth UNCP has experienced in recent years reflects a strong commitment from university leadership. This same commitment will have to be in place if the university is to improve student success.

The members of the Student Success Steering Committee respectfully ask Chancellor Jenkins and Chancellor-elect Carter, along with their leadership teams, to give careful consideration to these recommendations, which have grown out of extensive deliberation and research. Recommendations are grouped in the categories of academic advising, admissions, first- and second-year programs, student services, and campus community. While we believe that all of these recommendations deserve attention, we wish to emphasize advising, which we believe has the greatest potential for improving student success at UNCP.

### Academic Advising

*Working Group: Deborah Hanmer, Jennifer Bonds-Raacke, Beverly King*

Academic advising has been referred to as the “cornerstone of student retention” (Crockett, 1978). One of the leading theorists and researchers in the area of student retention asserts that “[e]ffective advising is an essential part of successful retention programs” (Tinto, 2004, p. 8). His research, as well as that of others, has led Tinto to the conclusion that “students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide clear and consistent information about institutional requirements and effective advising about the choices students have to make regarding their programs of study and future career goals. Students, especially the many who are undecided about their plans, need to understand the road map to completion and know how to use it to achieve personal goals” (Tinto, 2000, p. 2). Although there may or may not be a direct, causal link between advising and retention, Cusco (2003a) makes the case that “academic advising exerts a significant impact on student retention through its positive association with, and mediation of, variables that are strongly correlated with student persistence, namely: (1) student satisfaction with the college experience, (2) effective educational and career planning and decision making, (3) student utilization of campus support services, (4) student-faculty contact outside the classroom, and (5) student mentoring” (p. 4). With this information as background, the Advising Working Group of the Student Success Steering Committee respectfully submits the following initiatives for consideration.

**Initiative 1: Create an advising mission statement and goals for the university.**

**Rationale:** The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2005) emphasizes the importance of developing a mission statement and a set of goals for academic advising. Habley (2005), in outlining how to develop a mission statement for university advising, breaks his recommendations down into process and content. In terms
of process, an advising mission statement should be consistent with the institutional mission statement; its development should include campus-wide involvement; and it should serve as a guide for how to implement and assess an advising program. In terms of content, an academic advising mission statement should be visionary, broad, realistic, motivational, concise, easily understood, and memorable. Unless good advising is defined, it is impossible to determine whether or not it is occurring. A mission statement guides the decisions we make about what we do and how we accomplish it. “Unless the mission is explicitly expressed, clearly understood, and supported by every member of the organization, the enterprise is at the mercy of events” (Drucker, 2003, p. 371). Numerous examples of advising statements are available online. The mission statement should be succinct and emphasize UNCP’s personal touch philosophy, taking into account barriers and personal characteristics. A possible first draft of an advising mission statement is offered by Mark Canada, Chair of the Student Success Steering Committee: “Developmental advising is an integral part of UNCP’s personal touch. Advisers seek to know their students as people, to understand their strengths and challenges, and to help them make decisions that will enable them not only to earn a quality education in a reasonable amount of time, but also to thrive as thoughtful, healthy, concerned men and women.” Ideally, every adviser at UNCP will believe in the mission and will be able to recite key phrases.

**Action Steps:** 1) Create an ongoing advising task force, the membership of which should include both faculty and staff (especially staff from the Center for Academic Excellence). Initial membership could include members of the advising working group from the Student Success Steering Committee, as well as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness (in order to help align the advising mission statement with university strategic planning and assessment initiatives.) Alternatively, if the University College model is adopted at UNCP (a proposal of which this working group strongly supports), representatives of this college could coordinate advising activities. 2) Charge the task force (or University College) with the creation of an advising mission statement and goals for the university, modeled on the mission statement/goals currently utilized by the Center for Academic Excellence and on sample mission and vision statements for academic advising located on NACADA’s website at: [http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/Mission_statements.htm](http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/Mission_statements.htm). The charge should come from senior leadership (Chancellor or Provost) with subsequent campus-wide participation. 3) Seek approval of the mission statement and goals through the university’s shared governance structure. 4) Publicize the advising mission statement and goals broadly so that every faculty, staff member, and student at UNCP is aware of them and can easily access them.

**Timeline:** This initiative should be accomplished as quickly as possible within the next academic year (2010-2011). A final draft should be prepared no later than the end of fall semester, 2010.
**Responsibility:** The creation of an advising mission statement and goals should be the responsibility of all UNCP faculty and staff. Responsibility for guiding the process of the creation and publication will fall to the Advising Task Force.

**Assessment:** To some extent, the success of this particular initiative will be seen in the actual creation, approval, and publication of the mission statement. In a broader sense, a university-wide advising mission statement and goals will lay the foundation for all advising assessment efforts. Assessment should be anchored to the university’s advising mission and goals, and measure not only relatively objective advising outcomes, but also student attitudes toward advising. As Bean (another leading theorist and researcher in the area of student retention) asserts, “[t]he assessment of retention programs needs to be based not only on what these academic or co-curricular programs are supposed to accomplish, but on whether, in providing their services, staff and faculty members shape students’ attitudes toward the institution in a positive fashion” (cited in Seidman, 2005, p. 220). Though often neglected, the assessment of academic advising is a statement by the campus community that advising is important and that student service is valued (Cuseo, 2003b). Examples of how other universities are assessing advising are available on NACADA’s website at: [http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/assessment.htm#AAI](http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/assessment.htm#AAI)

The advising task force (or University College representatives) should coordinate the decision-making process about how to appropriately assess advising and what instruments should be used to do so (with input from the entire campus—faculty, staff, and students). Assessment may take multiple forms, some decided at the university level; others, at the department level. Some decisions about advising assessment may depend upon whether advising recognition is to be part of university service or auxiliary teaching or both. As this initiative is contingent upon devising a university advising mission statement and set of goals (and upon other decisions related to advising), it is difficult to set a timeline for its completion. However, initial work should begin no later than spring semester, 2011. The development and implementation of advising assessment methods, as well as their inclusion in a full assessment cycle of continuous improvement in advising, will be indicative of success on this initiative.

**Initiative 2: Increase the amount of advising information and number of advising resources available to the university community (faculty, staff, and students).**

A number of simple mechanisms by which to accomplish this initiative can be envisioned. Examples are:

- creating a listserv for advisers,
- ensuring that university policies related to advising are not only readily available, but also consistently enforced (e.g., placing a statement about the impact of dropping courses on financial aid in the catalog and student handbook beside the information on how and when students can drop courses, and clarifying this policy for faculty and staff), and
• conducting “exit advising” by use of face-to-face exit interviews.

Two initiatives that would require a greater degree of organization and coordination are described below:

(a) Design and implement a Fall Advising Week.

Rationale: Student commitment to educational and career goals is strongly related to student persistence (Wyckoff, 1999). Students are often uncertain about career goals and/or know little about their intended majors; they also frequently change educational plans, and this phenomenon holds true across a variety of institutional types (Cuseo, 2003a). Additionally, “[m]any students transfer—or sometimes drop out—simply because they do not know that a particular course of study is available at their college, or because they think they cannot have a particular option in their program of studies” (Beal & Noel, 1980, p. 103). Knowledgeable advisers can help students make informed educational decisions. (See Penn State’s Educational Planning Survey as one way to acquire information on which to base educational advising—http://www.psu.edu/dus/eps2009/longlist.htm.) One-on-one advising can be supplemented by planned campus events intended to provide information to students on potential majors and careers. One of the universities to receive a NACADA award for exceptional advising initiatives is Oakland University, which implemented an annual Advising Week. Advising Week is held each fall prior to early registration and includes the following components: an Advising Week kick-off, an advising fair, a career fair, a degrees/majors fair, and an adviser appreciation day. Students can submit nominations for “Adviser of the Year” and enter for a grand prize drawing at each event. The goals of Advising Week include helping students to learn whom to contact for advising and how academic advisers can assist them; raising awareness of the importance of academic planning; reminding students to prepare for registration by meeting with their advisers; giving students the opportunity to meet advisers, ask questions, and learn about academic programs; and putting students in touch with academic advisers and campus resources that can help them succeed while having fun and earning prizes.

Action Steps: (1) The Advising Task Force should gather initial information about what an Advising Week would entail. (2) Members of this task force then should begin a conversation among relevant individuals and units that might be in charge of or involved in the planning and implementation of an Advising Week and eventually put together an Advising Week planning committee. The planning committee should include, at minimum, representatives from each school/college, from Career Services, from the Center for Academic Excellence, and from the Office of Admissions. The committee should also address the issue of funds and budgeting for the event. (3) This planning committee may select only one of the activities that will eventually make up an Advising Week (e.g., a careers fair or a majors fair) to plan for Fall 2010 and build to have a full Advising Week in the fall of 2011. (4) After the successful completion of the one-day event in fall 2010, the planning
committee can begin work on a week-long event for fall 2011 and each subsequent fall. In addition to the type of activities included by Oakland University (see above), planners may want to consider having programming such as faculty presentations in general education courses about careers in that discipline or a coordinated effort with regional high schools to have potential students visit on one day during Advising Week (e.g., on the day of the majors fair). (Alternatively, this initiative could fall under the purview of a University College structure.)

**Timeline:** Partial implementation by Fall 2010; full implementation by Fall 2011.

**Responsibility:** Initially, the Advising Task Force, eventually turning responsibility over to the Advising Week planning committee.

**Assessment:** Methods should include (1) assessments during the actual Advising Week of both faculty and students about satisfaction with and value of activities, and (2) follow-up assessments of the value of Advising Week in influencing students’ major and career selection, as well as their educational plans and goals.

(b) **Expand the Web presence of advising resources at UNCP.**

**Rationale:** Both faculty and students frequently have questions about the advising process at UNCP and careers in various fields. Although the Center for Academic Excellence and Career Services both have information available to aid in students’ educational and career planning, creating a comprehensive advising Web page with links to these and other resources would significantly aid in the ease with which students and advisers could access information crucial to good advising and planning. On the faculty side, Web pages could include an FAQ page (with answers to frequently asked questions about advising), an advising handbook, professional development modules related to advising, links to exemplary practices and professional advising organizations (e.g., NACADA), and materials to enhance the advising process (e.g., an advising worksheet that outlines basic topics to cover with each advisee with dates for certain milestones such as choosing a major or applying for graduation). For students, web pages could include links to Career Services, occupational handbooks, an advising syllabus, campus support services, and other educational/career planning materials.

**Action Steps:** (1) Identify a webmaster for “Advising Central”—UNCP’s online advising resource center for faculty and staff. (2) The webmaster should coordinate with the Advising Task Force to design and activate the website.

**Timeline:** A basic Web site should be in place by the end of summer or fall 2010.

**Responsibility:** The Advising Task Force (or University College) and appointed IT person would be primarily responsible for the site with input from faculty, staff, and students about what should be included.
**Assessment:** Surveys of faculty, staff, and students would measure the usefulness of the “Advising Central.” The assessment could be done both formatively (in the planning stage) and summatively (after its deployment).

**Initiative 3: Improve faculty commitment to, and skills in, advising. Transition all academic advising from a “prescriptive approach” to a “developmental approach.”**

**Rationale:** The traditional approach to academic advising has been a “prescriptive” one that Crookston (1994) has compared to a doctor/patient relationship—the student (or patient) goes to the adviser (or doctor) with a problem. The problem is subsequently diagnosed, and a prescription (advice) given. This approach has a number of problems, including the limited responsibility it assigns to a student for his or her academic choices (Appleby, 2001) and the limited responsibility it assigns to an adviser to “address more comprehensive academic concerns” (King, 2005, p. 3) rather than answer a few specific questions. Developmental advising, on the other hand, is “a decision-making process that assists students to realize their maximum educational potential through communication and information exchange with an adviser; it is ongoing, multi-faceted, and the responsibility of both student and adviser. The adviser serves as facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and program progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus services as necessary” (Crockett, 1987).

Developmental advising promotes student success by increasing students’ awareness of campus support services, connecting them to co-curricular programs, challenging them to take advantage of learning opportunities outside of class, and increasing their one-on-one and out-of-classroom contact with faculty (Cusco, 2003a). (See additional information about the differences between these two advising approaches at [http://www.utdallas.edu/dept/ugraddean/devadvis.html](http://www.utdallas.edu/dept/ugraddean/devadvis.html).)

**Action Steps:** The developmental advising approach should inform the creation of the university advising mission statement and goals related to advising as well as advising materials (such as an advising syllabus and advising assessment instruments). The Office of Institutional Effectiveness should perform a needs assessment to determine gaps in faculty advising skills and areas of interest for training sessions. This office recently administered a faculty advising survey, which addressed issues such as commitment to advising and workloads. We still need to determine what types of training programs or resources would be most beneficial for improving faculty advising skills. The Center for Academic Excellence and the Teaching and Learning Center should develop a training program for new faculty to be completed near the end of the first year. Most departments do not ask new faculty to begin advising duties until their second year. Postponing the training until the end of the first year allows new faculty to settle into their new teaching responsibilities before assimilating all of the new information they need to be effective advisers. Part of the training could be online.
One resource that can assist faculty in developmental advising is the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI), an assessment of skills related to academic success that yields a profile of students’ strengths and weaknesses in areas such as study habits and time management. The scoring of the SRI (which is done by the producer of the instrument, ACT) also includes academic success and retention risk scores. The SRI is now given (beginning 2010) to all incoming first-year students at UNCP. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness could distribute information about students’ scores to their advisers for use in helping students to develop a plan for increasing their likelihood of academic success.

The Teaching and Learning Center should aid in designing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff in developmental advising. Training should include an annual seminar, in-service training, or a workshop on advising based on the needs assessment above. The program should be offered at a time most faculty can attend and include a reward like progress towards a certification or at least lunch.

The use of developmental advising techniques should be suggested as part of the enhanced promotion/tenure evaluation of advising. (This will probably be the most difficult of the advising initiatives to implement fully as it will require a culture change.)

**Timeline:** A needs assessment for advising should be completed by the end of fall 2010. Planning for basic new faculty advising training should begin immediately for implementation in spring 2011. The development of training programs should begin as soon as staffing and funding are available. While work can begin immediately on designing professional development programs, a complete shift to developmental advising may take some time as it entails a new way of thinking for many on campus (faculty and students alike).

**Responsibility:** With this initiative, total campus involvement is necessary. Every faculty member, staff member, and student needs to be provided with information about the nature and value of developmental advising. This work can be initiated by the Advising Task Force, but it is too big a job for this group alone. Members of this group should call upon whoever they think would be instrumental in instituting this type of campus change to help in their work.

A needs assessment for advising could be implemented and evaluated by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Training for advisers would be coordinated through the Center for Academic Excellence and the Teaching and Learning Center. The development of training programs requires staffing and money. It is the responsibility of the senior leadership of the University to find the funds necessary to initiate these programs.

**Assessment:** Assessment of this initiative will take many forms as its impact will be pervasive across the university environment. The creation and implementation of the above action stops will indicate success in achieving this initiative. Some type of certification for successful completion of training programs can serve two purposes. It gives faculty
members something concrete to add to their evaluation packets, and it gives the institution a way to measure progress towards improving faculty advising. The institution can set goals for numbers of advisers who complete different levels of training that can be measured by looking at levels of certification.

Other methods of assessment could include faculty and student opinion/knowledge surveys about developmental advising; evaluation of professional development activities/speakers/workshops on this topic; inclusion of questions based upon developmental advising in student evaluation of advising; follow-up faculty and student opinion surveys after developmental advising has been used for a while on campus.

**Initiative 4: Establish a meaningful system for recognizing and rewarding faculty members involved in academic advising.**

**Rationale:** Noel-Levitz provides areas of advising that should be considered when performing an advising audit. One of the ten areas included is a system for recognizing and rewarding advisers. Specifically, it is recommended to “establish a meaningful recognition/reward system for those involved in academic advising that includes, but is not necessarily limited to, consideration of advising effectiveness in making salary, promotion, and tenure decisions. Participate in the NACADA National Awards program for academic advising.” Many universities provide such rewards for faculty members. For example, Temple University has cash awards up to $1,000, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette recognizes junior faculty members with $500 and a reception, and Lee University presents an advising award with a cash value during commencement.

**Action Steps:** To begin, the meaningful recognition/reward system should be implemented at the university level. At the university level, the faculty handbook should be revised to include clear expectations for effective advising. Vowell and Farren (2003) state that “if good advising is to be considered in the faculty-reward process, clearly defined expectations must be in place. Ideally, such expectations need to be established and reviewed by the major participants in the process: faculty, the staff supporting advising, and students. They need to be included in the faculty handbook and available on the institutional web site. The most basic statement of expectation should be found in an institutional advising mission statement.” Furthermore, the Taskforce on Advising Recommendations chaired by Dr. Bill Gash recently made a recommendation to “review language in the Faculty Handbook that clearly states that advising is valued and should be mentioned and used for yearly evaluations as well as tenure and promotion portfolios and considerations.” Next, the recognition/reward system should be utilized at the departmental level. For example, each department can create its own advising syllabi, which would provide clear expectations for advisers. Similar to a course syllabus, an advising syllabus is a tool intended to define and clarify the role of advising for students (Trabant, 2006), including what university advising is and what it is not (that is, countering inappropriate expectations of advisers). The use of an advising syllabus is strongly recommended by the National Academic Advising Association.
(NACADA), and its Web site provides information on what an advising syllabus is and what it should contain, as well as the benefits and challenges of using an advising syllabus. An advising syllabus may contain advising learning objectives or expected outcomes of advising; a definition of advising and the campus advising mission statement; contact information for advisers; a set of student expectations and responsibilities; a set of adviser expectations and responsibilities; and a list of tools, resources, and recommendations for students (Martin, 2007; Trabant, 2006). Examples of advising syllabi can be found at [http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/syllabi.htm](http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/syllabi.htm). Departments may also select to document advising activities and efforts through student evaluations or advising portfolios. The ongoing Advising Task Force can provide departments with ideas and suggestions to meet the needs of their students and faculty members.

**Timeline:** The Faculty Senate should begin work on the assignment of revising the faculty handbook during the fall semester of 2010. Similarly, each department can begin work during the fall semester of 2010. Plans at both levels can be completed by spring 2011.

**Responsibility:** The Faculty Senate chair and the provost would be responsible for ensuring the system is developed at the university level. At the departmental level, chairs would be responsible for ensuring a departmental system is in place and the deans of the respective colleges would approve all plans. It is also recommended that each department chair appoint a faculty member in his or her department to serve as an advising coordinator (perhaps compensated by a stipend or release time) based on department size and responsibilities. A system of accountability instituted by the deans in collaboration with the provost and the Advising Task Force should be put in place to assure that departments and advising coordinators are working toward the improvement of advising in their areas.

**Assessment:** To begin, this initiative can be evaluated through the revised faculty handbook, which would have to go through the Faculty Senate and the process of shared governance. The creation of the departmental plans also can be used as assessment of the initiative. In the future, faculty members should be surveyed again regarding their attitudes and perceptions of the importance of advising on campus. This can be compared to the baseline data collected in fall 2009.

### Admissions

*Working Group: Lela Clark, Richard Gay, Monica Osburn*

**Initiative 1: Increase minimum high school GPA required for regular acceptance to 2.3 for fall 2010 and 2.5 for fall 2011.**

**Rationale:** The Office of Institutional Effectiveness provided three-year data on first-year students who were not retained from fall of their first year to fall of their second year. This
data included high school GPA. The total group was composed of 1,029 records. Of this group, 134 students had high school GPAs below 2.3 (13% of the group), and 240 had high school GPAs below 2.5 (23% of the group). If one does not count students who are considered non-traditional (over 21 years of age), the number in the group is reduced to 987. Of this number, 132 had GPAs below 2.3 (13% of the group), and 236 had GPAs below 2.5 (24% of the group). Based on these numbers, increasing high school GPA requirements will not be a total fix for the retention problems we face but should contribute toward improvement. The greatest potential for success will come with the 2.5 threshold.

**Action Steps:** (1) Any publications that include admission requirements, such as the catalog, will have to be updated with the new information. (2) The admissions staff will have to be trained and conditioned to make decisions based on the new requirements. (3) Information will have to be disseminated to key players in recruitment such as high school guidance counselors.

**Timeline:** For the increase to 2.3 for the fall 2010 class, implementation has already begun. Implementation for the 2.5 increase for fall 2011 will begin with the new recruitment cycle during September 2010. Additionally, changes to the catalog and any new publications will be made during the summer of 2010.

**Responsibility:** The Division of Enrollment Management and the Office of Admissions will be responsible for implementation of the new GPA requirement.

**Assessment:** The retention rate of the fall 2010 and 2011 freshman cohorts will need to be examined during fall 2011 and fall 2012 respectively to see if there is immediate improvement.

**Initiative 2: Address “fit” when recruiting students.**

**Rationale:** Student commitment to educational and career goals is strongly related to student persistence (Wyckoff, 1999). Students are often uncertain about career goals and/or know little about their intended majors; they also frequently change educational plans, and this holds true across a variety of institutional types (Cuseo, 2003a). Additionally, “[m]any students transfer—or sometimes drop out—simply because they do not know that a particular course of study is available at their college, or because they think they cannot have a particular option in their program of studies” (Beal & Noel, 1980, p. 103). Also, students who are engaged in the university community persist at higher rates. Engagement occurs when students feel comfortable in their environment. Finally, it is worth noting that a substantial number of the students who are contributing to UNCP’s low retention rate are actually students who never intended to graduate from UNCP; rather, they came here with the intention of transferring to another institution. While we may not wish to turn away these students, we should not be penalized for failing to retain them, particularly since many eventually graduate from other institutions. Evidence of their eventual graduation can be found in the most recent edition of the *College Portrait*. 
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(http://www.collegeportraits.org/NC/UNCP/undergrad_success), which gives UNCP’s “four-year success and progress rate” as 65 percent, meaning that “65% of students starting in Fall 2003 either graduated or are still enrolled at a higher education institution four years later.” As one graph in this report shows, when we take into account students who transferred to other institutions, we see that the “success and progress” of students who enrolled at UNCP is far greater than the four-year graduation rate would seem to indicate.

**Action Steps:**
1) Check on whether UNCP offers the major that each prospective student is seeking.
2) Develop incentives to promote the campus visit (No. 1 way to determine if the campus is a good fit). For the fall 2009 recruitment cycle the university sponsored a “full ride” promotion. Students who made official campus visits were eligible to win a full-ride scholarship. This was a great way to promote the campus visit but was costly and difficult to manage. Some ideas that may be more feasible with agreement from the appropriate offices and departments would be entering to win a bookstore allowance, meal plan for a year, parking for a year, or waiver of the New Student Orientation Fee. Students would enter by making an official campus visit through the Admissions Office. This would include the private visit or attendance at an open house. The promotion would have to be advertised in order to be effective. 3) Change our focus from being numbers driven to retention driven with an end result of always giving a realistic presentation of what we are and what we are not (no sugar coating). 4) Actively market and recruit in small towns where students may be a better fit. This step has great potential for success, since many of our students transfer to other institutions rather than just dropping out. The inference would be that we were not the right fit for them. 5) Determine which students plan to transfer and track these students. Include data on these students in reports on retention and make a case to General Administration that UNCP should not be penalized for the “loss” of these students, since they came here with the intention of transferring. If they graduate from another institution, as many of them do, then UNCP should be recognized for contributing to their eventual success, not penalized for failing to retain them.

**Timeline:** Implementation of each of these initiatives can begin with the coming fall recruitment cycle at the latest. Some, such as ensuring we have the desired major and presenting ourselves in a realistic and honest way, are for immediate implementation.

**Responsibility:** The Division of Enrollment Management and the Office of Admissions will be responsible for implementing this initiative.

**Assessment:** The university should conduct thorough exit interviews or surveys on students who leave to determine whether their reasons for leaving can be attributed to UNCP being a poor “fit” for them. The university’s current withdrawal form requests a reason for withdrawal, but does not call for sufficiently detailed information. Furthermore, some respondents may not provide accurate information. A face-to-face exit interview would be most advantageous for determining the “true” reason for withdrawal; however, cost and manpower to carry out this endeavor could be prohibitive.
Initiative 3: Increase faculty and staff involvement in Orientation and Welcome Week.

**Rationale:** The First Year Experience (FYE) begins at Admissions and Orientation. Student and faculty interaction is a critical component in student retention. By connecting students to faculty early, it provides another opportunity for the student become integrated in the campus community. As Skipper (2005) points out, “Integration and incorporation are essential to college persistence, and Tinto indentifies two primary pathways for this to occur—through academic and social integration.” The “lack of satisfactory interactions with faculty is an extremely important part of social isolation, a variable that has been shown to be a good predictor of the intention not to return” (McLaughlin, Brozovsky, McLaughlin, 1998, p.9). The frequency of informal student-faculty interaction impacts student satisfaction and first-year persistence (Endo and Harpel, 1982; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980). Additionally, Welcome Week contains social aspects but could benefit from more academic integration.

**Action Steps:** 1) The Welcome Program, which includes student orientation, should be mandatory. 2) A Welcome Week Committee should be formed. (3) The program, which is currently activity based, should be revised to include orientation activities, specifically including social interaction with faculty and academic departments. Some examples/ideas are “Meet your FRS 1000 Professor,” “Mentor Socials,” and “Departmental Meet and Greets” to welcome new and prospective majors into the departments. These events should take the form of receptions, and departmental activities should include department tours led by faculty members. 4) As part of Welcome Program, incorporate academic discussion sessions with advisers and/or department chairs to address departmental opportunities, policies, and advising procedures. 5) Offer film screenings with discipline-specific discussions. 6) To allow for success, administration should identify and provide funds for receptions. 7) Note faculty participation in annual and P&T evaluations.

**Timeline:** These initiatives can be planned during summer 2010 and implemented in fall 2010.

**Responsibility:** This initiative will take coordination from several campus groups. Some of the most involved offices and divisions would be the Office of New Student and Family Orientation, the Center for Academic Excellence and specifically the coordinator for First Year Programs, Academic Affairs, and department chairs.

**Assessment:** Poll sophomores about the effectiveness of program beginning fall 2011.
First- and Second-year Programs

Working Group: Elizabeth Froeba, Deana Johnson, Cammie Oxendine, Meredith Storms

According to Mary Stuart Hunter (2006), “The term ‘first-year experience’ as advocated by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina describes a comprehensive and intentional approach to the first college year. It comprises both curricular and cocurricular initiatives. It is the sum of all experiences students have in their first year of college” (p. 6). Within that definition, Hunter (2006) continues to describe all the activities related to FYE: recruitment and admissions efforts, orientation programs, welcome week activities, rituals and traditions, common reading programs, first-year seminars, academic advising, academic support centers, supplemental instruction, undergraduate research initiatives, learning communities, service-learning, and residence education initiatives (p. 6). In addition, other FYE literature (Hamid, 2001) discusses the role of peer mentors in assisting in the transition from high school to college.

This working group did not review all items related to a comprehensive FYE as stated above. To enhance the First Year Experience on the UNCP campus, we support the recommendations for initiatives connected with programs planned and implemented for freshmen. In an effort to create a comprehensive FYE program at UNCP, this subcommittee makes the following recommendations.

Initiative 1: Provide the Center for Academic Excellence, Student Support Services, and other academic support programs with the space and resources needed to support growth as student needs increase.

Rationale: The Center for Academic Excellence reports that it served more than 300 students for tutoring during fall 2009. Tutoring occurs in Jacobs Hall and Mimosa, which is a temporary unit near the Dial Building. The Mimosa location presents a problem because of the distance from the CAE office. Because of a lack of space, tutoring is also occurring in common areas. Student Support Services through TRIO also offers tutoring. This office is also located in Jacobs Hall. Some of its tutoring sessions occur in the same room. The Writing Center reports serving more than 845 students in fall 2009. These totals include only the number reported by tutors. With this amount of use by students, it is imperative that the University consider tutoring at all levels a priority.

Action Steps: 1) During the fall 2010 semester, the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness would provide data on the usage of various classrooms and other campus locations that could possibly be used for tutoring. Staff members from the Center for Academic Excellence, as well as staff members from other support services, would continue to collect data on the number of students served by their various programs. 2) UNCP’s vice chancellors would review this data and discuss the most efficient means of allocating or reallocating space. They would then make decisions about what changes can and need to be made in order to make student tutoring needs a priority. 3) In spring 2011,
alternate locations will be assigned and used for tutoring services. Each of the staff members from the various support services will monitor these new locations for their respective programs to see if these spaces are adequate or if additional modifications are necessary.

**Timeline:** The actions described above would take place during the 2010-2011 academic year.

**Responsibility:** The vice chancellors in consultation with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the Office of the Registrar, and Facilities Management will be responsible for reviewing usage and allocating space.

**Initiative 2: Foster collaboration among departments and offices to create a single marketing plan for UNCP’s First Year Experience (FYE).**

**Rationale:** As Hunter reminds us, “every student has a first year experience, whether it is desired by the campus leadership or not” (Hunter, 2006). A collaborative effort among departments and offices can promote the kind of first-year experience that will lead to student success. This experience should be based on the university’s mission and tailored to meet the needs of the student population. As Dolinsky, Matthews, et al. (2007), state, “Bringing together persons from across the campus is a critical means of developing and implementing programs for entering students.” These collaborating entities can help to promote the many opportunities FYE offers: service-learning opportunities, Freshman Seminar, and more.

**Action Steps:** See grid below.

**Timeline:** See grid below.

**Responsibility:** See grid below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compile all a list of all resources available to the first year student that fits the FYE model.</td>
<td>May 30, 2010</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs</td>
<td>One university calendar where all activities can be found (academic, financial, and social)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate with each office to create one marketing plan for the FYE.</td>
<td>Ongoing as materials are created and activities occur.</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs and all offices on campus that serve the first year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Initiative 3: Grow the Academic Resource Mentor program in the Center for Academic Excellence.

**Rationale:** UNCP has a peer leader program, called UPEERs, in the Freshman Seminar course. These upper-class students assist in the classroom and contact the students outside of class. To develop a more focused and intentional mentoring program, the committee recommends that the Academic Resource Mentor program replace UPEERs and provide mentoring not just in the classroom, but in an office and workshop setting. Because they are no longer tied to a particular course, these upper-class mentors can be available to the sophomores and probation students, as well. Many universities use students in some capacity to mentor other students. Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is one of the leaders in peer mentoring. Through the Bepko Learning Center, students meet with mentors based on their individual needs ([http://uc.iupui.edu/learningcenter/](http://uc.iupui.edu/learningcenter/)).

**Action Steps:** See grid below.

**Timeline:** See grid below.

**Responsibility:** See grid below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hire 7-10 Academic Resource Mentors.</td>
<td>Before fall 2010</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs</td>
<td>Salary for mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin connecting the students to mentors at Orientation.</td>
<td>Each Orientation</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs</td>
<td>Lists of students attending, mentors, &amp; listservs developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact students throughout summer.</td>
<td>Summer 2010</td>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan and participate in mentor social.</td>
<td>Welcome Week, fall 2010</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs and Mentors</td>
<td>See Welcome Week needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with Freshman Seminar instructors to connect the student with mentors in the course without co-teaching.</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs, Freshman Seminar instructors, and mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors will follow a communication flow that continues through the first year.</td>
<td>Fall 2010-spring 2011</td>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create workshops to assist with academic skills. Promote them on campus.</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Location to host workshop, marketing materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan and host a First Year Recognition Ceremony</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Coordinator for First Year Programs and Mentors</td>
<td>Refreshments, gifts, awards, certificates, location, invitations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment:** We can use the following strategies to assess the effectiveness of our FYE initiatives:

- Conduct evaluations of each activity.
- Document mentor interaction and listen to student feedback through the mentors.
• Use the SRI to determine if we are providing the right resources based on the student population.
• Evaluate fall-to-fall retention rates for first-year students.
• Establish focus groups to determine if we are offering the right interventions for the first-year student.

Initiative 4: Increase the amount of feedback provided to first year students in general education courses.

**Rationale:** Students need feedback. Many instructors and advisers can share stories of students who were not aware that they were going to fail courses. Such “surprise failures” occur when students do not understand the syllabus breakdown of the grading structure and when there are only two or three graded assignments in a course. As the ASHE Higher Education Report states, “timely, appropriate feedback is positively associated with student learning and success” (Chickering and Gamson, 1991; Kuh, 2003). Feedback increases learning by offering students clear information about whether they are making adequate progress so that they may adjust and make changes as needed (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2005; Tagg, 2003). “The best feedback is interactive, involving teachers, staff, and students in a conversation about how the student is performing” (Kuh et al, 2007). This committee recommends implementing a policy that provides students in all general education classes with multiple feedback opportunities, as well as opportunities for general education faculty to grow as educators.

**Action Steps:** See grid below.

**Timeline:** See grid below.

**Responsibility:** See grid below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Propose changes to the General Education committee</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer research based training on teaching styles that best suit the first year student.</td>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research other schools that have a similar policy and create one that fits UNCP needs and offers the students multiple feedback</td>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>General Education Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities.

Follow appropriate channels for implementation of policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
<th>General Education Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Educate faculty and implement policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2011</th>
<th>General Education Committee and faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Initiative 5: Establish a second-semester Freshman Seminar course.

**Rationale:** In “The Empirical Case for the First-Year Seminar: Promoting Positive Student Outcomes and Campus-Wide Benefits,” Joe Cuseo of Marymount College notes that “more compelling empirical evidence” has been “gathered for the first year seminar than any other course in the history of higher education” (1). Cuseo affirms that the assessment results for first-year courses (including results from 80,000 first-year students from the National Survey of Student Engagement in 2005) have confirmed both “positive and statistically significant advantages to students who take the courses” (1). First-year seminars are normally evaluated on the basis of their impact on both retention and academic performance for freshmen. Also, these courses have positive effects on students’ successful transition into college, persistence to sophomore year, and a “considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor’s degree completion” (2). Since UNCP already has a Freshman Seminar in place, the current consideration is whether to expand the course and if this expansion will have significant benefits in the form of increased retention and graduation rates. Perhaps the best-known case for more contact hours in Freshman Seminar was made by Pascarella and Terenzini, who found that freshman programs “that are longer in duration and more comprehensive in scope tend to be empirically associated with stronger direct effects on student retention” (qtd. in Cuseo “How Many Credit Hours…?” 1). More recent research conducted by Randy Swing indicates that increased contact hours can have significant effects. Swing, co-director and senior scholar for the Policy Center on the First Year of College in Brevard, NC, has worked extensively with John Gardner, who pioneered the first-year experience concept upon which many of the existing programs are modeled. Swing visited UNCP in 2007 for a consulting session about retention issues, so he is somewhat familiar with UNCP’s programs and policies. Swing’s research in “How Many Weekly Contact Hours is Enough?” concludes that “the final decision on contact hours should be based on an array of institutional variables. These data confirm the common wisdom applied to first-year seminars that 1-contact hour is better than none, 2 are better and 1, and 3 are better than 1 or 2” (2). Swing also indicates in this report for the Policy Center on the First Year of College that the goals of the course must determine the number of contact hours. He explains that if the goal of the course is to introduce campus policies, then 1-contact hour courses may be sufficient; however, if the goal is “increased knowledge of campus services, improvement in time management and
other study skills, increasing student/student and student/faculty connections, and increased out-of-class engagement, then at least 2 contact hours per week are more effective in producing these learning outcomes” (1-2). In the Noel-Levitz Retention Opportunities Analysis prepared for UNCP in November 2008, David Trites, Senior Consultant, recommended moving to a 3-hour course in Freshman Seminar as a way to improve retention. Our committee realizes that the move to a three-hour structure would require even more resources and may be even more of a “hard sell” to skeptical faculty members. Therefore, the implementation of a one-hour course seems a reasonable first step, and these sections can serve as pilot courses for assessment and curriculum design.

Each of these items mentioned in Swing’s analysis has been discussed and established as goals by the Student Success Steering Committee. Therefore, it is reasonable to implement another segment of the Freshman Seminar course. It also seems reasonable to begin with this as a first step of expansion given the considerations of time, resources, financial constraints, and speed of implementation. Also, since the greater problem of attrition occurs between the spring of the freshman year and the fall of the sophomore year, a new Freshman Seminar course scheduled to run during the spring semester of the freshman year may improve the rate of return.

Specific target populations should be identified for this new FRS course. Some possible target populations include freshmen on academic warning, undecided students, and/or students interested in particular majors that require diligent preparation for entrance. According to the Hanover Research Council’s Report on “Determinants of First-Year Persistence” prepared for UNCP in July 2008, the highest-risk majors in terms of attrition included nursing, art education, and special education. The group of students who are on warning following the fall semester of the freshman year represents an extremely high-risk population; therefore, these students would be a good place to start with this new intervention method. After an assessment of the results of this new course and the impact on student performance and retention, the second semester FRS course could be expanded to other target populations if it does in fact prove successful. This working group recommends that all students on academic warning be required to take the second-semester FRS course. Joe Cuseo recommends creating a “second-chance seminar” that would cover content not covered in the first semester. He says that “it should be intentionally designed to be relevant to the experiences of second-term students and would build on their first-term experience” (Cuseo, “If the First-Year Seminar is Required…” 1). Marc Dearstyne of SUNY Cortland is teaching a probation second-semester course that has resulted in positive outcomes according to his comments on the First Year Experience Discussion List. He admits that while he faces some resistance, he and the students are able to work through it, and he indicates that he usually ends up with 85-90% retention. The University of West Georgia has also implemented such a course with some success.
**Action Step 1:** Consider staffing needs for these sections. According to data from the registrar’s office, after the fall 2009 semester, 338 freshman students were on academic warning. If we limit these sections to 20 students, then a minimum of 16 sections would be needed for those on academic warning. While this is a significant commitment of resources, this population of students is one that can be readily identified and one that obviously needs intervention. If we could impact even 25% of those in this category, we could potentially “save” the academic careers of almost 100 students. This has the potential to increase our retention rate by almost 10 percent, which is significant. Even if this many students were not positively impacted, if we were to impact 10% of these students with the second semester of Freshman Seminar, this could improve our retention rate by about 3%, which puts us closer to our retention rate goal. Careful consideration must be given to the instructors identified to teach this course. Only instructors with experience in teaching FRS, as well as those who have a proven track record of working with students with academic difficulties or experience with guiding students in academic and career decision making, should be invited to teach these sections. In addition, all instructors of these sections should go through at least one intensive training session (or more if time and resources allow). The most important factor, however, should be an interest in these students and a desire to teach the course. Neither faculty nor staff should be pressured into these sections. Faculty should teach the courses in load. Also, staff members from the Center for Academic Excellence who have considerable experience working with students on warning and probation should be heavily involved. Additional pressure or monetary reward may cloud the purpose of these sections and actually has the potential to make the situation even worse.

**Timeline:** Staffing needs should be considered during the fall semester 2010 with hopes of implementing the course in spring 2011.

**Responsibility:** The administration should form a committee made up of representatives from the Center of Academic Excellence, this working group, and the task force recently charged with studying the FRS course, as well as faculty and staff who are interested in the course and willing to teach it.

**Assessment:** In “Assessment of the First-Year Seminar: Research Based Guidelines for Course and Program Evaluation,” Joe Cuseo recommends using an external party that is not directly associated with the FRS program for assessment. Ultimately, a person or group “who has no vested interest in the outcome” should be in charge of the assessment (4). At the University of South Carolina, for example, a researcher who is not responsible for the program has conducted assessment procedures. One consideration is whether funding will be available to contract with an independent research firm or whether the assessment can be handled in house. A firm such as Noel-Levitz, which has worked with UNCP on many occasions, may be a good option. Certainly, portions of the assessment can be accomplished via student course evaluations and activities supervised by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.
Cuseo also describes several assessment designs that may be employed in the evaluation of FRS programs. A time-series design can allow for outcomes to be assessed after the implementation of the second course, compared with the same outcomes before the implementation of the course. Particularly for the students on academic probation, this design could work. Cuseo says that the advantage of this design is that it provides “a ‘historical’ control group—against which the effects of seminar participation may be compared.” Multiple regression analysis also could be used to compute correlations among student outcome variables (i.e., retention) and student input variables (i.e., entering students’ SAT scores) and college experience (i.e. participation in the new FRS course). Cuseo points out that when using multiple regression analysis, “if desirable student outcomes attributed to the freshman seminar are not found to be statistically significant, the seminar’s effect on certain institutional outcomes may still prove to be practically significant” (11). In other words, even a modest gain in retaining students (such as 5-10%) may turn out to be worth it in terms of the revenue that is generated by the tuition dollars of the retained students.

Another important method of assessment is the use of student course evaluation surveys. Even though some faculty members and administrators dismiss the value of this form of assessment, Cuseo argues that the research on student evaluations provides “strong support” for the validity of student evaluations (12).

**Action Step 2:** Plan curriculum as well as course content, policies, and procedures. The suggestions that Trites included in his report for UNCP included effective use of technology, financial literacy, and rigorous training in academic skills. It is clear that the course for the students on academic warning also must contain explicit teaching on study skills and more detailed and practical application of time-management techniques. Even though these types of skills may be difficult for students to learn and to translate into their academic experience, Bruce W. Tuckman, a psychologist from Ohio State University, has implemented a psychology-based “study-skills” program with success. His program included a training course with four major achievement strategies to teach students how to “overcome procrastination, build self-confidence and responsibility, manage their lives, learn from lecture and text, prepare for exams, and write papers” (3). This training involved a “hybrid technology-based instructional model” (3). Tuckman reports that students who took the training course performed better academically, achieved higher GPAs, and were more likely to return the next academic year (3).

In the second semester of Freshman Seminar, students must be required to set short-term academic goals and develop action plans with specific steps in order to make progress toward these goals. Also, they must show evidence of following these steps or the development of additional ones on a bi-weekly basis. For undecided students, another important focus must be on selecting a major and career choice. Since we have offered a course in career choice previously, this curriculum could likely be adapted and included in the course. The course should also include a financial literacy component as recommended.
in the report from the working group on student services. In addition, activities must be implemented to further engage these students both inside and outside the classroom. Examples might include service-learning initiatives, group projects, and participation in social and cultural events.

**Timeline:** This initiative should be implemented in fall 2010.

**Responsibility:** The special committee mentioned above would be responsible for planning the curriculum based on recommendations from the current literature, as well as the experience of staff and faculty members who have worked with students who are struggling academically.

**Assessment:** Primarily, student surveys would be used to evaluate the curriculum, and student input would be gathered on what areas should be covered that would be most helpful to them. In addition, student performance during the semester of enrollment in the course and the semester immediately following the course, as well as retention rates, will all be essential data in determining the effectiveness of this course.

**Action Step 3:** Propose the course to the curriculum subcommittee and continue the process through the Academic Affairs Committee and the Faculty Senate. The course proposal must be written, and a sample syllabus must be designed. Authors of the proposal must attend various meetings and answer questions about the proposal and make a clear argument for its inclusion in the curriculum.

**Timeline:** The course would need to be proposed in the spring of 2010 for it to make it into the new catalog. If this action step is implemented, perhaps it could go through the curriculum process during fall 2010 with the understanding that courses (at least 2 or 3 test sections) would begin in spring of 2011.

**Responsibility:** The chair of the special committee would designate members to prepare and go through the course proposal process.

**Assessment:** Approval of the course will signal the success of this initiative.

**Action Step 4:** Determine a notification system for students who will be required to enroll in the course. Students who are on academic warning would be notified via the registrar’s office. The requirement for enrollment in the course would be added to the letter that notifies students of the conditions of their warning status. In addition, all academic advisers of these students would be notified, and they would be expected to follow up with the students to ensure timely enrollment.

**Timeline:** Students would be notified after final grades are posted for fall 2010.

**Responsibility:** The registrar’s office would be responsible for adding this information to the letter it already sends to students. Academic advisers would be responsible for following up with identified students, as well as promoting the course.
Assessment: The number of students who enroll in and successfully complete the course will provide evidence of success.

Action Step 5: Begin teaching courses.

Timeline: The pilot courses will be taught in spring 2011.

Responsibility: Instructors identified by the special committee, along with those who volunteer to teach, will be responsible for this action step.

Assessment: The action will be successful if the classes are taught.

Initiative 6: Expand the Supplemental Instruction Program to include more sections; review the allocation of funds related to the SI Program; establish an SI mentor program.

Rationale: Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic assistance program that engages students in active and collaborative learning strategies outside of class. SI sessions are regularly scheduled, informal review sessions in which students compare notes, discuss readings, develop organizational tools, and predict test items. Students learn how to integrate course content and study skills while working together. With the ample training and supervision built into the model, student leaders learn to avoid answering questions and re-teaching the material. Instead, they focus on getting participants to use effective study strategies to review the week’s work with their peers. In the thirty-odd years since it was launched at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, the SI scheme has been successfully implemented in hundreds of colleges and universities. After a rigorous review process in 1981, the SI Program became one of the few postsecondary programs to be designated by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) as an Exemplary Educational Program. SI is only one of two programs validated by USDOE as improving student academic achievement and graduation rates. USDOE validated the following claims of SI effectiveness:

Claim 1. Students participating in SI within the targeted historically difficult courses earn higher mean final course grades than students who do not participate in SI. This is still true when differences are analyzed, despite ethnicity and prior academic achievement.

Claim 2. Despite ethnicity and prior academic achievement, students participating in SI within targeted historically difficult courses succeed at a higher rate (withdraw at a lower rate and receive a lower percentage of D or F final course grades) than those who do not participate in SI.

Claim 3. Students participating in SI persist at the institution (re-enrolling and graduating) at higher rates than students who do not participate in SI.
Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reviewed the available evidence on SI in *How College Affects Students*, and they estimated that across hundreds of institutions and thousands of courses, SI participants earned an average final course grade roughly 15 percentile points higher than non-participants, usually regardless of student characteristics such as standardized test scores, rank in high school class, age, gender, ethnicity, and work responsibilities. Several studies indicate the potential impact of SI on graduate rates. In fact, as indicated by Boyles, McKoy, and Bates in “The Effect of Supplemental Instruction of Timely Graduation,” SI attendance increases the probability of timely graduation by approximately 11 percent.

Substantial evidence suggests that attrition follows poor grades. Students tend not to withdraw from courses or drop out of college when grades are acceptably high. In 1990, Noel and Levitz from the National Center for Student Retention published a research study that suggests a strong correlation between grade-point averages and persistence in college (Table 1). SI is designed to increase student academic performance that is generally indicated by higher final course grades.

Table 1: Dropouts andPersisters: Separated by College Grade Point Average
(N of Students = 3,874 and N of Institutions = 43)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Point Average Range</th>
<th>Dropouts (N = 1,060 Students)</th>
<th>Persisters (N of Students = 2,814)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA Below 2.00</td>
<td>42.1% (N = 336)</td>
<td>15.8% (N = 445)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA 2.00 to 2.49</td>
<td>18.9% (N = 200)</td>
<td>24.9% (n = 701)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA 2.50 to 2.99</td>
<td>19.6% (N = 208)</td>
<td>26.2% (n = 737)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA 3.00 to 4.00</td>
<td>19.1% (N = 206)</td>
<td>33.1% (n = 931)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schreiner, 1990

Based on the SI model, the SI program at UNCP targets traditionally difficult courses with a specific focus on general education courses with a high level of freshman enrollment and high W, D, and F rates. SI was implemented because it is a non-remedial approach to learning as the program targets high-risk courses rather than high-risk students; therefore, there is no stigma attached to attending SI sessions. SI is a voluntary program, but all students are encouraged to attend when enrolled in an SI course.
Since the inception of the SI program at UNCP, the program has expanded from 10 SI sections (Fall 2007) to 18 SI sections (Spring 2010). Based on the data provided by UNCP’s Center for Academic Excellence, students who attend SI sessions have higher grades in the course, as well as higher GPAs. According to the most recent data (Fall 2009), SI was integrated into 16 class from 8 disciplines with approximately 37% of the students enrolled in these courses attending SI sessions. Additionally, the GPA for students attending SI was slightly higher (GPA: 2.61) as compared to those students who did not attend SI (GPA: 2.23). To assess the impact of SI on GPA, additional statistical analyses determined that there were no significant differences between those students who attended SI based on high school GPA while SAT scores were significantly higher for students who did not attend SI. As a result, it can be concluded that various types of students are attending SI and the difference in GPA is due to the impact of SI rather than previous academic achievement. In summary, SI has made a significant impact on course grades and the overall GPAs of those students taking advantage of the SI sections. To improve the quality of the SI sessions, it is important to schedule training sessions for SI leaders throughout the year. Designating more space for SI would alleviate some of the difficulty with scheduling these training sessions.

**Action Step 1:** Designate more classroom space for SI. As of the spring 2010 semester, there are 18 SI sections. For each section, SI sessions are held for approximately 3 hours per week; therefore, SI sessions require a minimum of 54 hours of classroom space each week. This semester, classroom space was not allotted until the third week of the semester, a problem because many students are already preparing for their first exam at this point in the semester. Additionally, SI sessions are scheduled at times conducive to the schedules of the students in the courses; therefore, some of these sections are held in the evenings and/or the weekend. In some cases, this timing has been an issue because the buildings or rooms are locked; therefore, it is often difficult for the SI leaders to gain access to the designated facility.

**Timeline:** Classroom space should be designated for SI before the beginning of the fall semester.

**Responsibility:** The registrar’s office is responsible for managing the space on campus. Some locations on campus are available in the late afternoon and evening hours. Additional space designated for the Center for Academic Excellence to use for student support services, including SI, would be likely be handled through Academic Affairs, and evening access to facilities would need to be coordinated in consultation with Campus Safety.

**Action Step 2:** Establish additional financial support for SI. The current operating costs for the SI program are approximately $47,500 per semester. Of this budget, Academic Affairs allots approximately $22,000 per semester for faculty stipends. To the best of our knowledge, UNCP is one of the very few (if not the only) institution to pay the faculty for their involvement in SI; therefore, it is recommended that the allocation of money used to
pay faculty should instead be reallocated and used to support student stipends so that additional SI mentors may be hired and trained. Each SI leader is paid $1300 per semester; therefore, an expansion of the SI program will require additional monetary support for student stipends.

**Timeline:** This action step should take place in spring 2011.

**Responsibility:** The examination of the allocation of funds would be conducted by Academic Affairs and the Center for Academic Excellence.

**Activity Step 3:** Establish a peer-mentoring program to alleviate some of the duties of the SI program coordinator. Identify experienced SI leaders and train them to be SI mentors. These mentors would train SI leaders and visit their SI sessions, where they would help them to use the SI model of facilitating group discussions and peer-led team learning.

**Timeline:** This activity step would take place in fall 2011.

**Responsibility:** The Center for Academic Excellence would be responsible for establishing and managing an SI Mentor Program.

**Assessment:** Collect data on two exams in each SI course over the semester and compare scores and the overall GPAs of the students who attended SI with those of students who did not. Additional data could be collected to compare the graduation rate for those students who attended SI sessions while at UNCP with that of students who did not.

**Initiative 7: Enhance the Early Alert Program.**

**Rationale:** In order for the Early Alert system to work, faculty will have to be proactive, supportive, and involved in facilitating the academic components of student retention. Faculty awareness of potential student problems constitutes the backbone of this retention program. The early alert warning must come early enough to be useful, preferably in the first four or six weeks of the semester (Tinto, 1993). Beyond the obvious benefits of quick institutional response to student needs, faculty-initiated systems also put faculty into direct contact with students about their needs and difficulties. That engagement with the student underlies the success of faculty-initiated early warning systems. In order to achieve faculty buy-in of the early warning system, advocates of the system will have to be identified and used in the promotional aspect of alerting faculty to the new system.

**Action Steps:** 1) Create an Early Alert Task Force, the membership of which should include both faculty and staff (especially staff from the Center for Academic Excellence and faculty from each of the three schools). 2) Charge the task force with the creation of a public awareness campaign to inform the campus community about the policies/procedures for Early Alert. It is imperative that faculty members be the “voice” of the Early Alert program. 3) Develop a modified web-based monitoring form for faculty to use to provide prompt feedback to students and the Center for Academic Excellence during the fourth week of
class. Through this reporting mechanism, faculty would identify students who are experiencing academic difficulties, who are chronically tardy, have missed three or more class sessions, or have exhibited a pattern of failing to take notes or otherwise not engaging in classroom activities. Faculty would provide students with a copy of this form and discuss the noted areas of concern. If the faculty member determines it is necessary for the Center for Academic Excellence to become involved, then the referral form would be completed. Once the CAE meets with the student and develops an appropriate action plan, the referring faculty member and the student’s adviser will be notified as to the plan and its implementation.

**Timeline:** This initiative should be accomplished as quickly as possible within the next academic year (2010-2011).

**Responsibility:** Responsibility for guiding the process of the *Early Alert* System will fall to the Task Force.

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**Student Services**

*Working Group: Janice Goolsby, Mary Ann Jacobs, Staci Johnson, Sharon Kissick, Karen Stanley*

**Initiative 1: Communicate to students their academic responsibilities, as well as deadlines, and ensure that policy and procedures are defined and reviewed by faculty, staff, and administration.**

**Rationale:** Negotiating the various policies related to financial aid, registration, and other aspects of college life can be a challenge for both students and their families. Because they do not always understand what is required of them, students sometimes feel confused, overwhelmed, and frustrated. Making sure that they receive timely, accurate information can ensure customer satisfaction and ultimately may increase retention. Training and cross-training staff members can help to ensure that they are well-informed and able to provide consistent communications to students (Krakowsky, 2009). Furthermore, enforcing policies can help build confidence in the staff members who work in student services. While exceptions may sometimes be necessary, an excess of exceptions creates a perception that frontline staff are inept or unwilling to provide good customer service.

**Action Steps:** 1) Establish annual training sessions for faculty, staff, and administration to review policies and procedures that will affect students. Other universities have educational days dedicated to the training of faculty and staff similar to new student orientation. Western Carolina University, for example, conducts “Faculty Enrichment and Education Day.” 2) Administration and management should review policies and procedures to ensure a wide knowledge base to address student concerns and implement changes as necessary to
promote university growth. 3) Expose students to possible rewards for filing financial aid forms early. Staff in the registrar’s office, financial aid office, and bursar’s office should disseminate information to students via Face Book pages, the University Center marquee, and cafeteria table tents. 4) Establish an online “One Stop Shop” featuring information about financial aid, registration, etc.

**Timeline**: Implementation of some of these initiatives, such as the publicizing information on the University Center marquee, already has begun. A preliminary web site has been created under Business Affairs, but a new location will need to be found within the main UNCP home page.

**Responsibility**: This project would be a joint venture involving all of the student services offices.

**Assessment**: Student surveys could measure knowledge of expectations. Tracking the data on the students who submit forms by the deadline and the number of students who receive the incentives offered will indicate whether publicizing incentives is working.

### Initiative 2: Establish a physical “one-stop shop” where students can find information about financial aid, registration, etc.

**Rationale**: UNCP commissioned Moran Technology Consulting to conduct an objective assessment of current information services and to recommend an action plan for change. The consultant reviewed thoughts and concerns by campus leaders, as well as functional offices. In addition, student focus groups were established. It was agreed that functional departments are difficult to reach and that there is often a delay in providing the requested information. Such problems may affect retention. “One bad experience – a registration glitch, a misplaced tuition payment, or frustrations in dealing with student services personnel – can cause students to rethink their college choice” (Krakowsky, 2009). Modeled on other university information centers, which have demonstrated a high degree of success, a one-stop shop provides an increased level of access. Students would experience a quicker response time and would have the ability to receive assistance from start to finish in one location. This resource also would eliminate the need for students to trudge from office to office to pay invoices, handle financial aid or loan processing, make a housing selection, schedule courses, see an academic adviser, access support services, apply for a parking permit, or research internship and employment opportunity (Krakowsky, 2009).

**Action Steps**: 1) Choose a central location for the “one-stop shop.” 2) Provide staff at this office with “live chat” technology and set up a self-help kiosk, where students can obtain information via the Web. 3) Train staff members in attitudes and processes. The University of Southern Maine has operational rules included in their one-stop operation, such as “Do
not bounce the student,” and has staff provide “warm [phone] transfers,” meaning staff members call other offices preparing the staff there for students’ arrival. At USM, weekly meetings between key members of the financial aid, bursar’s, and registrar’s offices take place, and staff members discuss how best to help students.

**Timeline:** Implementation will occur in three phases. In the first phase (fall 2010/spring 2011), the university’s webmaster will add link on UNCP’s home page to a “one-stop” page for the aforementioned three offices. This approach is modeled after what has been done at Florida State University, Pepperdine, and University of Washington. The second phase (fall 2011) would include transforming the lobby area of Lumbee Hall into a welcoming area with couches, coffee tables, laptops, and self-help kiosks with a rotation of student services staff and student ambassadors to assist students when they enter Lumbee Hall. The third phase (fall 2012) would include a more thorough merging of the three offices and possibly include staff or information from Career Services and tutoring services, as well as information about advising.

**Responsibility:** This project would be a joint venture involving the financial aid, registrar’s, and bursar’s offices.

**Assessment:** Data will need to be collected to ensure that the concept continues to meet the university’s mission. Focus groups and student peer programs would help those who assess this initiative determine its efficacy. Additional student services offices will rate the use of each of the services in the hub and survey those who use it.

**Initiative 3: Integrate financial literacy into the second-semester sections of Freshman Seminar.**

**Rationale:** A new study by the UNC Center for Community Capital, “The Reality Education and Assets Partnership: Making the Case for Student Financial Management Programs at Minority Serving Institutions,” researched how financial education and support can help minority students in North Carolina meet the challenges facing them. The results of this survey demonstrated that very few students who received college loans have participated in a course in financial education and that a large majority would enroll in a course dealing with personal finances. Furthermore, the National Association of College and University Business Officers published an article on students’ lack of basic knowledge about money management. Many universities have found that providing financial-literacy programs improve retention. A financial-literacy course geared toward money management and additional assistance with financial aid can help reduce financial problems for students. The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics reports that more students who drop out of school cite financial reasons rather than academic reasons. In January 2008, the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Literacy was created to help
keep America competitive and assist Americans in understanding and addressing financial matters. There are several pending financial literacy bills that will affect our student population (http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/domestic-finance/financial-institution/fin-education/council/). In a 2009 survey administered by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, nearly 67 percent of first-year students at four-year institutions expressed at least some concern about paying tuition. In addition, more students are using loans to finance college—53 percent in 2009, which is up 4 percentage points from 2008 and is the highest level reported in nearly a decade. Clearly communicating the procedures to students well in advance of the deadline and providing motivation for completing the task on time will create a sense of security and well-being to students (http://www.nacacnet.org).

**Action Steps:** The REAP study is the first part of an initiative to develop a comprehensive, sustainable financial-education program. The next step will involve the implementation of a demonstration project that will prepare college students for financial success. The primary target audience will be at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, but UNCP should be included because of its substantial Native American population and because it exhibits many of the socio-economic characteristics of the HBCUs in the pilot. UNCP should investigate free or lost low cost options for a beginning curriculum.

**Timeline:** Implementation in fall 2011.

**Responsibility:** The Center for Academic Excellence, in consultation with the financial aid and bursar’s offices, would be responsible for this initiative.

**Assessment:** Freshman Seminar instructors would administer tests to assess students’ financial literacy at the outset and at the completion of the course.

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**Campus Community**

*Working Group: Scott Billingsley, Dan Kenney, Mike Severy*

The members of this working group have determined that the Student Success Steering Committee can offer two types of recommendations to the University administration: 1) Short-term recommendations that can be implemented immediately and with limited research to support their efficacy. 2) Long-term recommendations that require significant data to justify their implementation. We feel that, of the three initiatives listed below, the best option for immediate implementation from the Campus Community working group is Initiative 1: Student-Faculty Interaction.
Initiative 1: Promote more faculty-student interaction outside the classroom.

**Rationale:** Studies published in the *Journal of College Student Development* and the *Journal of Engineering Education* suggest that “[r]elationships with faculty were stronger predictors of learning than student background characteristics,” such as race or ethnicity, and that faculty engagement with students is “significantly and positively related” to the development of “several design and professional skills” (Lundberg and Schreiner, 2004; Bjorkland, et al, 2004).

**Action Steps:** Encourage first-year students to sign up for academic and non-academic clubs and organizations at New Freshman Orientation and at Pembroke Day, and provide tangible rewards for faculty and staff to interact with students outside of the classroom. Examples of such programs include the Pembroke Undergraduate Research and Creativity Center (PURC), which “stimulates, supports and promotes inquiry, discovery and creativity in scholarship and the arts through mentored research experiences with faculty,” and the Faculty Athletic Associates program, which is designed to increase faculty understanding of the demands of student athletes and to improve communication among student athletes, faculty, and coaches. UNCP could provide additional travel funds for faculty members involved with PURC to allow them to accompany their students to academic conferences. The Athletic Associates were publicly recognized at a ceremony on February 8, 2010, by the Student Athlete Advisory Council for their service to the University and to the student athletes. This form of public recognition might be expanded and emulated by other campus entities.

**Timeline:** This initiative can be implemented immediately, focusing on efforts to increase student-faculty interaction as early as next fall.

**Responsibility:** The director of Student Involvement and Leadership should work with the deans, the athletic director, and the chairs of academic departments to coordinate these efforts among the student population and the faculty.

**Assessment:** Given the broad range of environments in which students and faculty can interact, we cannot at this time recommend an assessment instrument for measuring the success of this initiative. However, we recommend that the people responsible for implementing this initiative develop such assessment procedures as they see fit.

Initiative 2: Explore the possible impact of requiring first-year students to live on campus.

**Rationale:** Some national data and data relating to specific schools within the UNC system suggest that students who live on campus during their first year perform better academically and are retained at a higher rate. However, the data for UNCP suggests that commuter students maintain higher GPAs during their first year than those who live on campus.
**Action Steps:** Continue to monitor the academic performance of on-campus and off-campus students to determine if UNCP commuter students continue to maintain higher GPAs or if they begin to reflect the trends of other institutions. At this time, we recommend that no change should be made to the housing requirements for freshmen.

**Timeline:** Data should be collected every three years.

**Responsibility:** The Office of Housing and Residence Life should work in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to collect and analyze this data.

**Assessment:** Regular collection and evaluation of academic performance and retention rates of on-campus and off-campus students should reveal consistent trends or changes in retention patterns. A distinction should be made between students who commute from home and those who live in off-campus housing (apartments, etc.) but are not from the immediate area.

**Initiative 3:** Examine the potential of learning communities to improve academic performance and retention rates at UNCP.

**Rationale:** There is a growing body of research on the efficacy of learning communities, most notably from the National Center for Postsecondary Research and the *Journal of Learning Communities Research*. Some of this research suggests that students benefit from the close interaction they have with faculty through learning communities, but faculty are sometimes reluctant to participate in such programs.

**Action Steps:** UNCP has three learning communities—the College Opportunity Program (COP), the Teaching Fellows program, and the Maynor Honors College. We recommend that the university first examine the effectiveness of these programs before introducing other learning communities. Studies should be conducted to determine if these students perform better than their peers and are retained at a higher rate. If so, then the University should identify other segments of the student population that would benefit from learning communities and create similar groups.

**Timeline:** The initial studies should be conducted over a period of two years to determine the effectiveness of our existing learning communities. If they prove to be effective tools for improving academic performance and retention, then a task force should be appointed to identify other potential learning communities.

**Responsibility:** The COP, the Teaching Fellows, and the Honors College should work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to collect the necessary data about the academic success and retention rates of students who participate in these learning communities.
**Assessment:** If it is clear that students who are currently participating in learning communities perform better academically and are retained at a higher rate than their peers, then the University should proceed with establishing other learning communities.
References


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