Student Success Initiatives: Retention Initiatives, Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), and Mental Health Awareness

Executive Summary
This report provides an overview of significant initiatives within the Division of Student Success (SS); namely Student Success retention initiatives, the work and recommendations of the University’s Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), and a campus-wide mental health awareness campaign.

The SS Division focuses on pathways related to retention and persistence towards graduation by putting effective programs in place that lead the way to student success and an outstanding Akron Experience for students, including: Advising to Coaching for At-Risk Students, SOS and NOW Initiatives, Getting’ Classy Registration Initiatives, Finish In Time, The Akron Experience: University 101, Help-A-Zip, and EAB-Student Success Collaborative. The report showcases these initiatives and showcases data that represents student success.

Title IX requires that institutions of higher education continue to educate, address, and respond to sexual discrimination. Colleges and universities are expected to have effective outcomes programs and grievance procedures in place and to provide necessary training for faculty, staff, and students. The University of Akron has made a concerted effort to ensure compliance with Title IX and to examine its approach to training, education, prevention, and service provisions regarding sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination. Based on recommendations from the Ohio Board of Regent’s Task Force on Ohio College Campus Safety and Security safer campus guidebook, the SART was formed and convened in May 2014. During the course of the year, the SART focused on what the University is currently doing, what the University is required to do, and made recommendations for a campus-wide model for implementation of programs and services.

College student mental health is a concern as nationally large numbers of college and university students increasingly report emotional distress that impacts well-being and academic functioning. One way to address student mental health concerns would be to develop a Mental Health Awareness campaign that would systemically and holistically address student behavioral health for the campus community. This would encourage not only individual training on identifying and working with at-risk students, but on a greater macro level, examine strategic policies and procedures, behavioral health, suicide prevention and substance abuse services, campus environmental issues and the connection with retention.
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Student Success Retention Initiatives

The Division of Student Success works diligently on creating ways and streamlining processes that lead the way for retention and greater persistence and completion of students. Much of the work is done through both academic initiatives and social support, as well as assessment and evaluation of students, programs, and services. Below are some of the key initiatives:

A. Moving from Advising to Coaching: Increasing intentionality with at-risk students

*Continuous change of advising model to improve intentionality with students, leave nothing to chance, and ensure no student falls through the cracks.*

- Required advising appointments for freshmen and sophomores.
- Constant student outreach, monitoring, and tracking.

### Increase in retention rate following implementation of Success Coaching:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Fall 2011 Cohort</th>
<th>Fall 2011 % Retained to 2012</th>
<th>Fall 2012 Cohort</th>
<th>Fall 2012 % Retained to 2013</th>
<th>Fall 2013 Cohort</th>
<th>Fall 2013 % Retained to 2014</th>
<th>1 Year Retention Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Ready</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>68% (660)</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>64.3% (525)</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>75.3% (359)</td>
<td>+10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>56.1% (477)</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>53.8% (401)</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>63.7% (457)</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Save our Semester (SOS) and Register NOW Initiatives

*Monitoring, tracking, and intervening with students who have not yet registered and who still have Non-Payment holds.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence Fall-Spring 2014-2015 (ALL Students)</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-major First Time Full Time Persistence FALL 2014/SPRING 2015</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Registration NOW (all colleges and units)</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Gettin’ Classy Registration Initiatives

*Comprehensive communication and intervention campaign to get students to register early.*

- Social media messaging, sidewalk chalking; enrollment parties, advisors/success coaches in the residence halls, recreation and wellness center, and student union; one-on-one assistance and peer mentoring help; proactive tabling and enrolling students immediately.
- Over 2,800 student contacts; 2,500 t-shirts distributed; 80 individual classroom checks (for students not yet registered following open registration); 112 residence hall checks.

D. Finish in Time

*Adviseing and communication campaign to ensure students register for 15 credits per semester; 30 per year.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th># Students Enrolled</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (Census)</th>
<th># Students Enrolled</th>
<th>Fall 2014 (Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Admit</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Ready</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,589</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>4,941</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E. The Akron Experience: University 101

*Effective Fall 2014, the Student Success Seminar (SSS), became “The Akron Experience: University 101” (AE). AE is required of all pre-majors and is designed to: orient students to The University of Akron, its traditions and resources; facilitate the development of skills for academic and personal success; and assist in the commitment to an intended major and career pathway.*

- Increase in enrollment from 691 students in Fall 2013 to 1674 in Fall 2014, a 142% increase.
- Fall 2014 Grades:
  - The percentage of A’s awarded increased from 55.9% in Fall 2013 to 57.6% in Fall 2014 (this is the highest percentage of A’s awarded in the past 5 years).
  - The percentage of F’s awarded decreased from 15.6% in Fall 2013 to 12.3% in Fall 2014 (this is the lowest percentage of failing grades in the past 5 years).
F. Help-A-Zip

Early alert referral and intervention system for students experiencing any life challenges. Referrals are made by students, faculty, staff and parents. During the Fall 2014 semester, 271 cases have been reviewed. As a result, we believe Help-A-Zip has helped to successfully retain these students who were experiencing academic, personal/social and/or financial issues.

G. EAB – Student Success Collaborative

Pilot program of the new predictive analytics package and advising platform.

From EAB – “Since August, there have been 560 logins to the platform, a huge number for a school only in pilot phase. The Division of Student Success (pre-majors) has successfully completed an outreach advising campaign, targeting “high hour” students (students with over 48 credits, but not yet declared within a degree-granting college). The campaign was made possible based on the platform’s work list capabilities, allowing advisors to find students based on specific criteria (i.e. within Student Success, with over 48 credits). One hundred percent of Student Success advisors participated in this campaign.”

The Work of SART

The committee began its work on May 7, 2014 and continues to meet biweekly. The committee set a deadline of August 13, 2014 at which time the committee reviewed its work and identified recommendations for the campus. Additionally, the team determined its continued scope and focus and re-evaluated its ongoing purpose in alignment with its initial charge.

The tangible outcomes of the SART committee to date include the following:

- A new stand-alone University of Akron Title IX webpage was created and activated (http://www.uakron.edu/title-ix/). The webpage allows students, faculty, and staff at UA to have a centralized place to locate information regarding Title IX. The webpage allows the user to file an electronic complaint.
- A new, educational sexual respect webpage http://www.uakron.edu/sexual-respect/ was created with the goal of providing all students a safe educational space that ensures sexual respect for all.
- UA revised its investigatory procedures, including the Sexual Misconduct Protocol wherein complaints involving employees are investigated by our EEO Office and complaints involving students are investigated by The Department of Student Conduct and Community Standards (“SCCS”). The Deputy Title IX Coordinators continue to have the ability to activate interim measures and to remediate the effects of any policy violations.
- A partnership with Campus Clarity to create an interactive online training program that ensures legal compliance was developed. Every new undergraduate student at UA was required to take a course entitled, “Think About It.” The current compliance rate for the Fall 2014 semester was 70% with 3,426 new students completing the course. The Department of Talent Development and Human Resources has mandated all new employees, including new faculty, take an online sexual misconduct training course from Campus Clarity.
entitled, “Eliminate Campus Sexual Misconduct.” The course will educate UA employees on how to identify and whom to report instances of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment.

- The SART Campus Wide Education Plan was developed to provide awareness, training and action strategies for new and returning students. This plan is necessary to ensure compliance with federal mandates. The topics of the training include nine focus areas that were developed following a review of Title IX, Clery Act, Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act, and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) related to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Special focus is paid to transition to school as well as social and cultural factors that contribute to sexual violence in college. The topics include: 1) Alcohol and substance abuse, 2) Bystander intervention, 3) Consent, 4) Esteem and healthy relationships, 5) Harassment/stalking/cyber versions, 6) Relationship violence, 7) Reporting, action and support, 8) Sexual assault, and 9) Sexuality.

- A comprehensive list of community resources to address sexual assault located in a four county area (Summit, Medina, Wayne, Cuyahoga) has been developed, circulated to students in need, and is available on The University of Akron website.

- A Campus Climate survey was developed and is scheduled to be distributed during the Spring 2015 semester. The survey is necessary to ensure compliance with federal mandates. The results will allow UA to gather benchmark data that will meet the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault recommendations. The survey is pending IRB approval and is anticipated to launch at the beginning of February.

- Created a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University and the Rape Crisis Center of Medina and Summit Counties. As a result of this new MOU, a new, full-time staff member of the Rape Crisis Center, Vanessa Sampsel, has been identified, provided office space on campus, and is currently working with and providing consultation services for faculty and staff as well as support and advocacy services for students across campus. Vanessa is also able to provide training to campus in many areas related to sexual misconduct, including but not limited to bystander intervention training and victim response training. Vanessa began working on the UA campus in September 2014.

**Recommendations Moving Forward**

As institutions of higher education across the country continue to come under scrutiny by the federal government, alumni and other constituency groups regarding how sexual assault, sexual misconduct and gender equity on campus is being addressed, the SART team will continue to operationalize federal priorities, the first of which will be continued development of a framework of education and support for our students and campus.

Based on extensive research and focused work and in order to operationalize the federal priorities related to Title IX, the SART team offers the following recommendations to the campus community:

- UA will continue to refine and adapt its processes and procedures relative to Title IX and sexual misconduct following the Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights recommendations, inquiries, or new guidelines.

- Add a full-time Title IX coordinator for campus who does not have other full-time job responsibilities to oversee all Title IX compliance work and to coordinate campus education and training.

- Add a staff member to the Department of Student Conduct and Community Standards (SCCS) to assist in sexual misconduct investigations.

- Add a full-time health educator to serve as a campus drug & alcohol coordinator.

- Train all SCCS hearing board members specifically on the issues of Title IX and sexual misconduct so that it may adequately hear and address cases before it.

- Execute The Campus Wide Education Plan developed by the SART education subcommittee.
• Disseminate and analyze the results of the Campus Climate survey by the end of the Spring 2015 Semester.

• Institute a budget for the SART to use for campus education, training, outreach, and other compliance-related to Title IX, VAWA, SaVE Act, and drug and alcohol awareness.

• Convene a group of student leaders to engage students, student organizations and student leadership to accomplish the work of the SART. The student group will assist in the development and implementation of the Campus Wide Education Plan and with communication with and within the student body.

• Rename and align the purpose and goals of the SART committee. The committee should continue to advocate and provide support for the campus community through education, outreach, and communication. In so doing, the University will have a streamlined mechanism for education compliance. It is recommended that the committee name be changed from the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) to the Sexual Assault Resource Team (SART) to better align this goal.

Fostering Mental Health on our Campus

Student mental health issues are prevalent on university campuses and impact the lives of students in many ways, from success in the classroom to social interactions to physical health and wellness. A healthy life, work, and school balance contributes to feeling happy, confident, and capable in many aspects of life. Students who take care of their mental health develop healthy coping mechanisms and are better able to handle the highs and lows of the college experience.

As an institution, creating a safe and open environment that will allow campus constituents to focus on the welfare of students and help students manage their mental health concerns is of utmost importance. Students will feel more supported and encouraged to feel safe to ask for help providing the campus community talks openly about mental health. The more aware and educated campus constituents become related to the facts about mental health, the more likely the campus should be able to decrease the stigma that is sometimes associated with mental health concerns and treatment. College students can better deal with mental health conditions if they have support to seek and use the services available on campus.

Many services are available on campus to help students with their overall health and wellbeing:

• Free, confidential psychological services are offered through the Counseling and Testing Center (CTC) in Simmons Hall 306, 330.972.7082. CTC also offers the campus community training such as suicide prevention gatekeeper training and consultation (http://www.uakron.edu/counseling/).

• Student Recreation and Wellness Services (SRWS) provides opportunities to develop a healthy and fit lifestyle, as exercise and other creative outlets, such as music or acting, help to decrease depression and symptoms of anxiety (http://www.uakron.edu/srws/).

• Student Health Services in SRWS, Suite 260, 330.972.7808, helps students address overall health concerns and provides health education. Medical providers work closely with the CTC to identify students who may benefit from medical intervention in the treatment of mental health concerns (http://www.uakron.edu/healthservices/index.dot).

• Help-A-Zip online alert system provides a vehicle for both faculty and staff, and students, to let campus professionals know who is having difficulties and who might need intervention and support (http://www.uakron.edu/referral/).

• The CARE Team provides guidance and assistance to students who are experiencing crises, displaying odd or unusual behavior, or are engaging in behaviors that may be perceived as being harmful. This Team accepts referrals and responds to students (and their families, faculty, and staff) when concerns for a student’s health, welfare, and safety are identified (http://www.uakron.edu/vpstudentaffairs/committees/care-team/).
One way to address student mental health concerns and heighten the awareness of mental health services and resources would be to develop a Mental Health Awareness campaign. Such a campaign would systemically and holistically address student behavioral health for the campus community. A multi-tiered framework, such as that proposed by the Jed and Clinton Healthy Matters Foundation, can promote a community health model to which CTC and SHS aspire that encourages multiple campus constituents to participate in making The University of Akron a safe and healthy campus. This would encourage not only individual training on identifying and working with at-risk students, but on a greater macro level, examine strategic policies and procedures, behavioral health, suicide prevention and substance abuse services, campus environmental issues, and the connection with retention.

A starting point for the Division will be to develop a multi-disciplinary university council or team. The following action items will take place in the Spring 2015 semester:

- Develop a multi-disciplinary list of faculty, staff, and students to serve on the team.
- Commence a first meeting to set the charge, goals, and initiatives of the team.
- Gather data and information related to mental health and health promotion.
- Launch an awareness campaign that involves educational programming, focus groups, peer-to-peer interaction, and student-centric engaging communications to educate and remove stigma.
- Work more closely with and enhance the Active Minds chapter.

Summary
The focus of the Division of Student Success will continue to be on the Akron Experience of students related to student learning, globally relevant student success, student engagement, retention and graduation. Assessment is embedded in the everyday life of the Division and the departments. Student persistence towards graduation is an important gauge of student success, and therefore, the success of The University of Akron. As a result, much focus in the Spring 2015 semester will be on phase II of the implementation of the Education Advisory Board’s Student Success Collaborative and predictive analytics system with the focus to further advance student persistence and graduation.

The work of SART has been ongoing over the course of the past year in examining its approach related to sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination. Supporting a comprehensive approach on campus to address these issues ensures that issues are addressed in a timely and consistent fashion, as well as to help to create a safer environment in which all members can be successful.

The University of Akron provides several resources to students to aid in mental health treatment. As student mental health issues continue to rise and be prevalent on college campuses, it becomes imperative for colleges and universities to expand efforts to address and promote the mental health of all students. A Mental Health Awareness campaign is one means by which to connect various campus constituents in a comprehensive and focused manner to address behavioral health concerns for The University of Akron community.

References