**Student Success and Empowerment Initiative**

**2016-17 Annual Report**

**Submitted by Amy Aldous Bergerson, Director**

**3 July, 2017**

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**Student Success and Empowerment Initiative**

**Annual Report**

**2016-17 Academic Year**

The four big goals of Undergraduate Studies as articulated in the Utah Pledge are to support students by providing them with learning communities, mentors and advisors, financial guidance, and deeply engaged learning experiences. These goals directly support the larger University of Utah commitment to promoting student success to transform lives. Key to both of these efforts is the work of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative, specifically the Student Success Advocate (SSA) program. Student Success Advocates meet students where they are, engage with them to develop a holistic understanding of their experiences as students, and provide individualized support for students’ success. *SSAs embody the University’s commitment to student success* through their understanding of a range of campus resources and information, their connections to other individuals whose roles include supporting students, and their on-going, in-depth relationships with students. Recently one student told his SSA, “It is easy to survive. It is hard to be successful.” *Our job is to make it easier for students to succeed at the University of Utah.* Through these efforts, we contribute to increased retention and graduation rates, as well as students’ satisfaction with their University experience, all of which are essential to the University’s bright future.

**Our Mission**

The mission of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative is to support students in making the most of their University of Utah experience. As caring, knowledgeable professionals, Student Success Advocates engage and empower undergraduate students in exploring and clarifying their interests and goals, overcoming personal and academic challenges, and connecting to campus resources and opportunities. Our holistic, individualized, mobile approach allows us to meet students right where they are.

**Our Staff**

For the 2016-17 academic year, the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative team included the following:

*Director Student Success Advocate Coordinator*

Amy Aldous Bergerson Melanie Lee

*Student Success Advocates*

Bianca Bellot Jon Bernal

Christine Contestable Wazir Jefferson

Tramaine Jones Lisa Lewis

Maggie Roque Stephanie Santarosa

*Administrative Assistant*

Juan Rios

*Outreach Ambassadors*

Sydney Magana (Lead Ambassador)

Halah Khan Odalys Levya Amanda Mabe

Leigh Seeley Andrew Tsai Derek Young

This has been a year of transition for the office. Stephanie Santarosa, one of our first SSAs, moved to a new position at Westminster College and we were thrilled to add Melanie Lee as our first Student Success Advocate Coordinator. As we move into the 2017-18 year, Bianca Bellot and Maggie Roque are both moving to new opportunities, and we are engaged in a search to fill their open positions. Our 2017-18 team will include eight SSAs, one Coordinator, eight Outreach Ambassadors, and the Director and Administrative Assistant.

**Our Contributions to the Utah Pledge**

Student Success Advocates contribute indirectly to each of the four big goals outlined in the Utah Pledge. Below, we provide a brief summary of our 2016-17 efforts in each area.

*Learning Communities*

In 2016-17, Student Success Advocates continued to work closely with several learning communities. In BlockU each set of integrated courses is assigned an SSA who attends class regularly to ensure that students have the support they need. Students are quick to take advantage of a supportive SSA whom they get to know through the BlockU program. Bianca Bellot worked particularly closely with the new V(i)llage BlockU, mentoring the students in the program to contribute to their successful start at the University and filling in for the professor when personal and health issues prevented him from being in class. Lisa Lewis led the New University Scholars students through a year of workshops centered on the StrengthsFinder. These workshops included considering how their strengths can enhance their learning experiences, writing their resumes to capitalize on their strengths, and using their strengths to enhance their leadership. Maggie Roque continued to deepen her relationship with the expanding Beacon Scholars program, taking time to visit both Beacon classes each week to ensure that this group of students has the support they need to succeed at the University. SSAs continued to visit LEAP classes on a regular basis as well, and are deepening their partnership with several LEAP faculty including Seetha Veergantha..

Through these efforts, the SSEI supports the University’s effort to provide learning community opportunities to students. We will continue to focus on learning communities as an ideal space for developing relationships with students and working to transform their University of Utah experiences.

*Financial Guidance*

Financing a college education is a weighty topic for University of Utah students. This academic year, SSAs have provided support to **889 students** around this concern. Additionally, under the leadership of Christine Contestable, the office has developed and maintains a comprehensive list of scholarship opportunities on and off campus. This resource allows SSAs to provide students with up-to-date and accurate information about what opportunities are available, who is eligible, and the deadlines to apply. The list was developed in-house after realizing that many of the resources available across campus, including on the Financial Aid and Scholarships website, were not accurate.

We will continue to develop a strong relationship with the offices of Financial Aid and Scholarships and the Money Management Center to refine our resources and provide timely and accurate financial guidance to students. Both of these offices are in our top 10 offices for referrals with a **combined total of 518 referrals** this year.

*Engaged Learning Experiences*

In addition to participating in the learning community partnerships mentioned above, SSAs are strong advocates for engaged learning experiences on campus, discussing the benefits of these experiences with students as well as referring them directly to individuals who can help students navigate the process of getting involved. Over the course of this year, SSAs have worked with **784 students** specifically around the topic of high impact practices that promote engaged learning.

Additionally, SSAs engage students in learning processes that assist them in setting and attaining goals, determining strengths and areas of growth, and making decisions about their futures – supporting students in developing a plan to finish their degree at the University of Utah. The Student Success website contains articles, podcasts, videos, and inventories that SSAs use to actively engage students in determining what they need to be successful. The high-touch, individualized approach of the SSAs is itself an illustration of an informal form of engaged learning occurring across campus on a daily basis.

*Mentors and Advisors*

The vast majority of SSA work with students fulfills the big goal of providing every student with mentoring and advising. During academic year 2016-17, SSAs had **29,074 interactions** with University of Utah students. Of these interactions, 66% are significant, meaning the SSA had a conversation with a student that was deep enough to collect contact information. Light interactions, (34% of the total), are those in which SSAs talk briefly to students, mainly introducing themselves and their work. Over the last three years, interactions overall have increased significantly. This is due, in part, to the increase in Student Success Advocates. (However, it should be noted that from 1 February to 1 June, 2017, we were short one SSA after Stephanie Santarosa resigned). We have also become more systematic in our outreach to students through class visits, tabling, and SSA introductions.

Increased interactions overall have also led to an increase in follow-ups as indicated in Figure 1. For AY 2016-17 72% of SSA interactions with students were follow-ups. Our continued focus on follow-up interactions is a direct result of encouragement from the University to focus on developing long-term, personalized relationships.

*Figure 1: Shifts in Percentage of Interaction Type AY 2014- AY 2017*

Student Success Advocates engage in various types of outreach to introduce their work to students and campus partners. In the 2016-17 academic year, SSAs visited undergraduate classes, reaching hundreds of students through brief presentations. Advocates also spent 24 days at Salt Lake Community College, providing information about high impact practices available at the University of Utah to students considering a transfer. Additionally, outreach to academic programs and departments included over 35 presentations. All of these efforts provided opportunities for SSAs to transform students’ University of Utah experiences through significant interactions.

The growth of our undergraduate Outreach Ambassadors (OA) program has supported the SSAs’ focus on significant interactions with students. In the 2016-17 academic year, we expanded our OA program to include six Ambassadors and a Lead Ambassador. Outreach Ambassadors participate in a number of outreach events across campus including tabling, one-on-one introductions, and class and student organization visits. Of particular assistance to the SSAs are Ambassador Referrals, through which Ambassadors assist students in completing an online interest form reaching out to an SSA. In 2016-17 Outreach Ambassadors **connected with 1096 students** and **made 205 referrals to SSAs**, contributing significantly to sharing the strong work of the SSAs with students across campus. Outreach Ambassadors also conducted 12 focus groups to support SSEI assessment efforts. Sydney Magana, Odalys Levya, and Andrew Tsai were instrumental in analyzing and presenting the data from these focus groups to the SSEI team. Student quotes from the focus groups are included in our assessment data below.

The work of the OAs has added another element to the support the SSEI can provide University of Utah students. Additionally, the OAs engage in projects geared towards supporting students. One such project is the UTalks event organized by Mandy Mabe, who invited students who have faced challenges at the University to develop short Ted Talk style talks in which they share their stories. The event was inspirational and well attended, and we plan to sponsor similar events in the future.

In addition to data reflecting the high numbers of students with whom the SSAs have interacted over the last year, we provide the following data from focus groups to underscore how SSAs fill the University’s commitment to providing every student with mentoring and advising support. These comments are categorized into three areas related to the mentoring and advising function SSAs serve: building relationships, sharing knowledge and expertise, and motivating behavioral changes.

Building Relationships

“The comfort level that she brings. I really feel that I am being listened to and that I am not just a student number with her.”

“[My SSA] really makes you feel comfortable when you’re in your meetings. He really tries to discover what your interests are and then goes from there. He really just makes you feel welcomed. We talk about personal things and every meeting we lead up and touch on that subject again. It’s not like he’s just trying to pass the time with pointless conversations, he really wants to get to know you and stuff.”

“I know the SSAs are really busy with the schedules and sometimes when you go to schedule a meeting, usually it takes a few days or even weeks, so I text [my SSA]. I would text her with some of my problems and concerns and she responded within a few hours – it wasn’t just short replies. It was long replies. I was like, ‘oh my gosh, thank you!’ Even though she isn’t there physically, she is there with me to help whenever I need.”

Sharing Knowledge and Expertise

“Before I met [my SSA], I wasn’t using a planner. I was missing assignments and just going with the flow. She helped me put things in a planner, make sure I wasn’t missing assignments. Not only that, but she helped me get on top of applying to scholarships and internships, writing resumes and cover letters. She proofread things and has written me letters of recommendation, so she’s done a lot of things.”

“I ended up meeting with her because I felt lost in my program and trying to find balance within everything. She helped me organize my priorities, I have the wonder woman complex that I feel like I can do everything and [my SSA] helps me find balance and grounding.”

“The first time we met, he helped me with my financial needs, because at first my financial status wasn’t paid off yet. He would sit down with me and call over to the student service center and have me talk to individuals within the office, instead of him talking [for me]. When I call people, I don’t really want to do it, but having some help was good. He just helped me get my school paid for.”

Motivating Behavioral Changes

“I was shy with talking to my professors and scared of meeting with them. [My SSA] encouraged me to talk to any professors, whether I am understanding the course or not, in order to be successful and to practice networking.”

“My first year here I didn’t really get too involved with anything and [my SSA] just kind of helped show me what clubs and organizations were available. I ended up joining a fraternity because he said that would be a good way to meet a lot of people and make some friends. He steered me in that direction and showed me that there were groups on campus where I have somewhere to go and feel like a part of it.”

“Personally, [my SSA] and I worked on meditating. Because I am a transfer student from a community college, it’s really difficult to have that balance in coursework. I was having problems keeping up with my school work and we found that I wasn’t handling my stress very well. She taught me some mindfulness exercises as well as some meditation that I could do before a test, or even after a test when you’re waiting to get your scored back. That’s definitely what she helped me do different, because if I waited to start working on that, I’d be so frazzled right now.”

These comments illustrate the impact SSAs have on students. They build relationships with students that engender trust in the information and knowledge that they share, which motivates students to behave differently. These behavioral changes contribute to students’ success as well as the transformation that can occur as a result of being in college. This is the core of SSAs’ work. In the next section, we address how this work helps ensure the long-term viability of the University of Utah.

**Long-Term Viability of the University**

In addition to ensuring that all University of Utah students have access to SSA expertise and support, SSAs have become a valued community partner for a number of different initiatives and programs on campus. In 2016-17 SSAs made over 60 presentations to student groups, campus partner offices, and at campus events such as Major Expo, Expect the Great, Residence Hall Association, and the Academic Advising Center. SSAs participate in every new student and transfer orientation program, offering support to students transitioning to the U. In summer 2016, SSAs partnered with the Academic Advising Center to develop a workshop for undecided students during New Student Orientation. The workshop, which helped students think about building support networks, was well-received by students. Unfortunately, additional time needed to advise and register students at New Student Orientation resulted in the cancellation of this partnership in 2017 after the first three weeks of New Student Orientation sessions.

Student Success and Empowerment Initiative team members serve on the Welcome Week Committee, the College Recruitment Committee, Women’s Leadership Summit Planning Committee, Academic Appeals Committee, Appreciative Advising Committee, Online Student Success Committee, and the Homeless Student Task Force. They serve as advisors for student organizations, helped plan the Swoop into the U transfer event, and are an integral part of the team developing a course/workshop/online modules as part of the Second Year Experience initiative.

Of particular note are the many interactions SSAs have had with students who are experiencing stress, fear, and anger as a result of the 2016 presidential election. The diversity of the SSA team has contributed to them being viewed by students as a safe place to express their fears and anger, and the SSAs have stepped up in tremendous ways to ensure that these vulnerable students feel validated by the University. This work is extremely draining for the SSAs, many of whom share vulnerable identities with the students with whom they work. Their ability to balance their professional roles, the support of students, and their personal identities is phenomenal. All of this difficult work adds to the viability of the University.

Our data indicate that students see SSAs as trusted listeners, and their University colleagues see them as competent professionals with a unique view of students’ experiences. In the four years the program has exited on campus, SSAs have grown to be viewed as an integral part of the University of Utah community with a reputation for working for the common good. Below, we describe three significant ways the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative will continue to contribute to the greater good and long-term viability of the University: CUSP Interventions, the Homeless Student Task Force (HSTF), and Second Year Experience Workshops.

*CUSP Interventions*

CUSP interventions represent our effort to work intentionally with students who are on the cusp of success at the University. Utilizing a model developed by Mike Martineau, SSAs directly contact students who have a predicted low rate of student success (50% or below). In a brief text message, SSAs explain how they assist students and offer to meet with them. In the fall of 2016, SSAs sent text messages to **1406 students**. Of these, approximately 10% responded, and about one third of those actually met with an SSA. The fall response rate was slightly increased from last year’s response rate of 9.4% and the meeting rate was about the same. In spring, 2017 SSAs sent text messages to **1170 students**, with a 7% response rate, and 20% of those meeting with an SSA. The lower spring semester response rate was likely due to the fact that the initial text messages did not go out until early April, which is too late in the semester to really make a difference for students. We are eagerly anticipating the implementation of Civitas, which will likely take the place of the CUSP intervention in 2017-18, and will provide us with the ability to intervene with students much earlier in the semester and in more targeted and meaningful ways.

An additional form of the CUSP intervention is being implemented during summer 2017 New Student Orientation season. Prior to orientation sessions beginning in June, Mike Martineau ran a CUSP list for the incoming class of new students. SSAs have been reaching out to these new students in the week prior to the New Student Orientation session for which they have registered, introducing themselves and offering to meet with student while they are on campus for NSO. Hard numbers are not yet available; however SSAs report a strong response rate from this intervention. Additionally, SSAs are establishing themselves as points of contact for new students as was exemplified when one new student was stuck in Nashville and contacted his SSA to let them know he would arrive late to orientation the following morning. The SSA contacted the New Student and Family Programs staff to alert them of the student’s situation and helped arrange for the student to be brought up to speed when he arrived. Our hope is to establish trusting relationships with students even before they arrive on campus in the fall, and this is one example of how this is working.

Also in fall 2016, we were able to more deeply analyze the CUSP data from the 2015-16 academic year, and determined that several academic colleges and departments had high numbers of students whose likelihood of completion dropped by more than 10% from fall to spring semesters. As a result of this analysis, the SSAs have developed plans to focus more specifically on the College of Business, and the departments of Health Education, Chemical Engineering, and Dance as they engage students in conversations. Over 40% of CUSP students in each of these programs or colleges experienced more than a 10% drop in their likelihood of completion. Targeted efforts include: meeting with academic advisors and other representatives of these colleges and departments to ensure that they are aware of the ways SSAs can assist students; scheduling drop-in hours in buildings where students in these programs attend classes; and, focusing class visits on gateway classes in these programs.

*Homeless Student Task Force*

Student Success Advocates have been at the forefront of a new initiative providing support for students on campus who are experiencing displacement or homelessness. Working in amazing partnerships with the Women’s Resource Center, Housing and Residential Education, Financial Aid, and University Student Apartments, the SSAs assisted 15 students who did not have a safe or steady place to live in finding more stable housing, accessing financial aid and other resources, and developing a plan to improve their stability. This effort is truly cross-departmental and takes a high level of coordination and communication. In addition to providing the direct funding and housing support listed below, we know that at least two of the students assisted this year graduated in May, which would not have been possible without the strong efforts of those involved in assisting them.

At the beginning of fall 2016 $20,000 were set aside in an account to fund the HSTF. These initial funds were provided by the Vice President for Student Affairs and the University Student Apartments. To date, $4200 has been spent providing various services for students. Table 2 displays how funds were allocated to support students.

Maggie Roque and Bianca Bellot led out on this project with the Homeless Students Task Force. They also provided extensive training for the SSA team enabling all SSAs to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to support these high-need students. In the coming year, we plan to rotate the SSA membership on the HSTF steering committee, to help our campus partners understand that any SSA is able to assist students in need. This new initiative has been challenging, for sure, but also extremely rewarding as we have seen students take steps to becoming more stable, and set themselves up for success in their educational and personal goals. We have also presented the fine work of the task force at both the Utah and National NASPA Annual Conferences.

*Table 2: Allocation of HSTF Funds 2016-2017*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of Service** | **Number of Students Served** | **Amount** |
| Emergency housing at University Guest House | 5 | $1,738 |
| Payment of rent or housing deposit | 3 | $2,265 |
| Miscellaneous expenses (personal hygiene supplies, insurance and cell phone payments, utility payments) | 6 | $190.11 |
| Housing in Promise Apartment (USA) | 5 | Offered at no cost or reduced cost to student. |

*SYE Workshops*

The Office of Undergraduate Studies, in partnership with several Student Affairs offices, is working to develop a comprehensive Second Year Experience initiative, which aims to improve retention rates for sophomores and juniors at the University of Utah. One element of the Second Year Experience is a course in which students will focus on developing a sense of purpose at the University. Developing a sense of purpose and a clear understanding of why they are at the University, will assist students in declaring majors, creating plans to finish their degrees, and understanding the skills and knowledge they need to make their impact. Implicit in each of the activities of the SYE course is the University’s learning framework. Students will look back and ahead as they envision their time at the University.

The SYE course will be offered in three modalities: a 1-credit course taught over 15 weeks in a regular semester format; a series of workshops held over the course of the semester; and a set of online modules. The current plan is to offer badges to students who complete the workshops and online modules, while those enrolled in the course will earn academic credit. Student Success Advocates Jon Bernal and Christine Contestable are part of the planning committee for the course, and Christine will be one of the course instructors. SSAs are in the process of adapting the SYE course syllabus for the workshop format and will begin facilitating the workshops in fall 2017. Due to their close connections with students, their understanding of the challenges and supports students encounter at various points in their University of Utah journeys, and their skill in facilitating self-reflection and critical thinking about how students can make the most of their time at the University, SSAs are ideal facilitators for these workshops. We are excited to be part of this effort and look forward to incorporating the workshop facilitations into our daily work on campus.

As the Student Success Advocate program approaches its five-year mark we seek to enhance our contributions to the long-term viability of the University of Utah. In the following section we highlight assessment data that illustrate these contributions.

**Assessment Plan**

In their work with University of Utah students, Student Success Advocates focus on the following learning outcomes:

1. Identify short and long-term goals that contribute to a student’s degree completion.
2. Identify high-impact educational experiences that result in a degree that is unique to each student.
3. Foster a sense of belonging in students.

Below we describe both current and future assessments that measure our success on meeting these outcomes for students. In each section we focus on both inputs and outcomes. Inputs include the numbers of students SSAs interact with, the types of interactions they have, and what they do in these interactions. Outcomes reflect what happens to students after they interact with an SSA. To date, our assessment has focused primarily on the inputs. Assessment of outcomes is a primary goal for the 2017-18 year, and plans for this are discussed below. Data included here are from our semi-annual focus groups facilitated by Student Success Outreach Ambassadors, emails and other communications directly from students, and our SSA Interaction Tracker.

*Identify short and long-term goals that contribute to a student’s degree completion*

Goal setting is an essential component of making progress toward a degree, and as Figure 2 indicates, is one of the most common discussion topics for SSAs and students. SSAs had 550 interactions with students around the topic of goal setting.

*Figure 2: Top Discussion Topics for SSAs and Students*

Qualitative data indicate the importance of goal setting as well, as illustrated in the following student comments:

“Just want to say thank you with your help last semester. I have accomplished many goals with your advice, and thankful for the opportunity that I can share my experience with you at the advisers conference. Thank you again and I hope I see you soon!”

“Hey! I just wanted to thank you for everything you've done for me so far because I don't believe I've thanked you. The scholarship links you sent me have helped me tremendously and I passed them on to other students. I have applied to many scholarships and so far I've gotten the alumni scholarship and zuni. You've also helped me get in touch with premed programs and the honors college which has helped me become aware of events on campus along with groups that I would have never known about without the resource of the student success advocates. I am very very grateful and just wanted to say that.”

We will continue to measure the number of goal-setting conversations SSA have with students, and to collect data directly from students related to the impact of these conversations. Additionally, we will examine how these conversations impact a number of student success measures as outlined in the next section.

*Identify high-impact educational experiences that result in a degree that is unique to each student*

High impact experiences are shown to elevate students’ persistence and graduation rates both at the University of Utah and nationally. Encouraging students to explore these experiences is a significant part of SSA’s work. Evident in Figure 2 above is the high number of interactions with students that center on high impact experiences (734). In Figure 3 below, we illustrate the top referrals and resources SSAs provide to students. Among these are academic advising (396), learning abroad (112), community engaged learning at the Bennion Center (108), and undergraduate research opportunities (101), all of which are high impact educational practices that enhance students’ experiences and have been shown to increase persistence.

Students frequently share with SSAs the impact of these referrals as illustrated in the following comment and text conversation:

“Hello! I am doing very well thank you! I got one of your emails for the research Opportunity at the Huntsman Cancer Institute and I am applying for that for next semester also! Thanks for that email I thought it would be a cool opportunity to do. Thank you very much for also checking up on me.”

“When I was meeting with her, I kind of wanted to apply to be an orientation leader for the summer, but I wasn’t sure if I wanted to do it and she just gave me that little push and now I have an interview.”

*Figure 3: Top 10 SSA Resource Referrals*

“SSA: Hi. It’s [Name], your Student Success Advocate. How’s your semester going? What can I do to help you finish strong?

Student: actually yes. i was wondering what resources were available for math tutoring

SSA: Do you know about the Math Tutoring Center in LCB?

Student: kind of. What time does it open and how much does it cost?

SSA: It’s free to University of Utah students. They’re open 8 AM until 8 PM Monday through Thursday and until 6 PM on Fridays. There’s also free drop in tutoring at the Marriott Library Monday through Thursday from 6 to 10 PM.

Student: great! Thanks so much :) and is the tutoring center just in the basement of the LCB?

SSA: Sort of… it’s located down the stairs on the west end of the building. Can I help with anything else?

Student: ok cool. that’s it!

SSA: Great! Good luck with math. Don’t hesitate if you think of something else. Let me know!

Student: for sure. thanks for being so helpful :)

SSA: You’re welcome!”

Future assessment of the first two learning outcomes will involve evaluating course taking patterns, term-to-term retention, GPA, and graduation for students who have worked with Student Success Advocates. We will examine how outcomes correlate to interactions with SSAS, as well as explore whether there is an optimal number of times for interacting with an SSA and making progress on these measures. Additionally, we will examine how different interaction types and topics relate to our outcomes of interest. Our accumulated tracking data is currently being cleaned, after which we will send the data to Mike Martineau in the Office of Institutional Analysis, where he will match our data with his student data and begin to examine the outcomes in which we are interested. We look forward to knowing more about the outcomes of our interactions with students in the coming few months.

*Foster a sense of belonging in students*.

Extensive research on college students indicates that students who feel a sense of belonging at their institution have stronger outcomes on a number of measures including satisfaction with their experience, learning, persistence, and graduation. The relationship-building aspect of Student Success Advocates’ work is centered on developing this sense of belonging in students. Figure 4 illustrates the significance of relationship building in SSAs’ work – it is the top type of interaction SSAs have with students, with over 10,300 interactions of this type in the 2016-17 academic year.

*Figure 4: Top SSA Interaction Types*

Quantifying sense of belonging is difficult. However, our qualitative data as well as comments from students indicate that this is a particularly strong suit for SSAs. Following are some examples:

“They are not just someone who sits behind a help desk asking ‘how can I help you?’ or ‘what do you need?’, but it is very personable. They ask ‘how are you doing?’, ‘what have you been doing?’, ‘what’s going on in your life’… etc, and so we start from there. Because of those questions, I am more open and feel like I can tell her what’s going on outside of school and academics and from those answers, she gathers information about what kind of person I am and what types of things I would be interested in.”

"I believe that the Student Success Advocates are single-handedly one of the best resources on our campus, particularly due to their variability and accessibility. As a first-generation college student, navigating the U has presented a multitude of challenges and triumphs. Within these experiences, there has often been a sense of isolation and confusion. I know that I'm not the only one.

Because every student on this campus comes with a diverse background and story, there presents a need for a diverse resource. While there are many wonderful resources on this campus, I find that the process of accessing those resources can take time, planning, and involves many separate processes, traveling from one office to the next to address separate needs. The SSA's address both of these problems. They are equipped with the tools to support students on a holistic scale, from major exploration, mental health, academic success, financial needs, and social life. The list goes on and on. All of this is self-contained within one person - one SSA, one mentor. There is no need to travel far and wide across campus to get support when you have an SSA. They are flexible, welcoming, and accessible -- within reach with just a quick text or phone call. Every student is on their own path in college, and SSA’s are there to walk right along side them.

My own SSA has not only been an invaluable resource to me this year - She has become my friend, my mentor, and someone I know I can reach out to at any time, for any thing. The U is such a big University, and it can be easy to feel lost in the crowd and alone. What students need is someone walking alongside them in their journey. They need individual support. They need to know that someone cares deeply about their success. And the Student Success Advocates achieve this with heart and soul.”

“Thank you so much for meeting with me today. I’m truly so grateful to have you as an academic support and honestly my overall life, too. You really helped remove so much stress from my shoulders.”

The combination of a sincere holistic interest in students, strong relationships forged across the University of Utah campus, and a deep knowledge of resources and support networks allows Student Success Advocates to support students’ development and success. We look forward to building on this strong work in the coming year. In the final section of this report we identify the goals that will guide this work.

**Goals**

To continue the growth and development of our initiative, we have set the following goals. Our goals focus on increasing our impact on University of Utah students, improving our internal processes, and improving our assessment of the outcomes of our work with students.

*Develop on-time interventions for students identified through Civtas as needing support*.

The addition of Civitas to the University’s software tools will allow the SSEI to identify specific groups of students who are in need of on-time interventions to ensure their success. Working alongside our Academic Advising Center partners, we will identify a series of interventions that can be offered to different groups of students identified through Civitas Illume. Over the course of the upcoming year, we will implement these interventions and use Civitas Impact to determine their effectiveness in increasing student success along a number of measures including GPA, persistence, course-taking patterns, and our own qualitative assessments.

*Develop an internal annual review process for SSAs and the SSA Coordinator*.

The professional development of our SSAs and the SSA Coordinator are important for their growth as SSEI team members as well as preparation for future roles. As we mature, the need for an internal review process to help facilitate this development has become apparent. We will develop a review process and implement the first round of reviews. The process will include setting goals and mapping plans for achieving those goals. The process is meant to be developmental, much like the SSAs’ work with students.

*Implement our assessment plan related to student outcomes*.

Outlined in the assessment plan above is our developing approach to measuring student outcomes related to the work of SSAs. Over the last four years we have fully developed ways to measure the inputs SSAs provide to students’ experiences at the University of Utah. While we continue to refine these, we also recognize the need to tell a more powerful story of what happens to students *after* they interact with an SSA. Our partnership with Mike Martineau as well as the implementation of Civitas Impact will facilitate our telling of this story. As outlined above, we are in the process of matching our data to institutional student data. Once we have engaged in this process, we will refine it and streamline it to create a more efficient way to measure outcomes. We look forward to reporting on these data in the 2018 annual report.

**Summary**

This report highlights the activities of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative during the 2016-17 academic year. We accomplished a great deal, as we worked to support the important mission and goals of the University. We have enjoyed a great deal of support from the University, which has made our job not only possible, but fun. Our data indicate that we have a significant impact on the University community. Our nearly 30,000 light and significant student interactions have touched the lives of a multitude of University of Utah students, and we consistently receive positive feedback regarding our efforts. We have built strong relationships across campus, with many more in the works. All of this requires the flexibility, creativity, and energy of the Student Success Advocates, who have, as a group, risen to the occasion of fully implementing our innovative approach to supporting the University’s commitment to student success.

As we begin our fifth year at the University of Utah, we are very pleased with the recognition our program receives across campus, including the Beacons of Excellence award, which we will receive in October 2017. We are thrilled that many of our University of Utah colleagues refer students to SSAs, that we are included as an important element of a number of emerging student success efforts, and that more and more students are accessing our services to support their educational goals. We are motivated to continue to expand our reach to students who participate in the University at off-campus centers and online, to build our Outreach Ambassador program, and to continue to meet the needs of the diverse students who are part of our community.

The name, Student Success and Empowerment Initiative, brings with it a high level of responsibility to and for the University of Utah. The SSEI team is committed to working with students in an individually-tailored fashion that assists them in identifying, and acting to implement, a plan that provides them with the best college experience they can imagine. We appreciate the support the University has committed to our initiative, both in the openness to our unique work and the continued commitment of resources. We look forward to future opportunities to demonstrate the difference we are making in students’ lives. Thank you for the chance to highlight this exciting year.