**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.