THE UIC UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS PLAN:

STEP 1: RE-IMAGINING THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

A Conceptual Framework for Promoting Access to Excellence and Success

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I. INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, AND PROCESS  

UIC aims “to provide the broadest access to the highest levels of intellectual excellence,” with a mission that focuses on diversity and includes “providing a wide range of students with the educational opportunity only a leading research intensive university can offer.” UIC pursues this mission with a commitment to diversity and to providing broad access to the highest levels of intellectual excellence and transformative education.  

Although UIC may be providing access, there is room to improve when it comes to providing all the educational opportunities needed for success. We must keep in mind that UIC already has an impressive history of increasing student success. Our 58% graduation rate is up from 31% in 1997 (for the 1991 cohort of entering full-time, first-time students). (See Figure 1). This progress has occurred with little change in the demographics of students we have accepted and who are attending, including entering ACT scores. We are not satisfied, of course, but we are encouraged by our recent track record, and this is the moment to capitalize upon that momentum. It won’t be easy. Further growth will require more than piecemeal efforts; it will require a concerted, campus-wide change in culture and practice, a better and sincere understanding of who our students are, how they learn, how they succeed. Given that these are national issues and that many other universities seek the same solutions, as a research university, we will build on the experiences of other campuses and reciprocate by publishing what we learn at UIC.  

The clearest indicator of success is in our 6-year graduation rate, which at 58%—largely regardless of college or major (with the exception of the Honors College)—puts us above the average of our urban peers with similar students (currently about 52%), and in fact ahead of the national average for so-called “four-year” institutions, which is 56%. It is certainly possible to improve upon this rate. Given our missions of diversity, access, and excellence, the campus will not accept a simplistic solution involving restricting admissions by simply raising numerical indicators such as ACT score. Although ACT scores are associated with success in certain populations, they provide limited practical information about which particular students across a broad demographic will and will not succeed. Thus, the burden of improving student success is on all faculty, staff, students, and administrators at UIC, as well as our emeriti, alumni, donors, and community and government partners.  

The first place to focus is on the first-year experience for students, both inside and outside of the classroom, because the first year in college is a tenuous time for new college students as they make significant life transitions, from high school to college, from homogeneous community to a diverse community, from a potentially poor academic environment in which they excelled to a rich academic environment in which one could fail, from the familiar to the new, from a one-building school to a 70-acre complex of 200 buildings, and so forth. Much of the literature in higher education focuses on the first year, and there is a common sense aspect to this as well: If UIC hopes to graduate students, they must first make it through the first year. Helping students succeed therefore starts on Day One—and actually well before Day One.
To start, Provost Kaufman has focused this plan on students' transition to UIC and their first year at UIC, posing the question, "If you were building a first-year experience from scratch, what would it be?" Once we have changed the culture of the first year, we will move to the remaining years.

How?

UIC is poised to answer that monumental question. As the first step, Chancellor Allen-Meares has charged the Undergraduate Policy Council, chaired by Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost Lon Kaufman and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Barbara Henley, to develop a UIC Student Success Plan. This document provides an initial conceptual framework describing the issues that need to be addressed and an outline of potential next steps. Campus collaboration is vital to this project; a diverse group of task forces will be charged with considering the ideas presented herein as a starting point, with formulating a plan to address the various issues related to student success raised herein, and with aiding in the implementation of those plans. Their work will be informed by a process that gives voice to all on campus (faculty, staff, and students) and, as appropriate, off-campus, who are interested, through town hall meetings, electronic methods at an accessible Web site.

What is success?

Multiple groups will work on various components of this plan. They will define proximal and distal goals for their efforts, but the overarching shared campus goals, endorsed by the Undergraduate Policy Council, are an 85% first-to-second-year retention rate, and a 65% six-year graduation rate, with full parity (gap closure) among all ethnic/racial groups and genders. These goals were derived by reviewing graduation rates at peer institutions and by considering the history of success at UIC. To achieve these goals, our Student Success Plan will need to bring about an understanding of the complications that impede student success, and it will need to address those reasons by removing barriers, shoring up support, and expecting success from the students whom UIC has chosen and who, in turn, have chosen UIC.

The changes we make must be immune to the changes in leadership and fluctuations in the degree to which undergraduate success is valued. Change and sustainability will require commitment from the broadest range of faculty, staff, administrative, and student constituents as well as our many community and governmental partners, alumni, emeriti, and donors. Not everything can be accomplished at once, and perfection is not a goal. Moving forward in practical ways that are affordable and sustainable and implementing change that improves student success incrementally and permanently are the goals.

UIC UNDERGRADUATES: SOME ANCHORING FACTS

A starting point is to understand some key facts about our student body and the unique position of UIC:

- The most recent overall six-year graduation rate is 57.7% overall, although typically about 50% of the students who graduated did so within five years. This rate has grown from around 30% fifteen years ago, with little overall change in mean entering ACT score or the overall demographic of our student population. UIC does not have parity in graduation rates with respect to race/ethnicity: African Americans’ graduation rate is 38.8%; Hispanics’ is 50.8%; Asian Americans’ is 64.6%. Nor is there parity among men and women, especially within the African American and Hispanic populations.
- The first-to-second-year retention rate is 77.8%, but again, this is lower for Hispanic and African American students and significantly different for men and women depending on race, ethnicity, and academic discipline.
• Although most students are still technically defined as commuter students, about half of the incoming first-year students live in Campus Housing. About half of all UIC students live on or near campus.
• According to a survey of first-year students in Fall 2007, only about 6% of first-year students work full-time jobs; 43% of them do not work at all. At least 40% of all UIC undergraduates are projected to be PELL eligible in 2013 with most having a family who is unable to contribute to their educational costs, up from a third only a few years ago.
• Computer and high-speed internet access is not a serious issue for our students. Nearly 100% of UIC students have access to a computer where they live, and 97% have internet access. Our plans should not be limited by perceptions of a digital divide among our students.
• When students drop out, it is often not because they have transferred elsewhere, but for a variety of other reasons—children, marriage, illness, work opportunities, etc. Many leave in good standing, many do not. Some reasons are beyond our control, but others can be ameliorated through advising, support services, classroom methods, and all the other areas for intervention discussed in this document. Given that the answers are myriad, so too must be the solutions.
• UIC is a strong institution pursuing a unique mission of providing access to success for a wide range of students from Chicago’s urban and wider metro area, including students who are exceptionally well prepared and those who are not as well prepared, and including students of many ethnicities and races, differing cultural and financial backgrounds, and life histories in general. For about 26% of our students, English is not their native language.
• The background of UIC students is different from our faculty and advising staff, an important gap to recognize as we focus on how we teach and how we advise. We should pay particular attention to those first-year students making the transition from a homogeneous learning environment to a diverse one.

A PROCESS FOR CHANGE

Target Areas

In Spring 2012, many administrators, academic professionals, students, and faculty began discussing student success across colleges and within Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, in settings such as regular meetings of the Undergraduate Policy Council, focus groups (see Appendices A and D), staff retreats, etc. Calls for suggestions regarding what could improve student success were made at regular meetings of groups such as the Course Availability Committee, at the campus-wide Advising Summit, at the Council of Assistant and Associate Deans, and so forth. What has emerged from these discussions, and from a review of best practices in the research-based literature and information from national conferences on student success, can be organized into the following set of “target areas” that should be addressed in the effort to build—or remodel—the first-year experience at UIC. Each is discussed in more detail later in this document. These areas are in no particular order and are all vital to this Student Success Plan project. Some ideas were so pervasive in various discussions as to warrant some urgency in the language presented here, others need careful thought.

This document is the first step toward achieving a campus-wide student success plan. It is, in essence, the thinking document we would normally produce prior to developing a strategic plan (e.g., Through the Lens of Diversity, The 2010 Strategic Thinking Document, etc.), and it will evolve in response to the work of the task forces discussed below and feedback from all on campus who wish to be involved.

1. Data Analysis and Assessment. We must become more sophisticated and intentional in tracking and evaluating our efforts to understand what is needed, what works, and how to improve. We need to engage in full-cycle assessment of all of our actions and end our reliance on anecdotes.
and stories. In addition, to provide appropriate resources, we must fully understand our student body—their needs, capabilities, characteristics, etc. We need to conduct multivariate analyses determining factors contributing to student success at UIC, accounting for overlapping variances, and exploring moderating and mediating relationships (i.e., build a statistical model predicting student success).

2. **Targeted First-Year Curriculum.** The first-year curriculum should be simple and tailored to first-year students. For example, actions might include limiting general education course choices for first-year students, making those general education courses “first-year student only” so that the level of instruction addresses the learning needs of new college students, and assigning first-year-only courses to faculty most skilled and interested in leading new college students to success. Course choices would include first-year seminars that are academically challenging but also provide practical information about “doing college.” Curriculum-related roadblocks to student success will be studied.

3. **Support for Student Learning.** A successful college career features an enriching learning experience, including support for learning outside of the classroom. Students of all levels of preparation, experience, and backgrounds should be offered a variety of high-quality academic support to help them succeed in their classes. This is especially important for our first-year students as they transition from their high school careers to their college careers.

4. **Faculty Engagement.** Faculty members should be supported as they embrace undergraduate success as their responsibility both inside and outside of the classroom. The university should provide them with more information about our students and about a broad range of “high impact practices” in teaching and mentoring methods that lead to measurable increases in student success. A subgroup of faculty who work with and teach our first-year students might be identified and become expert in what our first-year students face during transition and how they learn best, so that course and curricular content and delivery mechanisms are tailored to them.

5. **Advising in Transition.** The advising and mentoring students receive from professional advisors, peers, and/or faculty is key in ensuring their engagement with college and eventual success. In January 2012, Undergraduate Policy Council endorsed a list of principles related to advising, including the following: (a) Transition and first-year advising should be mandatory, more holistic, specialized, and professionalized; more centralized than current college-specific models; and supported by central resources; (b) Student/advisor ratios should meet national standards allowing longer advising face-time; (c) Advising should support the development of and continued attention to four-year (when possible) graduation plans, and it should support realistic course choices; (d) Advisors should work in concert with each other, which would be facilitated by a campus-wide shared electronic database; (e) Advisors should work in concert with faculty partners to ensure effective “early alerts” that can identify students in trouble and send them to the right resources; (f) First-year seminars should be implemented for all new students with a strong advising component.

Chancellor Allen-Meares has committed $1,000,000 of recurring funds to support such advising reform at UIC. As a part of this initiative, an Undergraduate Success Center has just been created at UIC and an interim director has been hired, and additional advisors are being hired. As the campus works toward deciding how to improve advising across all colleges, this center will function as a valuable resource for advisors and students. Colleges are being consulted about the plan for the Center so that it can help ensure the success of UIC students, particularly those most in danger of leaving UIC.

6. **Financing College.** UIC already provides a great deal of financial assistance to its undergraduates, who are approximately 40% Pell-eligible (i.e., little or no expected family contribution to the cost of their attendance). It is important to ensure that UIC is employing our resources to the best advantage of our students, and to consider whether there are additional financially relevant services we can provide to our students, including financial literacy training, better matching of
students with campus and off-campus financial assistance and employment, better communication regarding the cost of attendance and financial aid awards.

7. **Campus Life.** The campus must be physically and socially supportive of student success, and especially first-year student success. This review should encompass physical attributes, educationally purposeful activities, human services, housing, the details of online interfaces for student-initiated processes, and so on. In addition, UIC must employ methods of communicating with students in places that are convenient, and in ways that are effective.

8. **Pre-matriculation Issues.** All students need specific supports for the transition from high school to college. Our Summer College program is successful, but it reaches only 20% of incoming first-year students. Summer College is so successful, in fact, that it has been copied by DePaul University. New Student Orientation is successful and is attended by over 95% of incoming students. We should investigate what can be done to enhance these programs and whether additional new pre-matriculation programs could be developed to support students’ transition to the first year.

**Task Forces**

Each target area will be represented by a task force being assembled by Vice Chancellors Kaufman and Henley in consultation with the Undergraduate Policy Council. Each will have a defined chairperson or co-chairpersons. Task forces will meet regularly on short, specific deadlines to create specific action plans. The task forces will take as a starting point the suggestions already made in this document, but will keep, modify, or even discard individual suggestions in keeping with each task force members’ expertise, discoveries in light of findings from each task force’s review of the national literature on student success, and open discussions with relevant constituencies on campus. Each task force should derive solutions that are tailored to UIC; the only definitive imperative is that those solutions result in student success—in terms of student learning, first-to-second year retention rates, and graduation rates.

Each task force will summarize its conclusions in a detailed plan that it will present to the Undergraduate Policy Council. The plans will lay out the specific actions to be taken on campus, a rationale for those actions, and a practical plan for accomplishing those actions. Among other components, each plan will specifically delineate the following:

1. What obviously beneficial measurable changes could be made immediately—within one academic year or sooner?
2. What are mid-term changes that can be made within two academic years?
3. What are long-term changes that will take three or more years to accomplish?

The Data Analysis/Assessment task force will support the other seven task forces; all decisions should be informed by data. An assessment plan should be included in each task force report.

The Undergraduate Policy Council, headed by Vice Chancellors Kaufman and Henley, will consider and approve the task force plans, and provide the ultimate oversight for the work of the task forces. During the time the task forces will be working, there will also be an additional intermediate “Undergraduate Success Planning Committee,” comprising the chairpersons from each task force, and chaired by Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and Dean of the Honors College Bette L. Bottoms and Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Linda Deanna. Each task force will have representation from relevant constituencies (faculty, staff, students, administrators) and colleges as appropriate, and may in some cases be equivalent to or composed of an already-existing group on campus. For example, the Financing College Task Force will be equivalent to the existing Financial Aid Working Group (FAWG). A graphic representation of this organizational structure is included as Appendix C.
Each task force will build on the significant efforts in the areas of student success that are already underway at UIC and embrace the following tenets:

- Work according to a specific timeline.
- Focus on the first-year experience, understanding that the project will address later years after achieving success in transforming the first year.
- Prioritize plans to focus on the needs of students most in danger of leaving the university before graduating, which includes an overrepresentation of traditionally underserved students, including those most in need of support due to underpreparation (e.g., first generation, low-income), social factors (e.g., stereotype threat), etc. Changes aimed at these students will also benefit all other students.
- Take into consideration the fact that—simultaneous to the work of this student success planning project—UIC is embarking on an enrollment management plan with the goal of increasing international undergraduate student enrollment 1% per year to a total of 8%.
- Review what is already done at UIC relevant to the area of focus for that task force.
- Review what appropriate peers do (e.g., University of Maryland-Baltimore County, Florida State, Temple, University of California-Riverside, etc.)
- Consult relevant literature and include a literature review in its report.
- Agree on individual accountability measures, for goal-focused benchmarks and outcomes.
- Produce a succinct and accessible report that details clear action items, justification for those actions, steps necessary to make those actions happen, and a plan for assessing the effectiveness of those actions.
- Take into account multiple voices on campus (faculty, staff, administrators, and students), by seeking input through town hall meetings and/or focus groups, etc., understanding that the ultimate plan for increasing student success must be accepted, understood, and supported by the campus widely.
- Prioritize actions by studying the benefits of various interventions against their attendant costs, mindful of the current challenging economic circumstances.

The Undergraduate Success Planning Committee will:

- Coordinate with the task forces to arrange presentations and/or site visits from campus experts from UIC (e.g., Learning Sciences Research Institute, the Center for Literacy, etc.) as well as other universities who have already had successes on their campuses, such as representatives from the NSSE center at Indiana University, Aaron Brower from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, or others who have tested success strategies.
- Organize the task forces and coordinate the final reports into one collaborative document that will be added to this document and serve as the campus Undergraduate Student Success Plan.
- Make a plan for involving task force members in disseminating the results of our efforts through conference presentations and publications so that UIC can be a national model for how to increase student success.

**EXISTING CAMPUS MODELS OF SUCCESS**

We already have models for student success on campus, and task forces should look to these for examples of best practices that already work with the student body at UIC. For example, student athletes are among the most likely students to graduate. The six-year graduation rate for Athletics' 2003 incoming class was 68%. Athletes get close attention from advisors and mentors, coaches, academic support staff, Faculty Athletic Representatives (FARs), and Athletics Department administration. Athletes also have access to special scholarships and other financial awards. Student
athletes must balance the demands of classes, practices, sport competitions, and college social life to achieve success. The following contribute to student athlete success:

- Special orientation for all new athletes (first-year students and transfers).
- Mandatory meetings with advisors and other staff in the Port Academic Center for all new student-athletes each Fall Semester, and mandatory weekly meetings with head or assistant coach to discuss academic issues.
- Constant and open communication between Port Academic Center Staff and advisors in the academic departments.
- Periodic, unannounced visits to selected student-athletes’ classes to verify attendance.
- Mandatory progress reports from professors for all student athletes.
- Mandatory “study-table” with a prescribed number of study hours weekly for all new student-athletes and any continuing student-athletes under a 2.5 GPA.
- Use of a monitoring swipe-card system to ensure study-table requirements are met.
- Three to five “Life Skills Seminars” every year dealing with issues influencing student-athletes and their success.
- Required participation in volunteer service.
- Social activities for all student-athletes, coaches, FARs, and Athletics staff.
- Contract agreements between Port Academic Center staff and any student-athlete on probation.
- Special financial aid, including (a) scholarships in addition to need-based financial aid for many students, (b) summer- and fifth-year aid, and (c) summer school aid for new basketball players during the summer before matriculation.
- Access and referrals to Campus Support units such as AAAN, LARES, etc.
- Coordination between academic staff and compliance staff on all graduation and/or eligibility issues.
- Individual tutors available free of charge for any student-athlete in any class.
- Computers, printers, supplies, books, and other resources available in Port Academic Center.
- Motivation and support of staff, coaches, and FARs to stress graduation as #1 goal.

Athletics provides learning opportunities for student athletes outside the classroom through life skills seminars, volunteer/service activities, and competitions. Leadership, time management, interview and critical thinking skills, to name a few, are developed and enhanced. The Athletics Department facilities (Flames Athletics Center, Physical Education Building and Port Academic Center) form a “home” for student athletes and contribute to their sense of belonging and connection to UIC. Moreover, the athletic facilities help to create a feeling of smallness on a large campus. Tinto (2012) advocates several conditions to enhance retention, one of which is support. The Athletics Department provides academic, social, and financial support to UIC student athletes resulting in student success as measured by retention and graduation rates.

Another example is the UIC Honors College, which also provides many extra forms of academic and social support for students. Graduation rates for students who have spent any time in the Honors College are above 80%, with graduation rates significantly higher than students in other colleges who are matched for ACT scores (starting at 22). Many characteristics of the UIC Honors experience account for the difference, and a brief listing of them here echoes the areas of attention called for in this plan. For example, first, the first-year curriculum is more restricted, with students taking the usual composition and mathematics courses, a special Honors First-Year Seminar, and for at least one of their general education courses, they choose from among a small set of honors-only general education core courses taught by Honors Faculty. Second, in addition to advising resources in their line college, Honors students are provided with intensive and highly proactive advising by both assigned professional advisors who have master’s level training in higher education as well as by faculty members. Third, motivated faculty members (“Faculty Fellows”) are engaged with students by
providing career advice, research mentorship, and teaching core classes and one-credit specialty seminars. Fourth, the students have access to additional scholarships and other financial awards (tuition waivers, small grants for research, study abroad, and community service). Fifth, the Honors College provides students with a real feeling of community, belonging, and social support, which is fostered through the physical environment of the college that promotes students working and socializing together, and through Honors student organizations that provide leadership opportunities.

An important point is that the Honors College experience is marked by high impact practices, a term coined by Kuh (2005, 2011) to refer to campus and classroom experiences that significantly engage students, and which have been found to increase student success (Brownell & Swaner, 2010), yet which are foreign to the educational experiences of most college students. The five top high-impact practices (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2007), as well as others that are being linked to student success across the nation, are found in the Honors College: first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, capstone projects, study abroad, writing intensive experiences, common intellectual experiences, etc. Along with holistic advising, faculty mentoring, and financial support, each of these is a key component of the Honors College experience, because they are essential learning practices that engage students with their academic pursuits, their campus, their faculty mentors, and each other.

In summary, with more resources (more programs, more high-impact practices, more individualized advising and mentoring, etc.), UIC students in the Honors College and in athletics, who are similar to UIC students who are not in these programs, are more successful than students who do not have these resources. Even so, it will be important to look more closely at student success in programs such as these and others to determine comparative successes of student groups who are matched closely on demographic factors to determine whether such programs work equally well for all types of students. We need to identify other programs with excellent student outcomes, such as GPPA and CHANCE. And of course it will be challenging to determine how to provide such supports for students who are not in these specially resourced programs.
II. THE EIGHT TARGET AREAS FOR CHANGE

This section outlines a suggested road map, or a compendium of roads the individual task forces might take. In some cases, the task forces may need to investigate an issue more deeply and make new recommendations not already included herein; in other cases, the task forces may determine that the suggestions already provided are a reasonable way forward and devote their energy to implementing a plan. As discussed above, although there is urgency in accomplishing the overall goal of increasing student success, the particular ideas presented here are not meant to be specifically prescriptive, even though they have been suggested on the basis of considerable preliminary research and discussion on campus. Rather, the ideas here are meant to jumpstart the work of the task forces, which must take into account our campus and our students on the one hand, but which also must operate on short deadlines and ensure that real change occurs on the other hand. Other ideas that might grow out of the task force process—and that are particular to UIC students—are welcomed. What is important is student success and finding how to make that easier on our unique campus.

Also note that the task forces are charged with addressing areas that are specific, yet are designed to have considerable overlap (e.g., design of first-year curriculum and training of faculty who teach first-year students courses are not unique). Each task force should work on the full breadth of their topic with the understanding that their plans will be integrated later in the process.
1. Data Analysis and Assessment

As the task forces assemble and begin to explore their areas of interest, we expect many comments to begin with the phrase, “Do we have data that …?” Indeed, we have numerous individuals who work in various student success-related programs gathering data in an ad hoc manner. The scope and importance of the Student Success Plan demands a team of dedicated researchers and data analysts to answer the many questions that will arise in the other seven task forces. This group should also have responsibility for assessing the effectiveness of programming as well. In addition, the team may uncover data that raise new questions that this task force will pose to one of the others. The group responsible for data collection and assessment will need to consider mechanisms for sharing assessment results and for recommending coordinated programmatic changes if necessary. Importantly, such a data analytic group should include people trained specifically in cutting-edge social science techniques for addressing causal relations among variables, such as but not limited to Hierarchical Linear Modeling, path analytic techniques, etc.

Thus, a starting recommendation of this task force will probably focus on creating the infrastructure necessary to provide statistical support to the campus as it embarks on a student success plan. Specific initiatives or areas of inquiry include:

**Coordination of assessment efforts across student success programs; rethinking the ways institutional data are collected, analyzed, and reported**

The changes resulting from a campus Student Success Plan necessitate an agile office for evaluation purposes and to respond to data requests from a variety of campus constituents. Currently, it is not unusual for two units to generate the same analyses on the same data to address similar questions, while other units are unable to generate data to answer important questions.

This task force should develop a plan to coordinate all those efforts, saving effort and time across campus units. This task force will review current structures, including the University Data Analysis Group and the Office of Institutional Research, and develop a plan for college-level and central structures that will serve all colleges and units more efficiently.

**Entry surveys**

Students should take entering surveys that measure indicators that can be used by campus psychologists, counselors, and advisors to identify students’ needs, both cognitive and socioemotional. This team could institute a socioemotional survey to be administered concurrently with online placement testing and make suggestions about implementing those data. These could be made available to units across campus. Currently, the campus is investigating the feasibility of a new ETS product and participating in product development, but there are others, and this task force should explore what product would be most useful at UIC.

**Exit surveys**

To better support students while they are here, we should do more to understand why students leave. This task force will initiate a regular and comprehensive exit survey to try to provide some answers to this question. The immediate conduct of such a survey with a representative sample of recent students who have left the university should be seriously considered.
**Scientific approaches to data analysis predicting student success**

The university needs to employ social scientists with multivariate analytic expertise to help determine what factors are meaningful in predicting our students’ success now, and later will help us determine the impact of our efforts to increase success. These factors will of course include both student characteristics (e.g., first generation, low entering ACT, etc.) that we cannot change (but which we can hope to ameliorate through targeted programming), as well as institutional characteristics and actions that are targeted throughout this plan.

**Other data projects**

The task force might investigate how the campus progress-to-degree documents (DARS) are currently employed and to what degree they are coordinated with BANNER.

The task force might also analyze the rates of DFW grades in a variety of courses to suggest where interventions should be targeted, supporting the work of the curriculum and faculty task forces.

Other projects will be suggested by the following task forces throughout this review process.
2. Targeted First-Year Curriculum

**Coordinated Curriculum Blocks**

A liberal education is based on a broad choice of courses, covering a wide range of academic disciplines and disciplinary approaches, and is a manifestation of diversity fully supported by our campus (see the UIC Strategic Diversity Thinking Document: Through the Lens of Diversity). Yet such diversity of selection may not be best for students during the first year, especially those for whom the transition itself is a huge broadening experience. In essence, for first generation college students, for students from underserved communities, for students who enter college with no general schema for what college is or expects of them, we may be providing too much choice. When students arrive for registration, they are confronted with hundreds of general education choices taught at many different levels. Some are the introduction to a major, some are true general education courses, and all are open to students of any class rank. Students register for courses with little to no specific advice regarding which would be the best fit for new first-year students with their particular interests or particular level of preparation.

The first-year offerings need to be more deliberate and based on what is best for our students at the start of their college career. This is certain to include some combination of a more constrained set of course choices based on a guiding set of principles (e.g., general education courses that are designated for first-year students only, general education courses taught by a set of specially trained faculty, etc.). Course selection for the first-year students or perhaps first semester students should be limited to what is most likely to lead to success. This does not mean courses that guarantee “easy As.” It means courses that guarantee excellent, effective teaching, which can bring any content within a first-year student’s reach.

The task force should define a set of principles associated with courses for first-semester students including those specific courses or seminars common to all first-year students (e.g., first-year writing, First-Year Dialogues, etc.), course areas common to most or all first-year students (math as required by major and assigned by placement), introductory courses necessary for the major or required by the college, and general education courses designed for and available to first-year students only. The latter might be college specific and perhaps prescribed by specific colleges, assuming they are approved for general education. (This is the case for the Honors Cores, for example.) These courses, or just the general education courses among them, could be organized into a limited number of “blocks” or groups of classes, which—at first or at a later date—might even be linked by a common theme, such as social justice, diversity, global issues, criminology, psychology, social work, public policy, health, art, natural science, engineering, education, business, languages, environmental issues, etc. Some blocks might be more appropriate for students with greater preparation (e.g., Honors College students), while others would be for students with less preparation. A possible scheme is that at Summer Orientation, advisors would work with students to ensure they are placed into an appropriate block—one that interests them but also exposes them to the array of offerings at UIC. Having these blocks simplifies advisors’ roles so that they can focus less on the logistics of finding seats in classes, and more on developing meaningful professional relationships with students—supportive relationships that will continue throughout the first year and beyond.

The themed blocks might eventually lend themselves to “learning communities,” a key high-impact practice, which is by definition supported by out-of-class relationships among faculty and coordination among the individual classes. But this is not necessary at the outset of this plan; the simple fact of allowing students to register only for these coordinated course groupings, without any of the “frills” of a true learning community, will benefit them by simplifying the registration process, ensuring that they do not enter classes that are too advanced for first-year students, and providing a more structured way to build supportive friendships among their course group cohort.
Whatever the task force determines, it seems clear that the first-year courses need to be taught by faculty and graduate teaching assistants (TAs) who are skilled and knowledgeable about first-year student characteristics and needs. Training should be offered to faculty and TAs that would cover such issues as (a) characteristics of incoming first-year students, (b) pedagogy and methodology, (c) directing students to support services, (d) identifying students in trouble and employing early alerts, among other things. Planning for this should be devised by or in conjunction with the Faculty Engagement Task Force.

In addition, the task force might consider this an opportunity to investigate alternative, less expensive methods of delivering classroom texts to students (e.g., digitally). The University Library would be integral in any investigation of alternative methods of delivering information to students.

**First-Year Seminars**

Given the preponderance of data, all first-year students should have a proscribed first-year seminar that includes certain areas of instruction important to their success at UIC. These need to be based on the needs of our diverse student population, and focus heavily on their concerns during transition as they lay a strong foundation for their college career.

A report prepared by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Brownell & Swaner, 2010) summarizes findings indicating that first-year seminars can result in increased (a) persistence and retention to the second year, (b) graduation rates, and (c) student engagement (i.e., perceptions of stronger relationships with faculty, greater knowledge about campus resources, more involvement with campus activities). Several UIC colleges already offer a first-year seminar, but most undergraduates do not get this benefit because LAS does not offer one, although it is reconsidering this decision. This task force should explore the potential forms this course could take, which at other universities ranges from study skills and extended orientation workshops to variable-content academic seminars taught by faculty (Keup & Barefoot, 1992).

First-year seminars already offered by UIC colleges should remain, but in addition to college-specific content there should be some campus-wide content consistency across the courses. For example, it seems wise for these seminars at UIC to be taught by students’ advisors, who can use the seminar as the venue for accomplishing many of the first-year advising goals addressed in the Transition and Advising section herein (building bonds among students and between students and advisors, familiarizing students with campus resources and opportunities that can encourage student success in terms of study skills, major/career choice, etc.). Rather than simply repeating orientation information, however, first-year seminars could also provide support for students in two aspects of academic life: (a) building skills for academic success including note-taking, reading skills, ways to interact with faculty, the importance of attending class, time management (the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) should assist in these efforts); and (b) providing intellectual rigor with significant learning outcomes and high impact practices (Kuh, 2005, 2011), which are known to support student engagement and success in the first year. Given that undergraduate research is a high-impact practice, first-year seminars should introduce students to ways of eventually working with faculty research mentors. This type of consistency could be developed and sustained by reconvening the First-Year Experience Committee.

The current initiative to introduce First-year Diversity Dialogues at UIC could be coordinated with college-specific or generic first-year seminars, and this task force should work collaboratively with that initiative. For instance, the First-Year Diversity Dialogues may be offered as electives or as a requirement pending college and Senate review in the 2012-2013 academic year, are slated to be offered in seven-week terms; perhaps first-year seminars could be offered for the other seven-week terms, thus better utilizing student time and campus resources.
*Freshman Read*

Currently the campus has a Freshman Read program. Is it effective? Should it be better integrated into a targeted first-year curriculum? Other first-year programs unnamed here should also be coordinated with the academic offerings discussed above.

*Centralizing the Administration of Required First-Year Courses*

This task force should consider whether there are advantages to realigning the administrative structure of required first-year courses in math and writing.

*Review of Structural Factors in the First-Year that Slow Student Progress*

Of course, curriculum matters are in the faculty domain; thus, this task force, which will include many faculty members, will work in a partnership with college EPCs in recommending change.

This task force should review a variety of issues that can be the source of significant roadblocks for timely graduation or retention, including course availability, five-credit-hour courses, and majors and minors with requirements that make them difficult to complete because of the total hours necessary or because of numerous hierarchically organized prerequisites.

A first step in addressing these issues is to investigate how much these kinds of issues currently serve as deterrents to timely graduation (i.e., degree progress) or first year success. For example, surveying students and reviewing a sample of students' DARS reports (e.g., those who took four versus five or six years to graduate) might be useful in identifying (a) inability to register for certain prerequisite courses in the first-year that was subsequently associated with delayed degree progress, and (b) whether there is a discernible problematic pattern for certain courses or majors. At the same time, there will be much to learn by examining the records of students who have been successful. What are the paths of students who graduate in four years?

Consider course availability in particular: Many courses, some essential for popular majors, routinely fill before all students who want to take the course have registered. A study of student experiences might or might not reveal that this poses a deterrent to degree progress. If course availability issues emerge, we should investigate any number of creative solutions to address the problems.

It might also be useful to consider the classroom scheduling policy that UIC recently revised. The policy ensures that undergraduate courses are scheduled according to a university-wide grid that allows for the most efficient use of space plus the best options for students as they construct reasonable class schedules. Would more careful central monitoring of course scheduling uncover overlaps among course offerings that impede degree progress? That is, are certain required courses meeting at the same time as others in different departments or colleges, causing students to delay in taking needed courses?

The task force might also investigate innovative solutions that could provide alternative methods of class delivery, such as blended learning, night and weekend courses, and summer courses, to see if such solutions could facilitate degree progress and lessen semester loads, and in turn, whether and how they could work logistically at UIC.
3. Support for Student Learning

Supplemental Instruction, Basic Skills Preparation, and Discipline-Specific Tutoring

Traditional education and advising methods may not be as effective here as elsewhere given UIC’s particular student population—with more first-generation college students, students from recent-immigrant families, students from underserved communities, students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and so on. Many units on campus provide significant support for students outside of the classroom (e.g., The University Library, Disability Resource Center, the Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change, and others). The task force assigned to this area (as is true for the task forces working on curricular content and faculty engagement) should review campus structures aimed at supporting learning and securing the value of a UIC education and especially those affecting first-year students.

As this document is being written, the campus has begun to respond to Chancellor Allen-Meares’ call for a review of units on campus with primary missions that support student learning. Units to be evaluated during this first support-unit review cycle include the African American Academic Network (AAAN), Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES), Native American Support Program (NASP), the CHANCE Program, TRIO, and Women in Science and Engineering (WISE). Many other units such as colleges are already reviewed on a five-year basis. There is a clear need for coordination among the many places where first-year students are supported on campus and the many programs in which they can participate in terms of outcome goals and the methods to achieve those outcomes. The internal committee to be set up to review these units will constitute this target area task force to avoid duplication of efforts. Other units and programs that could be reviewed in future review cycles include:

- Learning Centers/tutoring: Math Learning Center, Science Learning Center, Writing Center, and the Language and Culture Learning Center; other tutoring programs including the Honors College, CHANCE and ASAP in Applied Health Sciences;
- Peer mentoring programs (e.g., in Campus Housing, Honors College, the Undergraduate Success Center, etc.);
- Others to be identified.
4. Faculty Engagement

One of the top factors influencing student success is engagement with faculty members, with whom, ideally, students will spend more time than with other persons on campus. Faculty members (including tenure-line faculty, adjunct faculty and lecturers, and teaching assistants, with special emphasis initially on instructors of first-year students) are in a unique position not just to teach specific subject matter, but to engage and motivate students about their academic futures, their research interests, their career goals, and to direct them to appropriate resources. In essence, as disciplinary mentors, faculty members are a key part of a campus-wide advising, mentoring, and early alert team for students. During the first year in particular, faculty can help tremendously in demystifying what it means to be a college student and how the expectations differ from what students were accustomed to in high school. Supportive and positive faculty interactions with students during the first year can help students succeed and teach them that faculty members are a resource for students throughout their college careers.

Faculty members who commit themselves to undergraduate success are certainly not rare at UIC. Yet the UIC culture does not presume that faculty members will take a truly active role or sense of responsibility for undergraduate success beyond the classroom. Few know how low the graduation rates are at UIC, nor the extent of the performance gap between students of different races/ethnicities. In fact, as is true at many universities, faculty members may view “institutional efforts to increase rates of student retention as an administrative matter” (Braxton, 2008). For some faculty, their sense of classroom responsibility includes students who are doing well in the classroom, but does not extend to underprepared students who are failing in the classroom. The latter kind of students must become important targets for faculty support at UIC to effect change in retention and graduation rates.

Faculty Development

The UIC Student Success Plan should include a campaign to educate faculty about both large and small things they can do to affect student success. A task force on faculty engagement (led by faculty, of course) should develop this campaign and examine the many ways in which faculty can contribute to undergraduate success. Faculty should be informed about who our students are, how they are and are not prepared for college, how very likely they are to drop out of college, and the issues affecting student success. When faculty understand that every 30 or so students they “save” from failure equals a 1% increase in the graduation rate, they will understand their power in increasing the UIC graduation rate.

Faculty could be given the reasons why they should (a) embrace their role as the earliest alert that students are struggling in college, (b) care enough to identify students at risk, and (c) intervene as mentors and resources when students appear to be failing. They could be trained to participate actively in midterm grading and EMS Early Alert functions and to understand specifically the range of resources on campus that are available for students who have various needs (including study skills, career and mental health counseling, advising, wellness concerns, etc.).

This task force could also address what is needed on campus to support faculty teaching excellence. Few doctoral programs include a teacher-training component, so most faculty have had little or no formal training in teaching, even though this is a large part of their job. Initially, a focus of such training could be for those who will teach first-year students. Specifically, as mentioned above, the new Targeted First-year Curriculum needs to be led by faculty and graduate teaching assistants who are especially skilled in first-year issues. The current Council on Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) could be strengthened into a vital campus resource that could lead faculty training efforts. Some training, especially for new faculty hires, might be made mandatory. Colleges could consider offering a course release to new faculty to provide time for training in teaching methodology.
for current faculty should be rewarding and participation. Teaching support could include education regarding:

- the basics of preparation, organization, and clarity;
- how to synthesize information effectively for students;
- the importance of emphasizing critical thinking, writing, and reading;
- the importance of communicating high expectations and confidence that students can reach those expectations;
- testing and grading issues;
- findings from cognitive science regarding how students learn (e.g., students learn by doing, not by just listening to someone else; they learn by solving problems, not by passively absorbing concepts);
- incorporating information technology into teaching;
- the importance of practical issues such as setting office hours, producing a clear and specific syllabus, helping students review for tests, lecturing in ways that facilitate note-taking, etc.;
- policies about academic dishonesty and conduct;
- the importance of high-impact practices in the classroom, and how to implement them. Studies have shown that they lead to better student learning and success, even increasing retention and graduation rates, and reducing achievement gaps among groups of students (Braxton, 2008; Engstrom, 2008; Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008; www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/Connecting_the_dots_report.pdf). Some are quite simple, others more involved, such as occasionally requiring students to (a) stop and write a “minute paper” during class; (b) make an in-class contribution; (c) work in collaborative groups and teach each other, (d) make class presentations; (e) write intensively about what they are learning; (f) participate in class-related community-based projects; and (g) meet with faculty outside of class about course material or career-related interests.

There are many others.

**Faculty Incentives**

This task force should consider the issue of appropriate and effective incentives for faculty to embrace responsibility for student success and act accordingly. Currently, faculty members at UIC are rewarded primarily for research and less so for undergraduate teaching and mentoring. How should faculty be supported in taking on the role of teaching well and mentoring in an effective way? What should the incentives for this be? How should messaging change regarding the importance of student success and the treatment of teaching and mentoring in decision about promotion, tenure and raises?

See Appendix A for a summary of input from faculty regarding many components of a Student Success Plan, especially the issues discussed above.
5. Advising

Significant resources have been committed by the UIC campus administration to improve advising at UIC. This task force will play a central role in determining how these resources are used, with emphasis on the first year. As mentioned above, the Undergraduate Success Center has been started. An advising staff is being hired and colleges have been invited to weigh in on the structure of the center and which students will be served.

The common graduation rate among all of our undergraduate-accepting colleges strongly suggests that the college-based experiences, as currently provided, simply do not provide students with the support they need to transition to UIC and succeed. (See Figure 2). Studies of college student satisfaction report that advising is the area with which students are least satisfied (Kuh, 2005), yet it is critically important for student success. Advising leads to students who are more engaged with the institution, more informed about available resources, and more prepared to understand how to succeed in college. Careful investment in advising should translate into increased undergraduate success as measured by increased retention and graduation.

Although we certainly need to focus on curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular content, and on delivery of that content by our faculty, we need to make the top priority the advising that students receive during their transition to UIC, with its diverse, research-oriented, and confusing, if not frightening, environment. It is this simple human contact and the trust established that will allow students to register properly, transition effectively, understand how to react to their fall mid-semester grades, etc. This is the human contact that will establish a basis for their success.

This section outlines a range of sample best practices that might be viable at UIC, and that therefore the task force should consider. Some practices are expansions of current UIC practices with subgroups of students; some are practices already in use at peer institutions. (See Appendix B for a summary of practices at some of our peer institutions.) Some might work well at UIC; some might be deemed inappropriate for our campus. Some could be implemented immediately; some need additional study and piloting. Many include the high-impact practices (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2007) that engage and increase the success of students from many backgrounds. Although the focus is the first-year student and the crucial first year, many components of the plan will apply to new transfer students and students at all levels of college study.
ADVISING MODELS

First, it is useful to understand the various models of advising (Pardee, 2004).

Centralized – The only truly centralized form of advising is “self-contained” advising. With this model, advising occurs at a central advising center or counseling center staffed by professional advisors. In some situations, faculty members are assigned to the center on a part-time basis.

Decentralized – Students are assigned to a departmental advisor (faculty or professional staff). The most prevalent form of decentralized advising is the “faculty only” model.

Supplementary – Students are assigned a departmental advisor, but a separate administrative unit exists to support advising through resources and training.

Split model – Advising is “split” between departmental advisors and an advising center. In most cases, a subset of students such as first-year students, undeclared students, or students who are determined to be “at risk,” are assigned to receive advising in a central center. When they achieve a certain status, they are then referred to the departments. Departments and colleges determine advising protocols for their individual units.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT UIC ADVISING STRUCTURE

The historical culture of UIC is one of decentralization and distribution, which, on the positive side, has allowed various units to develop practices that best address the particular needs of their student body. For instance, small, specialized colleges such as Architecture and the Arts and Applied Health Sciences have advising plans that seem tailored to their own students and disciplines.

Yet decentralization also leads to the possibility of varying levels of student support across campus. It should be the main goal of the task force to determine which advising components are best handled centrally, which at the College level, and which at the departmental or program level. No matter which components are centralized and which not, clear standards need to be articulated to ensure consistency and excellence of advising.

Although an argument could be made that distribution of advising among the colleges allows for flexibility, there is reason to believe that, in fact, the needs of first-year students are more similar than not. Further, Tinto (2011) estimates that about two-thirds of students at four-year schools either start undecided about a major or change majors at least once during their college careers. Finding the right major and career goal helps students engage with the institution, and can lead to greater success. We should examine the extent to which our students are exploring possible majors and that such students are accommodated in the colleges or centrally. Additionally, some students claim “undeclared status” to avoid differential tuition; we might be wise to find a way to close this loophole.

Whatever ultimate balance the task force determines to be the most beneficial for our students—especially our incoming students—it is essential that student/advisor ratios should be within the norms of the professional standards.

Decentralization also leads to inconsistent types of advising—i.e., more or less intrusive, more or less holistic. Some students are getting basic academic advising to ensure progress toward degree, while other students are getting both academic advising and career counseling. Other students may be getting more intense major mentoring from faculty members. Levels of proficiency also vary greatly among advisors (faculty, staff, and professional) regarding knowledge of policies that affect students (financial aid, housing, careers, etc.) as well as the support resources that might prevent a student from dropping out.

Decentralization can also lead to inconsistency in student/advisor ratios. Among UIC colleges, advising load ranges from 30:1 to 183:1; total undergraduate ratios range from 318:1 to 825:1. It goes
without saying that even the most highly trained, well-paid advisor will struggle to provide excellent service when the student load does not permit ample time to explore each student’s needs.

The task force should pay special attention to the benefits and possibilities of cohort advising: a system where a student has a dedicated advisor throughout his/her career.

**WHAT IS BEING DONE CURRENTLY AT INSTITUTIONS SIMILAR TO UIC OR THOSE TO WHICH WE ASPIRE?**

Appendix B provides advising-related structures and protocols at a number of peer and aspirational institutions, some in our region, some within the CIC, some situated in urban environments, some recognized as excellent by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). These include Florida State University, Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis, Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Houston, Ohio University, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, DePaul, University of Wisconsin at Madison, Temple University, University of Cincinnati, University of Minnesota, and the University of Michigan.

Although it is immediately obvious that each handles advising in ways idiosyncratic to each institution’s history, context, student body, and resources (as should be the case at UIC), we can learn much from alternative models about processes and models that could, in part or whole, be usefully considered for adoption at UIC. Although some specific information about each program is provided as Appendix B, it may be most useful here to consider the four broad advising models found across the different institutions: College/department-based, Advising Center for select incoming first-year students, Advising Center for all incoming first-year students, and University College. Each is discussed in more detail below. They range from the least to the most centralized, with the end of the continuum being the University College model, where there is full integration and centralization of academic and student support services for all incoming first-year students in an organizational unit that is largely separate from other line colleges and that reports often to the equivalent of a Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs.

Of the schools surveyed in the appendix, six have some form of a University College model. Notable among them is Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI), where all students are admitted as “University College” students—effectively “undeclared.” IUPUI’s University College then provides a structure which administers academic policies, supports students via various learning centers through the critical first year, but also develops programming as warranted by students’ needs. Florida State University (FSU) also utilizes such a structure, but makes exceptions for students in the arts. Advising at these schools is predominantly centralized and occurs at a central physical location. In fact, FSU’s center is organized around “The Exploratory Center,” which helps students choose careers and stands in more positive contrast to what most schools refer to as “undeclared.”

Other schools, however, have decentralized systems similar to UIC’s. Temple University, for instance, which has a better graduation rate than UIC even with very similar students, has a decentralized model, and their methods are mixed depending on the college. For example, the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Science and Technology, and the School of Communication and Theatre each have central advising centers that are well staffed with professional advisors and full-time administrators. The College of Engineering, however, uses a faculty advising model.

Several schools operate a central advising center intended for students who have not declared a major. UIUC, for instance, offers the Division of General Studies and the Campus Center for Advising and Academic Services, which is intended for those students who wish to “explore the academic landscape” prior to declaring a major. DePaul offers the Office for Academic Advising Support, which does essentially the same thing. The University of Houston (UH) has developed “USCholars” (Undergraduate Scholars at UH), which focuses on students with undeclared majors, pre-professional students, and students in transition, by “helping students navigate through the core Curriculum and
helping them feel more part of the UH community.” Similarly, The University of Cincinnati and the University of Minnesota have centers designed to help “exploratory” students choose a major.

Regardless of model, consistent among those schools is a serious attention to advising load and to dedicated assignment of advisors to particular students. One excellent example of what seems like a better model of advising and undergraduate support comes from Indiana University. In August prior to their first-year, incoming students are sent the name of their first-year advisor along with the date and time of their first appointment during Welcome Week. First-year students in residence halls have advisors located there, while other students attend meetings in the main advising office. IUPUI also has dedicated advising, with an advising center staffed by two types of advisors—those with joint appointments to the center and to a line college, as well as graduate assistant advisors, who are working toward degrees in education or related fields. The ratios are not reported online, but it is clear from the staffing levels that the ratio approaches the NACADA-recommended 300:1.

Also common among most of the institutions (10 of 13) is the presence of first-year seminars. For example, DePaul has a cohesive “First Year Program,” that includes, among other things, the requirement that all incoming students take a quarter-long seminar in which they discover Chicago’s neighborhoods and politics as well as become actively acquainted with the university’s resources. Wisconsin’s first-year seminar program is optional and targeted at students who have not declared majors.

There is variation in terms of reporting lines and structures for advising initiatives. Non-college advising centers most often appear to report to academic affairs. That said, it appears that schools with the most vibrant advising plans rely on excellent cooperation between student affairs and academic affairs.

WHAT CHANGES COULD BE IMPLEMENTED AT UIC?

Any final decisions about significant changes in advising structures must be made with full input and support of the academic colleges. That said, an initial self-study and review of best practices at various other institutions leads to the information discussed next. Note that any changes in the advising structure promoted by the task force need to be consistent with the following guiding principles which were adopted in January 2012 by the Undergraduate Policy Council:

1. Advisors can be faculty or professional staff members as defined by individual colleges; regardless, all faculty have responsibility for student success and therefore participate in some form of advising and mentoring.
2. Advising should be mandatory for all incoming new students, transfers, and upper-division students at risk.
3. Advising should be done by an assigned advisor who is seen as soon as students come to campus so that students can build meaningful relationships with advisors. Continuing students should have easy access to advisors as well.
4. Advising may be either college/department-based, centralized, or mixed, as long as the model employed promotes a consolidated, individualized packaging of campus services.
5. Advising for students at all levels must be proactive, less rushed, and more holistic.
6. First-Year seminars, with an orientation or acculturation component, should be implemented for all new students. There should be a relationship between advising and first-year seminars to support continuity of advising.
7. The student-to-professional-advisor ratio should more closely match the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)’s recommendation.
8. Advising at UIC should make four-year graduation the expected norm for most students. In support, students should have four-year plans for graduation that are readily available, tailored specifically to their needs, reviewed each semester with necessary changes.
9. Professional advisors should work in partnership with the faculty, who can be important mentors for students. A campus-wide campaign should engage faculty more as true partners in student success, both inside and outside of the classroom.

In broad terms, there are four possible advising structures that might support the goals above. They are placed below roughly along a continuum ranging from decentralized to centralized.

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<th>Level of Centralization</th>
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<td>College/department-based</td>
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<td>Central Academic Advising Center for select incoming first-year students</td>
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<td>Central Academic Advising Center for all incoming first-year students</td>
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<tr>
<td>University College</td>
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1. **College/department-based**—This is the model currently employed at UIC. Incoming students are encouraged to declare majors, recognizing that many are unsure and will change majors later at least once. Those students enter the corresponding undergraduate colleges/departments. All general advising is done in the colleges (including Honors College for honors students), and major advising is done largely in the departments. Most students with undeclared majors enter LAS. This model needs to be improved, and can be with additional resources. In fact, LAS is currently phasing in a cohort/assigned model for advising, which should go a long way to improve student access to resources and success.

2. **Central Academic Advising Center for select incoming first-year students**—In this model, students would not be encouraged to declare a major, but not discouraged from doing so. Those who choose a major would enter corresponding colleges directly and their advising would be done there. Undeclared students would officially enter LAS as they do now; however, all of their advising would occur in a central academic advising center until students declare a major. At that time the advising responsibility would transfer to colleges and departments. Other students, regardless of college, might also go to the center for advising:
   - All students who have not yet declared a major (including transfers) or students from any college who decide to switch majors at any time,
   - Pre-professional students and GPPA students (e.g., health, law, etc., who would still receive major advising within the appropriate college/department),
   - Students on probation (who would still receive major advising within the appropriate college and department),
   - Conditional admits,
   - Students identified as in need of extra preparation or who are for some reason deemed to be at risk.

All advising, whether done in the central advising center for the students listed here, or in the colleges for other students, should be dedicated/assigned and intrusive in ways described above and in more detail below, which will require additional training and resources across colleges. The advising center, in consultation with colleges, would be the central coordinator of this transformation of services provided to all undergraduates at UIC, providing on-going training and resources to all advisors across campus.

The advising center might also coordinate first-year experience initiatives such as a mandatory First-Year Seminar for these select students.

3. **Central Advising Center for all incoming first-year students**—This model expands the second model to all first-year students—regardless of whether a major has been declared and regardless of
college—and assumes that all incoming first-year students, regardless of their intended major or level of preparation, have many of the same concerns, challenges, requirements, and needs. They must complete general education requirements; and they are adjusting to a new environment, new expectations, and new social concerns. In addition, students might decide that the major they initially intended to pursue was in fact not a good fit. This system allows for greater exploration of major without the consequences of going down the wrong road for too long.

A variant is to apply this model to all incoming first-year students in some colleges, but not other colleges which might already have in place the kind of advising recommended here. Or, all advising is centralized, but there might be college specializations among the first-year advisors who work at the center.

4. University College—This model is a full integration of and centralization of all first-year academic and student support services. All students, regardless of desired major or college, would officially enter a “first-year college” rather than one of the existing line colleges for all services including but not limited to advising. Simply put, in a university college, all students are under the wing of an institutional structure with control over those students’ lives for their first year at UIC.
PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UIC REGARDING ADVISING:

An initial assessment, based on preliminary research of peer institutions and conversations with students and representatives from colleges and Student Affairs, suggests that a key for increasing student success at UIC is to ensure better resourcing to make more intrusive, specialized, student-centered advising a reality at UIC. This should be true wherever the advising physically exists, for all students at every stage of their college career, but especially for incoming new students and those who are at any point at risk of leaving UIC.

The campus has already established the Undergraduate Success Center (USC). As detailed in Appendix F, the USC will work closely with colleges to provide coordination and support for advising at all stages of a students’ career—a “one-stop shop” model. The USC will house the existing (but largely virtual) Advising Resource Center, with a centrally located physical presence on campus, a dedicated full-time Director who supervises USC activities. It will be staffed a total of approximately four professional advisors to start.

The USC advisors will be guided by best practices for advising that have been identified in the literature and that are used successfully at our peer institutions nationally. The task force on advising should consider these and perhaps other best practices, and study how such practices could be more widely implemented at UIC by the USC, the colleges, and student support units:

- **Dedicated/assigned, intrusive, holistic, and mandatory advising that is “package-oriented,”** for first-year students and for students on probation (and perhaps others). The guiding principle would be to provide students individualized advising that fits—a holistic “packaging” of various resources across campus. Such packages would be built from professional advisors’ individualized assessments of students’ needs and would include resources and referrals to academic support sources, the counseling center, career services, various support programs and cultural centers, and so on. Such advising would also ensure a more personalized touch than is now sometimes the case at UIC. Under this model, students would get their advising from a dedicated/assigned advisor (a) with whom they can build a relationship starting with a first meeting at Orientation followed by mandatory first-year advising meetings and participating in a First-Year Seminar taught by the advisor; (b) who has sufficient time to spend with them during advising sessions, which will be possible with a reasonable student/advisor ratio; (c) who is well trained via better professional development opportunities; and (d) who is equipped with appropriate assessment tools and early alert systems that will allow for intrusive interventions with students when students are at risk of failure. Mandatory advising appointments might be enforced through registration holds in colleges.

- **Pre-first-year advising-related initiatives.** Advising supporting the transition to college should start at the point of admissions. Messaging is key—basic, simple advice about college readiness, including how to address professors, how to get organized, how to act in class, what to expect, how to search for resources. Such messaging could be included at:
  - *Orientation*, which might be expanded to involve stronger advising and academic preparation components.
  - *Retreat days*, which might be planned in addition to current orientation programming for some students, and would happen just before school starts. The current UIC campus model for this is the Pathways to Success intensive weekend retreat before the first week of school. All African American males are matched with an African American male advisor and with peer upperclassmen as mentors.
  - *Summer College*. During the five-week Summer College session, advisors from colleges, the USC, and support units could have a presence throughout, assisting students with advising questions (e.g., a Summer College “hotline” could be promoted
on the Summer College Web site, or there could be a temporary advising “kiosk” at Summer College events).

- **Electronic files and notes.** UIC should initiate a file sharing system to increase the depth of advising by allowing different groups of advisors access to all information. Currently, in our paper-based system, campus advisors are limited by their lack of comprehensive student records. Electronic files that include combined notes and records will enable advisors to provide better service to students. It will also relieve some of the pressure of space constraints. Electronic files and notes will also facilitate the transition for students transferring colleges. This would also permit opportunities for advising in non-traditional settings (e.g., residence halls). Tracking visits to support programs and other resources will better help inform advisors and allow them to follow-up with students when services are not utilized.

- **Major and career advising/exploration.** This is a critical student engagement tool, because students are more motivated if they have concrete long-term goals. Such advising might help students choose majors earlier and/or keep them engaged in a major. Research and writing around major possibilities might be explored as a part of the first-year seminar or composition courses. A strong relationship with the Office of Career Services is obviously key.

- **Special advising and services for underprepared first-year students** (a part of the “individualized package” approach described above). Identification of such students must be done in a supportive and non-stigmatizing manner, and might include a wide range of students such as those who have not declared majors, first-generation college students, students with remedial placements in basic courses, etc. An excellent campus model for such efforts is the Pathways to Success Program that boosted retention rates among African American male students.

- **Special services for students who are on probation (at any level) and interventions in response to Early Alerts.** After the Fall 2010 semester, 413 first-year students (13%) ended up on probation. For students on probation, advising should be even more intense. Advisors should assume more responsibility for communicating with all students on probation, investigating the reasons for the poor GPA, and developing a multi-faceted plan for services and support that will best meet the particular student’s needs. Advisors should be alerted to a students’ difficulties before the student is put on probation via mid-term grading reports and by UIC’s new Enrollment Management System (EMS), which will include an “early alert” system, whereby various constituents across campus—advisors, faculty members, support staff, etc.—can input information about a student’s performance or behavior, allowing for early and appropriate interventions for students facing academic difficulty.

- **Specialized advising for especially well-prepared students.** Advisors would ideally be trained to spot students eligible for the Honors College and for accelerated degree pathways (i.e., three-year degree). Regarding the latter, three-year completion advising might be offered to students for whom early degree completion is possible as well as advantageous, which is not necessarily one and the same. Such students might have multiple college credits from AP, community college courses, or college classroom instruction, and those students might be offered tailored plans for accelerated graduation (an option currently taken by approximately 2% of all undergraduates per year, especially Honors College GPPA students majoring in Biology).

- **Peer mentoring program.** Best practices in advising sometimes include peer mentoring. Successful UIC students can be excellent role models for current students and act as:
  - **Peer Advisors:** At some universities, trained peer advisors are available on a drop-in basis as a supplement (not a replacement) for professional advisors.
o **Peer Mentors:** At the University of Wisconsin, peer mentors were perceived by students as helping by providing (a) personal-experience-based advice about courses and professors, (b) academic support and reassurance, and (c) a resource and source for learning about other resources. The USC, colleges, and support programs at UIC could host programs of peer mentors matched with individual students or groups of students, as is done in specialized programs that already exist at UIC (i.e., Honors College Ambassadors program, Brothers Reaching Out program). There might be a campus-wide program, or a network of smaller programs supported centrally at the USC. For example, the Commuter Center could sponsor peer mentor activities for commuter students, LARES could sponsor peer mentor activities for Latino students, the Office of Student Veteran Affairs or ROTC could support veterans groups, ensuring that mentors and mentees have the most in common. The program could be supported by a Web-based system like the University of Cincinnati’s “major mentoring” Web site.

o **Peer Tutors:** Peer tutoring is already practiced in UIC’s Science Learning Center, Math Learning Center, and Honors College.

- **Graduate students as advisors and mentors.** There is much promise in partnering with the Graduate College in finding graduate students with interests in fields related to education, advising, and counseling, and providing these students with assistantships to help with advising. (We could look to the program in place at Indiana University for guidance with this initiative.)

- **Four-year graduation monitoring** could be accomplished via consistent and motivating messaging to students ranging from, “Congratulations! You’ve completed xx hours at UIC. At this rate, you will graduate in Spring 2013! Keep up the good work!” to “We’re glad you’re at UIC and we want you to do well. Your current academic load, however, has put you behind your target graduation date. Don’t despair! Please see [your advisor]. She’s waiting for your call.” This is one more way to illustrate that the culture of UIC expects student success, rather than accommodating failure, and reinforces the message of four-year graduation.

- **The Undergraduate Advising Resource Center** is currently an online resource for students as well as advisors and faculty across campus, but is under-utilized. The USC staff will revitalize the site to be as impressive as those at other successful institutions, such as Minnesota’s “One Stop” Web site: [http://onestop.umn.edu](http://onestop.umn.edu).

- **Professional development opportunities for staff,** including advising summits, trainings such as webinars, financial assistance for NACADA membership, conference attendance, etc., all aimed at professionalizing the role of advising and recognizing excellent advising work, should be better supported at UIC. Advisors need to know they are an important and appreciated part of the coordinated UIC student support team, and that theirs is a highly regarded profession unto itself. The Provost just started a program of advising excellence and professional development awards. More resources might be offered, perhaps even including seed grants for creative advising initiatives that lead to measurable success, that have the potential to be self-sustaining, and that have the potential to garner outside funding.
6. Financing College

As the cost of obtaining a college degree continues to rise, more families are applying for financial aid and seeking other alternatives to manage their expenses. At the same time that college costs are increasing, federal and state funding for higher education is decreasing, squeezing family budgets further. Nationally and here at UIC, more students are turning to loans as a way to fill the funding gap, creating a long-time financial burden for families and students.

Ostensibly, one solution is to increase fund-raising efforts that result in more need-based scholarships. Perhaps another solution could involve a strategy that front loads more scholarship and grant funds during the first two years of matriculation.

This task force, which will be the existing Financial Aid Working Group (FAWG), with the addition of faculty and student representation, will develop a Student Success Plan for Financing a UIC Education. Deliverables could include strategies to: address financial literacy for prospective students and their parents; communicate college financing options to students and parents, communicate more clearly and earlier on billing statements to students and parents, and examine ways of coordinating the administration of scholarships and the timing of bills.

The task force might also consider how to encourage students to work on campus rather than off-campus, and how to administer federal work study funds to maximize student employment opportunities on campus. Research indicates that working an average of fifteen hours per week, ideally on campus or in a position related to a student’s academic interest, has a positive effect on persistence and degree completion (King, 2006).

On the one hand, having to work many hours may be a deterrent to students’ academic success. On the other hand, some students might work as a means of time management as well as a means of self-confidence. Many of our students have worked during high school, have little social time, and are accustomed to structuring time for homework and study around the demands of a work schedule. The collegiate schedule, wherein there are many fewer contact hours, is known to be difficult for first-year students who sometimes struggle when they have too much unstructured time. The assertion that they should not work might be disruptive to their success.
7. Campus Life

The transition to college can be difficult for first-year students since they are “starting all over again” and dealing with the challenges of a new and demanding environment. The typical first-year student may have unrealistic and uninformed expectations of the collegiate experience. Issues related to study skills, time management, values clarification, and independent living can serve as barriers to student success. In addition, individual differences among first-year students need to be recognized and accommodated. For example, the escalating number of new students coming to college with psychological problems can have a negative impact on the individual student as well as the entire campus community. Students must succeed academically, personally and socially to achieve the goals of any Student Success Plan: retention, graduation, and timely completion. To achieve these goals, it is vital that students have a supportive, educationally purposeful, safe, and engaging learning and living experience.

Students coming from high schools where they are among the most successful individuals in a homogeneous population might experience a larger challenge intellectually and personally than other students might.

The Campus Life task force will be charged with addressing a number of diverse aspects of campus life, outlined below:

**Establishing a connection to the campus**

It is important for the campus to help students move from feeling like outsiders to feeling personally involved in campus life and connected to their new community. A key element in establishing this bond is ensuring that new students are connected to someone at the institution (a faculty member, an advisor, an administrator, a peer, or group of peers). Studies indicate that first-year students who can identify someone on campus who can assist them with problem-solving are twice as likely to return for their sophomore year as those who cannot (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Opportunities for new students to identify individuals who can assist them during their academic career can be included as part of Summer College, the New Student Orientation Program, etc.

**Campus Environment**

Environmental factors can influence student persistence, and that influence can vary based on the student’s interaction with variables such as institutional type, demographics of the campus, curricula, faculty, and peers. It is important to understand the connection between first-year students and their campus environment. If the campus environment is viewed as an ecological system (the relationship between students and their environment) then this transactional relationship becomes an essential component in understanding the success of first-year students (Astin, 1993; Upcraft, Gardiner, & Barefoot, 2005). The task force should consider how UIC can make its large, urban campus feel smaller so that first-year students will adapt positively to their new environment.

Additional elements of the campus environment can affect student persistence, including campus climate issues, campus appearance, and campus culture. The perceptions of first-year students regarding campus climate, especially issues of prejudice and discrimination for under-represented students, have an effect on retention.

The physical characteristics of the campus (i.e., cleanliness, signage, green spaces, friendly and supportive faculty and staff, comfortable oases) are also important components of a welcoming environment for new students.
Finally, campus traditions create a connection to the institution and foster campus spirit. Identifying and establishing traditions for first-year students (i.e., UIC Convocation) provide a positive introduction into campus life and an initiation into the UIC community, contributing to a sense of belonging and a connection to the university.

**Involvement and Engagement in Campus Life**

Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that students devote to the academic experience. Students who engage both academically and socially with other people on campus are more likely to stay and graduate from college (Astin, 1993, Braxton & McClendon, 2001). There is evidence that students’ participation in co-curricular activities is positively associated with persistence (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Participation in campus activities such as leadership in student organizations, attendance at athletic events, and service learning opportunities can contribute to student learning, an affiliation to the campus, and the development of a peer-support network.

Recent research indicates that students who develop significant social connections with other students early in their first year are more likely to be successful than those who don’t. The lack of a network of friends at college could result in “friendsickness,” the challenge for new college students created by moving away from an established network of friends (Paul & Brier, 2001). The campus needs to develop more intentionally managed opportunities for students to develop appropriate social and support peer networks. These might include learning communities in and out of the residence halls, training for student organization leaders in ways to engage new student members, and developing cohort groups at orientation that continue into the academic year based on commonalities (i.e., social justice interests, commuter students from the same home communities, common intended majors).

To have every first-year student engaged in purposeful co-curricular learning activities, the task force will be charged with exploring ways colleges and advising centers can connect students with The UIC Experience program, a co-curricular initiative to engage students in three ways: (1) personally, socially and politically with Chicago’s urban environment, (2) intellectually with UIC’s programs, services, and global initiatives, and (3) actively with UIC’s diverse community. In addition to aiding retention due to involvement, this will enable all UIC students to have a common experience, The UIC Experience, by the time they graduate.

**Living on Campus/Commuting/Off Campus Students**

Students who live in residence halls tend to succeed at higher rates than those who don’t (Pike, 1999). UIC has closed the gap considerably by achieving a retention rate for commuter students that is almost comparable to the rate for resident students. Nevertheless, opportunities for students living on campus to interact with other students and with the campus environment contribute to student satisfaction and retention rates. For first-year students who commute to campus and those who live nearby (neighborhoods near the campus), their needs are similar to resident students: the desire for more time with faculty, more peer interaction, and a closer integration of their living and learning experiences. In particular, the challenges of time management, family commitments, working off-campus, and traveling to campus can inhibit opportunities to engage in campus life.

The task force should examine the educational programs and activities that are occurring in the residence halls and discuss ways to enhance our living-learning environments for those who are not in residence. We need to explore more programming and services for commuter students that will provide opportunities to engage in campus life and form meaningful connections to the campus.

**Student Support Programs/Diversity Centers**
All first-year students are not the same, so it is necessary to develop system-wide, specialized and targeted approaches for diverse student populations. Interventions should be relevant to the students and address their specific needs (i.e., lack of representative faculty and mentors, feelings of disengagement and “being lost in the crowd”). Issues of transition to college, academic preparation, and making connections to the campus are critical areas to consider. The relationship between student support programs and diversity centers should be examined to determine appropriate coordination efforts and issues related to duplication of services (i.e., tutoring, academic support activities). Therefore, this task force should connect as necessary with the Support for Student Success task force.

The task force will also need to consider what services we currently provide to all students in a common manner and consider creating separate services for first-year students only. Such specialized attention might make those reticent new students more likely to seek the supports they need without fear of embarrassment.

**Wellness/Mental Health/Safety**

The first year is an excellent time to reinforce or introduce students to the concept of a wellness lifestyle. Educational efforts are needed to help first-year students understand the importance of developing healthy habits related to nutrition, substance use, sexual health, stress, rest, and exercise to optimize their educational experience and enhance their chances for success.

Today’s first year students are arriving on campus with more problems than students in previous years (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Consequently, more students are seeking help, resulting in an increased demand for counseling services. Students are suffering from serious emotional conditions that include a wide range of diagnostic disorders and many of these students are taking prescribed medications. An increasing number of students are engaging in disturbing and disruptive behaviors (i.e., eating disorders, substance abuse, suicide ideation/attempts, threatening and harassing other individuals). Waiting lists for treatment at college counseling centers are at an all-time high. Counseling services can assist students in their successful transition to college by providing opportunities to explore issues of personal and social adjustment and academic and career development. Crisis intervention and support by counseling center staff can play a key role in student persistence, helping students explore choices and make decisions that could affect their continued enrollment.

An overall sense of well-being and feeling safe on campus is another element which can contribute to student success. Educating students about personal safety and campus resources dedicated to safety (i.e., campus transportation services, emergency communication and assistance, violence prevention programs) is an important campus responsibility. Students should be aware of how to get help and where to get help for example, if they become victims of a crime or experience a traumatic event. Without proper assistance and support, students may not be able to achieve their academic goals and remain in school.

The task force may want to conduct an internal review of current campus resources designed to assist students with wellness, safety, and mental health concerns and develop a comprehensive catalog of existing resources. In addition, a bench-marking activity involving an examination of these types of services on other college campuses, may provide useful information that can be utilized in developing recommendations for the UIC campus to consider. Factors such as the type of staffing and resources dedicated to wellness, safety, and mental health concerns, practitioner-student ratios in counseling centers, and innovative programs and services are examples of elements to examine during the bench-marking activity.
**Career Development/Placement Activities**

First-year students who are undecided about academic majors, degree goals, or careers are attrition risks. Career development activities can assist students in developing goal-directed thinking and behaviors. One area to explore at UIC is how to enhance the central Office of Career Services and coordinate various campus activities related to career services such as career counseling, internship opportunities, and career placement. Moreover, the relationship of the college career offices to the central office requires examination to ensure that UIC maximizes its resources and speaks with one voice during interactions with employers.

Some universities (such as the University of Cincinnati) have career exploration courses. One might imagine a one credit course in which faculty lead classes with an enrollment of 10-15 students who were interested in a particular career track (e.g., health related careers, sciences, humanities, etc.) Students would learn about their career options and faculty would become more engaged with undergraduates.

**Student Leadership/Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement opportunities could be coordinated and promoted along with the development of service learning initiatives for first-year students. Promoting a sense of social awareness and educating first-year students about social issues is a way to engage first-year students in the community, contribute to a sense of belonging, and develop a connection to others. The UIC Experience program might be reviewed to determine ways to engage all first-year students.

**Campus Services**

Students should be treated respectfully by every office they encounter on campus. A number of areas should be examined at UIC related to “customer service” such as electronic communication including the university’s web site, reviewing the registration system for any efficiency improvements, customer service training for staff, and coordination of feedback activities for students to voice issues and concerns with university operations and services.

In considering these issues, the task force is directed to consider the “one-stop shop” approach taken by the University of Minnesota (http://onestop.umn.edu), and others, no doubt.

Summaries of recent focus groups with Student Affairs staff and undergraduate students are included in this report as Appendices D and E.
8. Pre-matriculation Issues

Summer College

We know that Summer College is effective at bridging the transition from high school to college so successfully it has been copied at DePaul University. We also know that Orientation programs are also very effective at introducing students to campus, organizing registration, and dispensing information. And we know that we miss opportunities to learn more about the socio-emotional state of our incoming class that could and should be capitalized upon. This task force will be charged with exploring pre-matriculation opportunities, including:

- Expanding Summer College to include more students by exploring enhancing marketing to potential students and by exploring potential incentives to get students to participate. Should it be mandatory for some students? Perhaps we could provide financial stipends to some students to encourage attendance.
- Reorganizing and expanding Orientation. Perhaps it should include a “welcome week” prior to classes starting. If it were more than one week, perhaps we should consider delivering the UIC dialogues seminar along with other transition programming at this time.
- Moving placement testing online.
- Developing strategies to address technology and information literacy for first-year students.
- Working with the Data Analysis and Assessment Task Force, incorporating a socio-emotional and cognitive diagnostic survey (e.g., the ACT product "Engage") that can be used by campus psychologists, counselors, and advisors to support students in a more individualized and specific manner.

Orientation

Orientation programs in higher education carry great weight in easing the transition experiences of new students since many students begin their higher education experience without knowing what to expect (Tinto, 2012). Knowledge about the nature of the collegiate experience may be limited for low-income and first-generation students as compared to students entering the institution from college-educated families. Orientation programs introduce students to the inner-workings of a campus and to programs and resources intended to assist them with navigating the institutional processes required to complete a post-secondary degree.

Orientation is perhaps one of the most vital responsibilities of student affairs educators because it can set the tone for success and leave a valuable first-impression on students, thus developing institutional allegiance among individual students. Institutional allegiance can be defined as a student’s commitment to remain involved and enrolled at a particular institution of higher education. In simple terms, the more students feel allegiance to a particular community, the more likely they are going to remain engaged and remain enrolled in college (Nora, 2003). Orientation can serve as a critical venue to develop this type of allegiance among new students and set them on a pathway toward success at the university.

The task force should access our current orientation program and determine if there are better ways to accomplish our goals of introducing students to campus.
III. REFERENCES


Association of Deans and Directors of University Colleges and Undergraduate Studies http://adandd.org/


Figure 1: Historical Six-year Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity

The data for each year indicated in this chart represents the graduation rate for students who started six years prior. In other words, the graduation rate for 2012, for instance, includes all students from the Fall 2006 entering first-year cohort who have graduated by Fall 2012.
Figure 2: Graduation Rate by College and ACT

Six-Year Graduation Outcomes for New Freshmen who started in Fall 2004 and 2005

Data for fine colleges excludes Honors College students.
Appendix A: Faculty Focus Group Summary

As part of the initial stages of the Student Success Planning process, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and Dean of the Honors College Bette L. Bottoms hosted a series of faculty focus groups on April 3, 4, and 5, 2012. Sixty-two faculty members (both tenure-track and non-tenure-track) were invited and ultimately, thirty-one participated in the focus groups, with representation from all undergraduate-accepting colleges. An additional seven faculty members expressed interest in attending the sessions but were unable to participate. This participation rate is evidence that a great many faculty members are very much engaged in the success of students at UIC. The faculty members who participated in these focus groups represent some of the most committed faculty members on campus and are eager to be part of this process.

Of course, although a focus group is an excellent way to begin collecting multiple perspectives from across the campus, it is not a scientific way of gauging the extent of concern about specific issues, so this summary must be supplemented with additional discussions through town hall meetings, additional focus groups, etc., led by the task force.

In these focus groups, participants were provided with a number of documents in advance, covering historic retention and graduation rates, financial aid information, college graduation rates, and a summary of Fall 2011 entering class survey data.

At each session, Vice Provost Bottoms or a designate framed the conversation by discussing current retention and graduation data, noting that the current graduation rate of 54% has increased from around 30% a dozen or so years ago. It was also noted that the rates for African Americans and Hispanics is actually much lower than 54%. Because the increased graduation rate was accompanied by little change in the demographics of the entering student body such as mean entering ACT scores, the increase in rates was not due to changing the quality of students or the racial/ethnic mix of students, but rather to the myriad activities and initiatives that have been put in place over the years. Several faculty members expressed concern that there are no data to indicate with any certainty which of the activities/initiatives caused the increase in student success, but it was explained that it is impossible to settle that question empirically because initiatives were added simultaneously and not in a controlled manner with comparison groups that would allow for analyses that could support causal conclusions.

The faculty members were informed that UIC’s student success data is comparable to our peer institutions. Still, no one is satisfied with 54%. Nationally, the calls to improve have come from the Obama administration (Obama’s 2020 initiative http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education). Closer to home, Chancellor Allen-Meares has charged the Undergraduate Policy Council to develop a Student Success Plan to address UIC’s retention and graduation rates. She explained that, as a result of ongoing planning meetings and focus groups, reviews of literature and of successful programs on campus and at peer institutions, a Student Success Plan is being constructed for the university, focused on the eight broad target areas already discussed in this plan.

Vice Provost Bottoms called the groups’ attention to data illustrating the college graduation rates of Honors College vs. non-Honors College students. The rates are consistently 20-30% higher than the other colleges, even when matching students in terms of entering ACT scores, suggesting that the Honors College is already having success with students and that the campus could look to the Honors College and other campus units such as athletics for best practices. Those practices include the “high-impact practices” that are being found across the nation to increase student success, such as holistic and supportive (and, when needed, “intrusive”) advising, first-year seminars, undergraduate research, capstone projects, study abroad, faculty mentoring, and more.
After the stage was set with these introductory remarks, in each of the three focus groups, a wide ranging conversation ensued with a variety of topics covered. Ultimately, a number of common themes emerged.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

Generally speaking, faculty participants embraced the idea that the culture of the campus faculty community needs to change. With exceptions, of course, the groups saw the faculty as not engaging in undergraduate (particularly first-year students) education as much as they should. Several reasons for this were posited:

- At a research institution, faculty members’ primary occupation is creating knowledge and not transmitting knowledge. One participant said that teaching was seen as an obligation, a mindset that should change. One remarked that faculty members should remember that 80% of their salary comes from tuition.

- Teaching first-year students is not viewed as a valued appointment and therefore is eschewed by many faculty members. A participant said, “of course we would all rather teach graduate students.” Some took exception and endorsed teaching undergraduates, but it was clear that most recognized negative attitudes toward teaching first-year students in either themselves or colleagues. In fact, a participant noted that one department uses a formula to excuse faculty from teaching undergraduates altogether: The more publications and grants one has, the less one has to teach at the undergraduate level. Some faculty members compete not to teach undergraduates.

Teaching is not valued by the campus administration and is therefore not a major part of the promotion and tenure papers or process. One participant said that she wanted to teach more undergraduate courses but was encouraged not to increase her publications. Another noted that tenure reports ask for numbers on graduate students supervised and senior theses chaired, but little about first-year education. Similarly, teaching is not rewarded enough through campus recognition programs.

- Tenure-track faculty members teach fewer and fewer first-year courses. The university has come to rely on adjunct faculty and graduate teaching assistants to teach many of the first-year courses. The group was mixed about how negative this might be. Some thought that the experience of faculty members would have a positive impact on first-year students, while others argued that adjunct faculty and teaching assistants might be better trained and more inclined to work with less experienced students.

SOLUTIONS:

PROMOTION AND TENURE REFORM – Without exception, participants agreed that teaching, especially teaching undergraduates, and even more so first-year students, is not valued as part of the promotion and tenure process. For some faculty members, teaching undergraduates will be reward in and of itself. For others, no reward would be sufficient. For most, however, improving the quality of pedagogy and the engagement of instructors may be a matter of carrot-and-stick. One participant said that an interest in teaching undergraduates had to be infused and become part of the DNA of UIC. Because teaching is not currently talked about and expected—and other aspects of faculty professional life are talked about and expected—it is understandably given a lower priority by many faculty members. Teaching first-year students should be a more significant criterion in the promotion and tenure process. One or more new section(s) could be added to the P & T papers that focus on teaching first-year students and undergraduate success.
“I hate to start on a cynical note, because we’re research oriented, there’s not a great deal of value on teaching – grants and pubs are privileged.”
“We have to re-engage faculty and remind them of their responsibility.”
“In tenure reports, we are asked to list grad students, senior theses, but nothing about teaching freshmen. There must be recognition for undergraduate teaching in our portfolios.”
“Refuse raises! If this were private industry, that’s what we’d do.”

FACULTY AWARDS – While tenure reform may take some time and energy, there are a few things that could be instituted immediately, with a small outlay of cash. Several participants suggested a teaching award for first-year teaching. In fact, such an award would be included in a teaching portfolio and could influence tenure review as well.

EVALUATIONS – Participants agreed that the current teaching evaluation system is not effective. The participants did not have concrete recommendations for how to fix evaluations, but recognized that if we are to ask more from our faculty, a reasonable evaluation measure is required.

“We have a funny way of evaluating teaching. Everyone gets fours or fives, so the SIT scores don’t indicate anything.”
“We could post the evaluations online and create a kind of competition for the highest evaluations, which could be rewarded with awards.”

TRAINING – Participants recognize that faculty members typically do not have a background in pedagogy and teaching methodology. Many recommended varying methods of professional development efforts such as:

- **Workshops** – Some participants mentioned workshops such as those that CETL offers a couple of times a semester.
- **Master Teachers Courses** – Another possible model would be voluntary teaching courses that would offer certification that could be used for a teaching portfolio.
- **Mandatory New Hire Training** – The campus might start immediately requiring teacher training in methodology and pedagogy for all new hires.
- **TA/Lecturer Training** – TAs and lecturers receive varying degrees of training across campus.
- One participant recommended a full semester of training for inexperienced instructors prior to student contact.

FACULTY MENTORING – Most participants voiced an appreciation for the important role of faculty in mentoring students—one-on-one interaction between faculty members and students. This is separate from academic advising (which many faculty thought might best be left to professional non-faculty advisors) and is most often geared toward the student’s success in a discipline or profession. One participant said that many first-year students don’t know what they want to do. They think they want to be engineers, physicians, or criminologists, but they have not been exposed to the real work of those disciplines. This faculty member claimed, somewhat polemically, that he could tell in thirty minutes if the student will fit the major. The point was that most students do not have such dedicated time with a faculty member in their first year and could benefit from it. Students often pursue majors based on parental influence or a vague understanding of a discipline. Faculty mentoring could both help students succeed and redirect them to more appropriate majors when necessary, more quickly than is currently the case, especially since most advising is now done in such a brief period of time that the advising session is merely about picking classes than about helping students understand choices for their future.
LEARNING COMMUNITIES – Several faculty members recalled the effort to establish learning communities over the past several years (e.g., the LAS Links project, where two to three courses were linked in terms of registration so that students could take classes in cohorts), and how, ultimately, that project may not have succeeded (although it is unclear whether data necessary for a fair assessment were collected). Still, faculty members recognized and appreciated the concept of learning communities – an arrangement where students register for a number of courses with the same cohort, thus providing a measure of automatic peer learning and support. Participants were very supportive of revisiting this effort, as is discussed in the Targeted First-Year Curriculum section.

“We have the Global Learning Community in LAS where many [high impact practices] are already happening. We should learn from what is already here.”

“When you talk about faculty development, you also must talk about how to activate peer learning and educate faculty about what peer learning is. They are not trained to do that.”

“Data is mixed about learning communities. Some say it is enough to throw students together, while others say you have to have faculty working in concert.”

“Perhaps we could establish virtual learning communities.”

ADVISING – Although not strictly in the purview of faculty, at every session, advising was mentioned as a particular problem at UIC. Some participants knew that some degree of centralization of advising was being considered. Overall, there was support for centralization, but there were also a few cautionary voices from the Colleges of Applied Health Sciences and Architecture and the Arts, AHS, and A&A. For those smaller colleges, some faculty members believed that the specialized attention their students received was integral to their potential success (although it was pointed out that the graduation rates in those colleges are no better than in other colleges). For others, however, centralization translated to specialized attention for first-year students by professionals trained in understanding the particular needs to new students. Some faculty members also endorsed the notion of four-year graduation plans that would be clearly articulated by advising.

“Students should be required to see an advisor. Athletes are under constant scrutiny and have the highest graduation rates and highest campus GPA.”

“Advisors have to be integrated into the fabric of the university. Currently they just go by a template and have no idea what students need.”

“I’d like to see centralized understanding of advising [in the first-year] and then have more departmental advising for the majors.”

“Advising is currently seen as a punitive thing. Students don’t like to be put in the position of having to see an advisor.”

“Students don’t go to advisors for preparation.”

“We tried to get cohorts organized in [my department], but advisors actually worked against us during orientation.”

“There needs to be an office where students must go in and be advised by a first-year advisor who is trained in first-year issues.”

OTHER ISSUES – Other suggestions don’t fit into the categories above:

Policies – Some college policies are restrictive and should be reviewed to ensure they are student centered and not merely bureaucratic.

“I spend a lot of time apologizing for breaking rules.”

Registration – Students find the registration process very difficult. Course scheduling has gotten less flexible through the years.

“Once in the units, we do a good job managing them.”
Data – As mentioned above, many faculty members would like to ensure that any initiative is data driven.

“We don’t want to assign solutions without knowing the reasons for the issues in the first place.”

Orientation to the major – Every student should have an extensive orientation to the major, which from this group implies more than a policy-driven introduction. Students should be introduced to the work of a discipline.

Course difficulty – Many courses at UIC are more difficult than they should be.

“We see curves on exams where 50% of the class scores under 50%. Such difficult courses could shatter kids’ dreams. We need to take a different approach to how we try to teach a subject in a semester. I often think my course is getting better, but in fact I’m just adding content and making it more difficult.”

Focus on “good enough” – One participant made the pragmatic point that, yes, we should be concerned about excellence, but we should also be more concerned about getting students through the first semester.

“It’s like the little old lady in It’s a Wonderful Life who rushed the bank and wanted all her money. George Bailey asked her how much she needed to get through the weekend. ‘Five dollars.’ In some cases, we need to consider what it takes to get a student through the first semester, and then figure out the next step in the spring.”

Space – One participant made the point that students need healthy, clean, attractive spaces to hang out and work together. His building is a “death trap, so students don’t go there.” Also, the campus needs to make it clear that campus is a place where learning happens all the time. Unfortunately, most of the buildings are locked at night and on the weekends… “After 5pm, nothing happens.”
APPENDIX B: A SUMMARY OF ADVISING AT SELECT INSTITUTIONS

1. University of Iowa

Iowa has about 20,000 undergraduates, about 4,000 of whom are first-year students. Retention rate is 83%.

Iowa employs a split model of advising. They have a central Advising Center, reporting to Enrollment Services, and providing “professional academic advising to virtually all entering College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) first-year students, some entering CLAS transfers, open majors, pre-professional students, non-degree/special status students, and entering students in the IowaLink Program. Entering students with declared majors in Engineering, Speech Pathology and Audiology, and Physics and Astronomy are assigned to advisers in their major department.” [http://www.uiowa.edu/~uaactr/]

Iowa has a University College ([http://bit.ly/eTQ4Xz](http://bit.ly/eTQ4Xz)), but it apparently does not include an advising component. Instead, University College is home to a myriad of “major college-level programs such as the University of Iowa Honors Program, Study Abroad, Career Center Programs, and study at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory.” On the organizational chart, University College is listed under “Other Academic Programs”—not a college—reporting to the Provost.

The Center has a physical location on campus and also serves as a clearinghouse for advising resources, most significant of which is SWAT.

**The SWA+T Team (Study, Workshops & Tutoring)**

Offers a “Free, drop-in, small group tutoring for a variety of courses – presumably high enrollment “gateway” courses. It is unclear from the Web site whether the workshops are conducted by peers, faculty, instructors, TAs or professional advisors.

Other resources collected by the Center resource page include the following:

- **Tutor Referral Service** – links to a tutor referral service—like our URE—administered by the Student Union, and presumably, student affairs.
- **Mathematics Tutorial Laboratory** Link to Math Learning Center run through the Math Department
- **Writing Center** – Links to the Writing Center page. Their Writing Center seems to report to LAS.
- **Speaking Center** – Links to the Center, which is housed in the Rhetoric Department. Provides one-to-one instruction in all aspects of public speaking.
- **Statistics Tutorial Laboratory** – Administered by Department of Stats and Actuarial Sciences
- **History Teaching and Writing Center** – Oddly, the History Department runs a “Writing Center” as well, with a Web site that seems to have been created in 1995. (It is a history department after all).
- **Language Media Center** – Administered by the Division of World Languages
- **Chemistry Center** – Administered by Chemistry Center. Does not seem robust.
- **Computer Science Help Lab** – Administered by Department of Computer Science
- **Engineering Tutorial Programs** – College of Engineering.
- **Physics** – Department of Physics – Tutorial Schedule only
- **Center for Diversity & Enrichment** – “The CDE brings together under one umbrella a variety of programs, offices and services that work to create a welcoming climate for student, staff and faculty from communities underrepresented in higher education.”
- **University Counseling Service**
GPA Calculator

**College of Liberal Arts and Sciences - Academic Assistance** – LAS also provides a list of resources very similar to this list.

During the first two weeks of the semester, the Center provides “Advisor on Call.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Center Staffing:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional advisors:</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty advisors</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer advisors</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty advisors are located in the departments. In LAS for instance, faculty advising is expected. Students are assigned faculty advisors when they declare a major and have earned at least 24 credit hours.

http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/teaching/advising.shtml.

2. **Temple University** – [www.temple.edu](http://www.temple.edu)

Temple is often mentioned at UIC as a reliable peer for UIC based on their urban setting and diverse population; included here the full breakdown of FA10 enrollment by race/ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment by Ethnicity</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2,834</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4,198</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>16,280</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>2,671</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Students</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27,803</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Their retention rate is 87%. Advising at Temple is highly decentralized, and methods are mixed depending on the college. For instance, the College of Science and Technology has established an Advising Center with a crew of seven professional advisors and four administrators (http://bit.ly/evDYXi).

Similarly, the College of Liberal Arts has their own Advising Center (http://bit.ly/evDYXi), with eight professional advisors and four administrators.
And the school of Communication and Theater has an advising center (http://sct.temple.edu/web/undergraduate/advising/) with six professional advisors and three administrators.

These are just three examples, and I assume the same model exists in the fifteen or so other colleges and schools that serve undergraduates at Temple.


“Working through the Office of Admissions, the Russell Conwell Center (RCC) provides university admission for students who have a strong academic record in high school, but may not have "aced" the SAT/ACT. Once selected by the Office of Admissions as a university student, students are enrolled in the RCC, which serves as their academic advising unit and academic support community through graduation. The RCC offers a wide range of services to students, including:

- academic advisement and counseling
- individual and group tutoring
- academic and educational support
- undergraduate research
- employment opportunities
- leadership development activities
- peer mentoring
- career identification and exploration
- scholarship support
- six computer labs
- a laptop loan program
- cultural and academic enrichment programs

Contact the Office of Admissions at 215-204-7200 for further information. See the Student Support Services section of this Bulletin for more descriptive information about the services provided at the RCC, view the web site at www.temple.edu/rcc or call the RCC at 215-204-1252.”

29,300 undergraduates and about 6,200 first-year students with a retention rate of 82%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Undergraduate Scholars at UH is a branch of the university that serves as a resource center for undeclared students, pre-professional students, and students in transition as well as those University of Houston staff and community organizations who support them. USCholars focuses specifically on helping students navigate through the Core Curriculum and in helping them to feel more a part of the University of Houston community itself.”

Under the leadership of a Director, there are four components to the Undergraduate Scholars:

- Joint Admission Medical Program (a UHP-type program)
- College Success Program (a support program that targets first generation students among other groups)
- Academic Advising Center

The Center is the primary advising resource for: prospective students; new and current undeclared students; students on academic warning; students in transition; alternative major exploration; veterans and Texas Success Initiative (a special access program).

Advisors’ Portfolio

- Established in 2003, the goal is to assure that students have access to “qualified and highly trained professional academic advisors. The signature program of the Advisors’ Portfolio is the Academic Advisor Training and Certification Program. This program includes: 15 hours web-based training; 28 hours of Workshop sessions; and 13 hours of Advising Practicum and Portfolio Review. The Program is open to all UH employees involved in undergraduate academic advising.
- The Advising Coordinators Team (ACT) is composed of representatives from advising units on campus and other key offices with which they interact. Established in 2007, the ACT provides a forum to discuss advising issues of common concern.
4. Ohio University

Ohio University has a total undergraduate enrollment of 17,212 (2010 fall enrollment - [http://bit.ly/gXibVm](http://bit.ly/gXibVm)). Retention rate is 81%. Ohio University, the 2005 NACADA Award Winner, operates with a decentralized model of advising, but rather than advising centers situated in the colleges, students are assigned a faculty advisor. AAC reports to University College, and a brief history of the Center is located here: [http://www.ohio.edu/aac/aboutus.cfm](http://www.ohio.edu/aac/aboutus.cfm).

OU also has a University College. Students may declare a major upon entering, or enroll in University College, which itself offers two BA degrees (criminal justice and specialized studies; they also offer a number of associates degrees. [http://www.ohio.edu/univcollege/](http://www.ohio.edu/univcollege/)). The following is a list of colleges that accept incoming first-year students:

- University College
- College of Business
- College of Arts & Sciences
- College of Education
- College of Health and Human Services
- Russ College of Engineering and Technology

What is especially notable about OU’s commitment to student success is the Ohio University Academic Advancement Center: [http://www.ohio.edu/aac/](http://www.ohio.edu/aac/). AAC is located in the library and has a large staff of five administrators and four instructors. The instructors teach academic preparation courses.

There are a number of components of the AAC including the Writing Center, a sophisticated computer lab, a math learning center, a supplemental instruction program which targets gateway courses in accounting, biology, chemistry, economics, math and psychology), academic preparation/skills courses such as computer literacy, learning strategies, reading and vocabulary, and an online tutoring referral service. AAC also houses the College Adjustment Program (CAP), an initiative that targets at-risk students, identified by a specific criteria that incorporates ACT scores, first-generation status, etc. [http://www.ohio.edu/aac/cap/](http://www.ohio.edu/aac/cap/). An additional set of services are housed within CAP, which overlap somewhat with the general AAC, but also includes professional advising, peer advising, private tutoring, study tables, and computer resources.

OU has a FYE Web page, but it does not seem to have much to offer. [http://www.southern.ohiou.edu/firstyear/](http://www.southern.ohiou.edu/firstyear/). Interestingly, they do offer five learning communities that do not seem to be linked by a common CRN. It is a small number of courses that are organized by topic. [http://bit.ly/iJqxB](http://bit.ly/iJqxB)

Students who apply to Ohio University are able to declare a major by listing the intended major on the application. Undecided students have several options by beginning as an undecided student in any of these undergraduate colleges:

- University College
- College of Business
- College of Arts & Sciences
- College of Education
- College of Health and Human Services
- Russ College of Engineering and Technology
5. University of Cincinnati

In Fall 2011, 22,893 undergraduates were enrolled—about 6,000 first-year students. Their retention rate is about 85%.

Advising at UC is decentralized, though there is an peculiar arrangement for undeclared students. While UC does not have a University College, they do have a “Center for Exploratory Studies,” a clearinghouse for information for “Exploratory” majors—aaka undecided. The Center has a physical location and is staffed to provide “exploratory advising.” The staff consists of two administrators and seven “exploratory advisors.” This advising is separate from academic advising, which is handled by the colleges. “Exploratory students see an advisor in the College of Arts & Sciences. Other students see a College Academic Advisor or Faculty Adviser. The Web site also features some simple tools and resources to help students find out more about available degrees and possible career paths.

The Center offers a sleek matchmaking site for students wishing to be student mentors/mentees. Cincinnati Sophomore Initiative is an interesting program that seeks to “avoid the sophomore slump” by providing services to students in their second year. Unfortunately, the link leading to those resources is dead. The Center provides three courses designed for students with exploratory majors, though the courses are not part of a first-year seminar. They are three-credit hour courses, presumably pass/fail.

**Discovering UC** (15MLTI175) Choose a UC major! This course explores over 125 baccalaureate majors and associated career opportunities. Faculty guest presentations from every college and exploratory activities are a big hit in this course. It’s offered winter quarter and summer term by the Center for Exploratory Studies.

**Discovering A&S** (15MLTI125) Choose a liberal arts or natural science major! This course explores the majors in the McMicken College of Arts & Sciences. It’s offered in the spring quarter by the college.

**Special Topics in Career Decision Making** (18CNSL302) Choose a career! This course helps students to explore careers, practice interview skills, and begin building a resume that works. It’s offered fall, winter, and spring quarters.

Another section of the Web site offers a list of resources. A few lead to Monster.com resources, but one is worth stealing: A list of every major at UC with a second list of “what you can do with that major.” This seems like an easy thing to do to help students think about their futures. The Center is very clear about its role in advising: “Remember, exploratory advisors specialize in major selection, but your college academic advisor or faculty advisor helps you with course planning and course selection.”
6. University of Wisconsin

Wisconsin has about 29,000 undergraduates, about 5,200 first-year students, and a retention rate of 95%.

Advising at Wisconsin is decentralized. All of the advising occurs in the colleges Students enter some majors by declaration and others by application, and a complex chart of this process is available here: [http://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/majors_entrance.htm](http://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/majors_entrance.htm). Academic advisors are assigned to EACH undergraduate student. Students in support services then have “auxiliary” advisors. Students have access to their advisor information through the Wisconsin portal.

Wisconsin’s version of the Advising Resource Center is the “Advising Toolkit” ([http://www.learning.wisc.edu/advising/index.asp](http://www.learning.wisc.edu/advising/index.asp)), a notable aspect of which is a statement about graduating in four years (Graduating in Four Years [http://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/study.html#fouryears](http://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/study.html#fouryears)). The list of all majors includes a column indicating that the major may be completed in four years—a four-year plan.

Students with undeclared majors have a special resource available – a cross-college advising service ([http://www.ccas.wisc.edu/](http://www.ccas.wisc.edu/)).

“CCAS provides integrated academic and career advising resources for undecided and exploring undergraduates.

- Incoming first-year students and transfers who are officially assigned to CCAS advisors at SOAR
- Students not officially assigned to CCAS who change their intended major or are considering changing their major
- Students who are denied admission into limited-enrollment programs (business, pharmacy, nursing, education, journalism, etc.) and who now find themselves exploring their options
- All students who would like assistance with early career exploration through the Exploration Center for Majors & Careers"

To the final point is handled by a component of CCAS, the “Exploration Center,” designed to assist students in exploring majors and careers. CCAS has a large staff including a director, four administrators, and seventeen advisors. It is worth checking out the photos and mouse-over effects at [http://www.ccas.wisc.edu/ccasteam.html](http://www.ccas.wisc.edu/ccasteam.html). Three career advisors from this staff are dedicated to the Exploration Center.
7. Indiana University

IU has 32,400 undergraduates with 7300 first-year students, and a retention rate of 78% retention rate.

IU operates using a University College model, named “University Division.”
http://ud.iub.edu/academicadvising.php

“As the major gateway to IUB, UD provides individualized advice and support for new undergraduate students as they make the transition to college life, explore academic options, and prepare to enter degree programs. UD encourages students to develop the skills, knowledge and independence they need for attainment of educational goals.”

Advising is key to this attention to goal attainment.

“Each University Division student is assigned an advisor, with whom s/he is encouraged to make appointments throughout the year. First-year students who live in residence halls are usually assigned to advisors who maintain offices in residential neighborhoods. Students who live off campus, transfer students, international students, and all students beyond the first-year are usually assigned to advisors in the Division’s main office, currently located in Maxwell Hall.

As an incoming student for fall you will be mailed the name of your advisor during August, along with the date/time of an initial advising meeting during Welcome Week. At this meeting, you will learn your advisor’s office location, hours, the procedure for making an appointment, and other information that will help you successfully begin your first year as a college student. If you enter IUB in January, you are assigned an advisor at the time of initial registration.”

After declaring a major, students receive advising from departments, schools or small colleges. University Division is also the home for a variety of support services including:

- **Academic Support Center** Similar to UIC’s ACE, ASC offers tutoring, workshops, and review sessions; administered by Diversity, Equity and Multicultural Affairs
- **Explore Majors at IU** Information on matching your interests with academic options
- **Groups Student Support Services** Similar to our support services, especially TRIO, Groups offers academic advising, financial aid counseling, mentoring, and tutoring for first-generation and low-income students and students with disabilities
- **Mentoring Services and Leadership Development** Enhancing the quality of student life and learning with an emphasis on diversity, equity, and student achievement; administered by the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Multicultural Affairs
- **Student Academic Center** Seems to overlap with ASC; this unit report to Undergraduate Affairs; offers academic assessment and assistance, supplemental instruction, and for-credit courses on study skills and adjusting to college
- **Writing Tutorial Services** Similar to our Writing Center, offers tutoring for all phases of writing
8. **University of Florida**

Florida has about 32,000 undergraduates and about 4,000 first-year students. For some reason, the classes are hugely disproportionate; while there are 4,000 first-year students, there are 12,000 seniors. Retention rate is 95%. [http://bit.ly/e8b6pO](http://bit.ly/e8b6pO)

Florida employs a decentralized advising structure. There is a central advising Web page ([www.ufadvising.ufl.edu](http://www.ufadvising.ufl.edu)), but it simply impresses on students the importance of seeking academic advice from their college. Students are instructed to see their advisors once a term; it is unclear if this is mandatory. The Web site also features cursory information about choosing a major. The Advising Resource Web site is housed in the Provost’s office.

Florida offers First-year seminars ([http://www.dso.ufl.edu/nsfp/firstyearflorida/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/nsfp/firstyearflorida/)), which are one-credit, optional, and designed as student success seminars. They connect students to resources, expose them to faculty, peer mentors and fellow students.

**Most students receive advising through LAS:** “The Academic Advising Center (AAC) provides undergraduate advising services for CLAS students, exploratory students, Pre-Health and Pre-Law students, and other students interested in CLAS majors.” It is interesting to note the emphasis again on exploratory students.

“The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' Academic Advising Center (AAC) and the Career Resource Center (CRC) provide academic and personal assistance to those students who have not yet decided on a major. First-year students may remain "exploratory" for their first three terms of enrollment. This general classification gives students a certain degree of freedom in experimenting with courses that might help them decide between majors. Students interested in any of the three exploratory tracks (Science and Engineering, Humanities and Letters, or Social and Behavioral) can officially declare this classification with an advisor in the AAC.”
9. University of Minnesota

Minnesota has 30,500 undergraduates with 5516 first-year students and a retention rate of about 90%.

Minnesota has decentralized advising and no University College and no first-year seminars and no centralized advising center or academic support system. They do have an extensive student services Web site that is well organized and worth considering as a model for the ARC Web site. [http://onestop.umn.edu/](http://onestop.umn.edu/)

From the catalog:

**ONE STOP STUDENT SERVICES**

Go to onestop.umn.edu for convenient, comprehensive, expert information on registration, finances, financial aid, billing, payments, and student accounts. Self-service tools and forms available at your fingertips. Or use any of these other convenient ways to get help when you need it:

**Visit a One Stop Student Services Center:**
- to turn in scholarship checks; obtain duplicate study lists; have in-person registration and cancel/adds processed; mail, e-mail, and fax registrations for non-degree-seeking students; obtain certification letters and APAS reports.
- for official transcripts (see page 15 for service and fee information) and for in-person service for unofficial copies of student records at no charge (limit of two copies per day). Unofficial transcripts and requests for official transcripts are also online at onestop.umn.edu/onestop.grades.html.
- for regular service for certification letters (no charge; limit six copies per day) and rush/fax service ($10 charge).
- for assistance with individual student record problems or questions; address changes; Veterans certification (Fraser Hall only); student loan deferments; turning in Application for Change of College or Status forms; obtaining maps and miscellaneous publications and information.

**One Stop counselors are experts** on registration, financial aid, billing, payments, and student accounts. Walk-in counseling is available at three campus locations...

They do not seem to be touted as experts on advising, however, and this is an important distinction.

There is a One Stop page of resources for Students, Faculty and Staff. The Staff page (and interestingly enough, NOT the faculty page) has an extensive section related to advising. [http://onestop.umn.edu/staff/index.html](http://onestop.umn.edu/staff/index.html). Note that many of the same resources are available on the faculty side, but under the category of “Teaching and Learning Support.”
10. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

31,500 undergraduates, 6,900 first-year students and a retention rate of about 85%.

UIUC employs a split model of advising.

The Division of General Studies (DGS) is a member of the Campus Center for Advising and Academic Services and is a comprehensive advising resource for first-year students and sophomores who want to explore the academic landscape before declaring a major.” It also offers assistance to students who are contemplating a new major direction.

The DGS has a large staff of four administrators and ten professional advisors.

A component of the DGS is the Program for Academic Support and Success (PASS), a support and mentoring program designed specifically for DGS students on academic probation. It is an intrusive advising (meet with advisor 5 times per semester) to assist students in moving off probation. [http://www.dgs.illinois.edu/pass/index.html](http://www.dgs.illinois.edu/pass/index.html)

11. DePaul University

16,000 undergraduates, 2,700 first-year students and a retention rate of 78%.

DePaul uses a split model of advising. The Office for Academic Advising Support (OAAS) provides holistic advising and major exploration services to undeclared and exploratory students, and advise newly admitted transfer students making a transition to DePaul. Students with exploratory or undeclared majors are directed to OAAS.

Otherwise, advising is handled in the colleges.

Although not specifically stated in their description, it appears that the OAAS also targets first-year students as part of the First Year Academic Success Program. The First Year Academic Success Program is similar to UIC’s Summer College, and is for students with low ACT test scores, negative indicators on high school transcripts, or low placement tests. “Thus, we are providing you with the opportunity to take one or more of these prerequisite courses prior to starting at DePaul in the fall. These prerequisite courses will be offered on-campus during the academic year, but we are offering you the opportunity to complete them over the summer, tuition-free.” [http://fyas.depaul.edu/Pages/FAQ.aspx](http://fyas.depaul.edu/Pages/FAQ.aspx)

About 27,000 undergraduates and 6,500 first-year students with a 96% retention rate.

General statement:

“The University of Michigan is fully committed to supporting its undergraduate students. To this end, the University offers numerous office and services to assist students in their academic pursuits. However, students are expected to take charge of their education…”

Academic Advisors are provided by the School or College in which the student enrolled.

The **Comprehensive Studies Program**, formed in 1983, is a comprehensive program of academic support for students with outstanding potential for success at the University of Michigan.

Components of the CSP include:
- Summer Bridge
- Academic Advising Services
- Financial Aid Advising

Advising in CSP appears to be far more engaged and intrusive.
APPENDIX C: STRUCTURE OF STUDENT SUCCESS PLANNING COMMITTEES

Undergraduate Policy Council

Co-chaired by
Lon Kaufman, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost
Barbara Henley, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

UPC Membership:

| Bette L. Bottoms, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and Dean of the Honors College | Judith Kirshner, Dean of the College of Architecture and the Arts |
| Paul Brandt-Rauf, Dean School of Public Health | Michael Mikhail, Dean of the College of Business Administration |
| Kevin Browne, Vice Provost for Academic Enrollment Services | Peter Nelson, Dean of the College of Engineering |
| Mary Case, University Librarian | Michael Pagano, Dean of the College of Urban Planning and Public Administration |
| Victoria Chou, Dean of the College of Education | Astrida Tantillo, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| Linda Deanna, Dean of Students | Terri Weaver, Dean of the College of Nursing |
| Bo Fernhall, Dean of the College of Applied Health Sciences | |

Undergraduate Success Planning Committee

Task Forces

1. Data Analysis and Assessment
2. Support for Student Learning
3. Faculty Engagement
4. Advising
5. Financing College
6. Campus Life
7. Pre-matriculation Support
8. Targeted First-Year Curriculum
APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF STUDENT AFFAIRS STAFF MEMBER FOCUS GROUPS

As part of the planning process for the Student Success Plan, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Linda Deanna, hosted a series of student affairs staff focus groups on April 17 and 18, 2012. Twenty-four staff members participated in the focus groups. The staff members who participated expressed an interest in serving on the task forces which will be established as part of the plan. Several themes emerged during the focus group discussions and the staff comments are listed below:

First-Year Student Characteristics/Concerns
First generation college students with little knowledge about the collegiate experience.
Undecided majors with difficulty developing and identifying academic and career goals.
Students feel that “I don’t have” what college expects.
Health and wellness issues.
Family obligations.
Social and emotional needs.
Stress from overwhelming schedules.
Academic preparedness and issues of how to handle the rigors of college life.
Making the transition from high school to college and adjustment issues.
Financing their education.

Elements of a Success Plan
Defining student success and identifying barriers and factors that contribute to success.
Advising is key to success.
Advising should be intrusive.
Assist students in developing decision making and time management skills.
Develop a campus-wide first year dialogue course co-taught by academic and student affairs.
Offer structured, personalized experiences for students.
Develop an exit interview process to examine why students leave.

Campus Environment
Create a campus culture of acceptance and validation.
Issues of customer service need to be addressed.
Use technology to communicate with students through on-line chats (i.e., library chats).

Academics
Evaluation of first year courses.
Use test scores to determine where students need help.
Look at the classroom experience for first-year students. Can improvements be made?
Develop opportunities for more faculty/student interaction inside and outside the classroom.
Faculty do not have enough time available for student interaction.
Research 1 institution presents challenges related to emphasis on research first, and then teaching.
Keeping students informed of their academic progress (i.e., mid-term grades, faculty office hours)
Build curriculum for first-year students.
Identify high-risk courses for first-year students.
Develop cohorts (mimic Honors College structure).
Look at the infrastructure of Honors College–what are the components in place that contribute to student success? Why don’t some students select to be in the Honors College? Address the misconceptions about this college.
Limit number of classes that first year students can take.
Contributions of Student Affairs to the Plan
Orientation can get students off to a good start.
UIC Experience can assist students to connect to the campus.
Enhance the marketing of our services to students.
Create opportunities for students to get involved through programs and activities.
Develop learning-living communities in the residence halls.
Examine services for commuter students and offer opportunities for engagement.
Make a concerted effort to attend more student events and interact with students.
Utilize a developmental, holistic approach in working with first-year students.
Promote resources available to assist students.

NOTE: Although a focus group is an excellent way to begin collecting multiple perspectives from across the campus, it is not a scientific way of gauging the extent of concern about specific issues, so these collections of thoughts must be supplemented with additional discussions through town hall meetings, additional focus groups, etc., led by the task force.
APPENDIX E: SUMMARY OF STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

A focus group with seventeen UIC students was held on April 20, 2012 to discuss the development of a Student Success Plan for the campus. The session was facilitated by Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Linda Deanna. The students who participated expressed an interest in serving on the task forces which will be established as part of the plan. The students were happy to be included in the conversation and were very engaged in the discussion. Several themes emerged during the focus group discussions and the students comments are listed below:

Orientation
Orientation helped.
Orientation leaders need better training and they have to be honest.
Orientation throws too much at you and broke students into groups by race or major.
Orientation was not effective for preparing students for the campus experience.
Concerns were expressed about segregation of races during orientation.
Emphasize student organizations and importance of getting involved.
Find orientation leaders that want to make a difference.

Involvement/Engagement
Involvement is a key.
First-year was phenomenal because I got involved in everything.
You have to choose to be involved and engaged since those things make a difference.
Campus Programs could push students to be more involved.
Many people need to learn how to become connected.

Commuting
Commuters have trouble meeting people.
Commuters lose a lot going back and forth.
Commuters’ experience was tiring; stress getting back and forth from campus was high.
When you become a commuter you become a machine.
Commuting on the train has been a place to network.
Commuting has contributed to emotional issues.
There is a disconnect between residents and those that who aren’t living on campus. This can cause issues with group projects because of a commuters’ limits to time on campus.
Commuter resource center (CRC) has become too much a party room. Need a quiet place to rest/nap.
CRC can help to integrate residents and commuters.
CRC could expand and environment is unwelcoming (too much socializing).
Could have more opportunity for commuters to network.
Commuter culture is a hallmark of UIC experience
Commuters don’t get a chance to have peer mentors.
Expand commuter lounge.

Living on Campus
It is easier to be involved when you live on campus.
Changing from resident to commuter is tough if you try to stay involved.
Residence hall programs helped students to network.
Make it possible or mandatory housing for first-year students to live on campus for at least a semester; subsidize if needed.
On-campus living makes you connected to the university and resources; asset to success; feel more a part of the campus.
Academics
Honors College small classes helped to develop engagement to faculty.
Summer College helped get to know campus and get established and learn and meet faculty.
If I'd been a LAS student, I wouldn't have made it. A&A helped create a small intimate experience.
Small classes are important.
Student success has to be centered on academics.
Need something like integrated curriculum for first two years like Princeton.
There are too many kids failing organic chemistry or not even making it to organic chemistry.
Advising is the other huge problem. Need better support.
Honors College first-year seminar is good.
Have a First-year 101 for all students.
More training for mandatory advisors. And you never see the same advisor.
Advising! Make it better.
Concerned about time constraints on professors.
Consider how first-year students process information in preparation for delivery.
Promote undergraduate catalog as resource.

Interactions with Faculty/Staff/Peers
Getting to know upperclassmen was great. Opportunity helped to share experiences and use as resources.
Some faculty and staff have been awesome but some just completely ignore you.
Mentors are important and can be students, faculty, and staff.
Create mentorship programs to create connections.
It is important to form relationships with professors.
Develop small cohorts/ learning communities of students.

Advice/Suggestions
The first year is what you make of it.
You have to make it your own.
College should be focused on getting students to do something new.
Rely too much on mass mail. Drop the mass mail label on emails.
First-year experience office would help.
Develop app for how to get to classes.
Whatever is done should be done sooner than later
Make people feel comfortable right away. Make them feel at home.
A one stop location for complaints would help button on home page.
On-campus jobs are important. Know your campus- spend time exploring campus.
Customer service issues of poor response time or no response from staff and can be disheartening to first-year students.
Students need opportunities to vent.
Make UIC students feel at home and comfortable.

NOTE: Although a focus group is an excellent way to begin collecting multiple perspectives from across the campus, it is not a scientific way of gauging the extent of concern about specific issues, so these collections of thoughts must be supplemented with additional discussions through town hall meetings, additional focus groups, etc., led by the task force.
APPENDIX F: MISSION AND PROPOSED SERVICES OF THE UIC UNDERGRADUATE SUCCESS CENTER

Mission Statement:
The mission of the Undergraduate Success Center is to help UIC students progress and graduate with high achievement, attaining their educational goals in a timely manner. The center defines advising as holistic, intrusive, and supportive, guiding students in the development of their academic, career, and life goals. Advising will encompass information about academic program requirements for all degree-granting colleges; the benefit of students building relationships with faculty; academic opportunities such as research, study abroad, internships, co-ops, civic engagement, scholarships, etc.; and referrals to a host of campus support services including academic support units, tutoring services, records and registration, financial aid, counseling, cultural centers, career planning resources, etc. In essence, we become an advising and “one-stop” referral resource for students who need help.

All of these activities are meant to complement academic advising and other services already being provided by colleges, in so doing the Undergraduate Success Center becomes a resource for not only the student, but also the college and major advisors.

The center is committed to the following principles and goals:

- Shared responsibility for academic success between advisors and students, and between the Undergraduate Success Center, the colleges, and support services;
- Open and frequent communication with college and other campus advisors;
- Building of meaningful relationships with students, which is facilitated by assigned advisors;
- Listening carefully to students’ questions and concerns, fostering an environment conducive to personal and academic growth, and assisting students in understanding the purpose and goals of higher education;
- Providing timely and accurate advising, planning, and resource referrals in a collaborative, supportive environment;
- Developing links across campus to ensure students’ seamless navigation of the educational system from admission to graduation;
- Assisting and advocating for students as they experience a variety of college transitions;
- Promoting students’ engagement on campus in ways that lead to student success;
- Respecting and valuing the diversity of UIC students, their perspectives, life experiences, interests, world views, and cultures. We seek to foster an environment in which the dignity and unique characteristics of each individual are recognized and respected.

Services Provided at the USC:
The USC is a gateway to campus-wide resources and information for both students and advisors:

Services for Students:

1. Comprehensive, individualized advising and action planning that includes
   i. Needs assessment
   ii. Monitoring of the detailed four-year graduation plan provided by the students’ colleges ensuring effective progress
   iii. Referrals
   iv. Creation of individualized action plans with deadlines and accountability

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v. Exploration of co-curricular and extra-curricular campus engagement opportunities (e.g., study abroad, student organizations, etc.)
vi. Ongoing follow-up meetings

2. Peer Mentoring Program
Successful upper-class students will be matched with first-year students. Peer mentors volunteer for the program and receive special training consisting of review of empirically validated best practices in peer mentorship.

3. Explorers Program
Undeclared students who are still exploring majors/careers will be offered a program in partnership with the Counseling Center, Office of Career Services, and academic departments.

4. Faculty Mentoring Program
A group of faculty volunteers will each mentor a number of students, meeting with each student at least once per semester.

5. Academic Skills Resources
Establish partnerships with ACE, campus learning centers, etc. to ensure that students have access to time management workshops, tutoring, cutting edge online resources (assignment calculator, GPA calculator, smartphone apps,

The Assignment Calculator will assist a student with the standard steps toward completing an assignment that includes links to web resources. This is based on the original Assignment Calculator from the University of Minnesota.

6. Web site
A sophisticated yet user-friendly Web site will be developed to support the “one stop” nature of the Undergraduate Success Center.

Services for Advisors:

7. Frequent and detailed reports to major and college advisors detailing USC contacts with students

8. Undergraduate Advisors’ Resource Center whose activities are coordinated by a board of advisors from across campus. Activities include:
   Planning Advising Summits
   Hosting Webinars and other professional development activities
   Administering Provost’s Excellence in Advising Awards and Professional Development Awards
   Updating and maintaining advising resource website, which includes resources such as “Resources and Advice for Midterm Grades” for students and for advisors
Student Populations Served:

The Undergraduate Success Center will initially focus on first-year students. In Fall of 2012, we estimate that at partial staffing we will be able to see 75 students. The first student populations to be seen at the center in fall semester 2012 are those recommended by colleges and/or:

- Math 075 students who at the end of the 8-week term receive a U or W. (In Fall 2011, that number was 55 of 165.)
- Summer College students originally placed in MATH 075 who at mid-term received a D or F in their first semester math course (MATH 090, 118, etc.). (In Fall 2011, of those who were given mid-term grades, that number was 95 students.)
- If our capacity increases, the next target audiences will include students who are, by their instructor’s judgment, not likely to succeed in their First-Year Writing Program (ENGL 160/161) courses. (In Fall 2011, of those who were given mid-term grades, that number was 126 students.)

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