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Responses to IRC Assessment/Evaluation Team's Findings and Recommendations for The Center for Student Success (TCSS)

*Note: TCSS was reconfigured into the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE)*

**Recommendation 2:** TCSS' web page needs to be kept up to date and more effectively used as a communication tool. The Center could be more systematic about sending out announcements via e-mail

Response:

- CAE, formerly TCSS, is in the development stage of the new website which will be fully operational September 2008. CAE academic advisors utilize e-mail, Facebook and other tools such as Blackboard to communicate with students and post announcements.

**Recommendation 3:** There needs to be a university wide commitment to retaining and graduating all students admitted to the University. The focus needs to be on developing strategies that involve the entire institution and do not result in a single office being solely responsible.

Response:

- The University Wide Retention Committee reviewed the university's retention efforts and made three major recommendations:
  - Enhance Academic Advising campuswide
  - Implement Supplemental Instruction program to address student performance in high failure rate courses
  - Establish Summer Bridge Programs to expose new students to rigor and environment of college
- CAE Retention Advisors are assigned to each school and college to provide intensive academic support services to all declared students. CAE Academic Advisors provide same services to undeclared students.

**Recommendation 5:** There also needs to be increased appreciation of the role that high quality advising can play in establishing a students' commitment to an institution as well as degree completion.

Response:

- Establishment of the Faculty Academic Advising Council led by a doctorate level CAE advisor
- Partnership with the Academy of Teaching and Learning to facilitate academic advising workshops open to the university community

**Recommendation 6:** Develop a university-wide advising and tutoring center in which services are available for all students, freshmen through seniors. Explore allowing students to keep their initial advisors.

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Response:

- The Center for Student Success was transformed into the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) to: address specifically the academic needs of first and second year students; and to provide high quality academic support programs (i.e. tutoring, Supplemental Instruction).

**Recommendation 7:** TCSS is seriously understaffed. Their workloads are high, as they are teaching as well as have excessive advising loads.

Response:

- CAE hired six (6) new academic advisors and seven (7) retention advisors
- Reduced advising and teaching loads due to new hires

**Recommendation 8:** The need for increased specialization in responsibilities is evident. For example, most advisors should be full-time advisors with the exception of teaching freshmen level courses.

Response:

- Continuing to assess and realign the structure of advising within CAE to maximize utilization of staff in an effort to provide efficient delivery of services
- CAE advisors who teach the UNST 100-University Experience course and who advise a special population of undeclared students have these students enrolled in their courses (ex. Undeclared engineering intended students are enrolled in the section of UNST 100 taught by their CAE advisor)

**Recommendation 9:** The advising staff will need additional training to be able to increase their expertise in financial aid, learning disabilities, and navigation of University system.

- CAE has partnered with university student service units to schedule monthly in-service workshop series that will expand staff's current knowledge in the areas of enrollment management and student support services
- CAE staff participates and attends additional professional development opportunities at university, local and national advising conferences

**Recommendation 10:** The Center needs to have a much stronger connection and communication with academic offices.

Response:

- Title III funds allowed CAE to hire eight (8) Retention Advisors. Each school and college has at least one Retention Advisor with the exception of the Graduate School and the School of Nursing. Retention Advisors serve as the academic liaison for their respective school/college. They are charged with communicating school/college academic requirements to CAE. CAE also implemented a Liaison program for non academic units such as Housing, Library Services, Counseling and Testing, the Honors Program and others to enhance communication and stay

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informed of programs and services that are beneficial to student academic and personal success.

**Recommendation 11:** There needs to be more input from those with greater academic expertise into the tutorials and courses taught within the center. There needs to be a thorough review and improvement of the tutorial program. There needs to be more supplemental instruction in math.

Response:

- The CAE Developmental Math team worked closely with the Math department to enhance the syllabus and instruction of the MATH 099 courses.
- A Tutorial Coordinator will be hired Fall 2008 and will devote 100% time to monitoring, improving and assessing tutorial program
- Researching on-line tutorial program SmartThinking to supplement current program.
- Implementing tracking software to capture tutorial program usage data
- Reading program is undergoing internal and external review with the purpose of improving the Developmental Reading course and expanding our reading services to address comprehension, speed, and learning styles of all university students.

**Recommendation 12:** Advisee assignments need to be made on the basis of major and advisors should become specialists in specific discipline areas.

Response:

- For efficient and concise student tracking purposes, it was decided that advisor assignments would be determined by student last name. All CAE students are in “undecided” status, thus advisors have knowledge of entry requirements for all majors offered at the university. There are specific CAE advisors who handle the following special undecided populations: athletes, engineering intended, nursing intended, and students participating in the Male Retention Initiative program. Because these areas have special requirements and needs, the rationale for specialized CAE advisors is supported.

**Recommendation 13:** To ensure a seamless transition for undeclared students that declare a major, faculty should be trained and encouraged to provide comprehensive advising practices, as well as, mentor students.

Response:

- The Faculty Academic Advising Council (FAAC) was developed in an effort to support the seamless transition for students moving from “undeclared” status to declared status. The FAAC, coordinated by a CAE advisor, will be the driving force behind advising training for faculty in their respective areas. Departments will receive additional support from the CAE Peer Advising Leaders program, comprised of discipline-specific peer mentors.

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- Students are welcome and encouraged to maintain relationships with their former CAE advisors. Official advising takes place in the academic department and this is stressed to students to eliminate confusion.

**Recommendation 14:** The course registration and PIN distribution process needs to be reviewed.

Response:

- During registration, CAE distributes PINs at the conclusion of each individual advisement session. This process was implemented to make sure that students are following the curriculum of their intended major and to ensure satisfactory progress toward declaration of major and degree completion. CAE advisors are mandated to increase office hour availability during these peak times. CAE also starts the advisement process at least two weeks in advance of the actual registration dates as a measure to increase advisor availability.

**Recommendation 15:** The University policy that allows students to remain “undecided” for 45 hours needs to be changed to encourage students to declare majors earlier:

Response:

- CAE is assessing this policy and will propose recommendations December 2008.
- Advisors have been directed to declare eligible students earlier
- An Exploratory Program is being developed for undecided/undeclared students to assist them in determining their major during the first or second semester

**Recommendation 16:** Faculty need to be more active in ensuring that the intermediate math and basic reading courses meet required standards, that the course advising is appropriate for the respective major, and there is ongoing communication between all advisors.

Response:

- Developmental Math and Reading programs will undergo an internal and external review to ensure courses meet standards and address student needs.
- Advisors receive ongoing training to ensure course advisement is accurate
- Processes are being developed to improve communication between campus advisors via Faculty Academic Advising Council, CAE website, utilization of Retention Advisors and CAE Liaisons.

**Recommendation 17:** Add required labs to the most critical freshman classes.

Response:

- CAE implemented the Supplemental Instruction program during the spring 2007 semester. The fall 2008 SI program provides peer-facilitated study groups for students in select sections of High Failure Rate courses.

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**Recommendation 18:** There needs to be better tracking of students and their involvement in advising-related activities. TCSS staff members are far too dependent on the Registrar's Office for critical student data.

Response:

- Through a joint venture between CAE and University Institutional Research & Planning, AdviseTrak was developed to provide a consistent data input tool for the tracking of undeclared students. This excel spreadsheet provides compiled data uniformity.
- CAE is currently working with the Office of the Registrar to secure necessary accesses needed to obtain critical student data and run specific reports.

**Recommendation 19:** The office is in need of an assigned data analyst whose primary responsibility should be to assist the advising staff with data needs and reporting out in a way the office can more appropriately be held accountable.

Response:

- CAE is collaborating with Enrollment Management (EM) and Institutional Planning and Research (IPAR) to obtain necessary data throughout the year. CAE is developing a list of needed data and corresponding time points to submit to EM and IRP to ensure timely, comprehensive and accurate reports.
- CAE is reviewing the feasibility and need for hiring a full-time data analyst.

**Recommendations: 20, 22, 25, 26:**

There is a need for more detailed analyses that identify points where students need intervention.

There needs to be an increase use of data both quantitative and qualitative.

Establish an ongoing effective assessment and evaluation process for the advising center as stated in the SACS portion of the report.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the "Freshman Survival" courses taught by the staff, the tutorials, the peer advising program, and the services provided to athletes.

Response:

- CAE has acquired the services of MGT of America, to analyze retention data and provide detailed feedback on our intervention efforts.
- MGT is conducting a comprehensive assessment of all CAE services, programs and courses.
- MGT:
  - Conducted evaluation planning,
  - Developed evaluation tools
  - Wrote report needed as part of getting a better understanding of programs and their impact on students.

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**Recommendation 21:** The TCSS team should recommend that the University create a unique code for students who are not “true” undecided” majors.

- CAE is currently working with the Office of the Registrar to develop additional codes for student populations that do not qualify for the “undeclared” major code. These populations include students participating in Early and/or Middle College, Non-degree seeking students, and consortium students.

**Recommendation 23:** The Retention Plan needs to be updated in general, but specifically to reflect not just TCSS being the primary responsible change agent. Other “units” need to be specified as accountable in specific ways for the retention successes of the University.

Response:

- The University Wide Retention committee updated the plan and identified three areas of focus: High failure rate courses, academic advising and summer bridge programs. Other units such as the Office of Summer Sessions and Outreach were listed as “responsible” change agents.

**Recommendation 24:** As part of the reconfiguring of the center, the mission will need to be updated accordingly for SACS compliance.

Response:

- As part of the transformation of TCSS to CAE, a new mission was established which indicates the center should focus on retention and intensive advising of first and second year students.

**Recommendation 29:** The location and facilities of the advising center need to be reviewed. To the extent possible, it should also be a comfortable, attractive, and inviting space that has working A/C and elevators (if applicable).

Response:

- CAE submitted a proposal to Academic Affairs requesting more space in Hodgin Hall after the School of Education moved to its new building. A final decision has not been made on this request
- Received approval from Title III to do minor renovations to the current location to make it more warm and inviting for students and other stakeholders
- Acquired space in the New Classroom Building for three (3) academic advisors.