Topic Working Title:

Student Success and Belonging for Diverse Populations

Values, Mission, and Strategic Plan

Student transformation forms a key component of the UNCG strategic plan which hopes that "students acquire knowledge and develop skills and habits of mind necessary to be life-long learners, informed and engaged members of society, and successful in life and work." This QEP begins with students' strengths and nourishes those through holistic support aimed at transformation that sustains individual students and supports their contributions to a broader society. This proposal encourages student transformation by creating a network of support for students, amplifying their talents to produce greater resilience. This QEP would take a systems approach to student success, making student success and belonging a shared responsibility.

Student Learning Outcomes and/or Student Success

Student Success Outcomes

The proposed QEP topic aims at enhancing overall student success among undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), with specific focus on student populations including, but not limited to, underrepresented minorities, Pell-eligible students, and first-generation undergraduate students. The goals of the QEP will be to narrow or close performance and/or belonging gaps for diverse populations at UNCG.

The proposed QEP focuses on two aspects of undergraduate student success:

- enhanced academic outcomes for underrepresented minorities, Pell-eligible students, and first-generation students at UNCG
- increased sense of belonging and engagement of students from diverse backgrounds.

Measures

Both direct and indirect measures will be used to assess student academic outcomes and their sense of belonging.

- **direct measures** include first-term GPA and first and second-year retention for both first-time and new transfer populations
- **indirect measures** include student surveys such as the iBelong survey.

Baseline data will be collected and analyzed to establish the specific target for student success and belonging.

Strategy

UNCG's undergraduate student population is evolving, with first-generation and racially or ethnically diverse populations growing at an outsized rate. As the university's demographics shift, UNCG's access and equity-based mission comes into ever sharper focus. An infrastructure of data-driven support and equity-minded services must be in place to properly support our students as they face mental health, economic, and academic challenges.

We will work with an appreciative model for advising and mentoring that "offers a comprehensive education framework that promotes the cognitive, metacognitive, and affective development of students based on an appreciative mindset and approach" (He & Hutson, 2016, p. 217). "The model challenges the deficit mindset through the advising and coaching process, highlighting student strengths and empowering students to redefine their own success in higher education" (Hutson et al., 2014, p. 47). To accomplish this, UNCG will build a network of awareness that allows faculty, staff, and student mentors to identify and reach students in a timely manner with the right questions and proper resources. The proposed QEP will follow a strength-based inquiry process and invite various campus stakeholders to contribute to the specific design.

To achieve these student success outcomes, the proposed QEP will leverage, augment, and amplify existing programs and strategies, enhance data collection and sharing to provide student support and offer effective referral, and cultivate a strategic campus-wide networked community to nourish individual students' talents and differentiate support based on students' backgrounds and needs. There is a potential to engage a broad range of campus stakeholders in creating networked support.

Specifically, the proposed QEP may:

- leverage, augment, and amplify programs such as McNair, CHANCE, VOISES, and student support services such as advising through students first office, services through student success center, office of accessibility resources and service, and various campus units, etc.

- enhance the awareness and use of data to highlight students' assets, strengths, and strategies for success and empower faculty and advisors to make effective referrals to address students' needs; enhance collection of in-term data regarding attendance, grade performance, and engagement. For instance, using Starfish to its full capabilities.

- build connections across various student support services, student programs, and academic programs on campus to cultivate a networked community involving staff, faculty, alums, peer mentors, and community partners.

References

He, Y., Hutson, B. (2016). Appreciative assessment in academic advising. *The Review of Higher Education, 39*(2). https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2016.0003

Hutson, B., He, Y., Bloom, J. (2014). How appreciative advising is revolutionizing academic advising: Framework, evolution and possible future directions. *AI Practitioner, 16*(2). https://doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-19-9-8

Evidence of Need

First-generation and Pell-eligibility statuses are two key markers in predictive modeling for student success, and UNCG has consistently seen a gap in performance and outcomes for these diverse populations. From 2016-2021, first-time first-generation students produced a 2.68 average GPA in their first terms while non-first gen students averaged 2.91. This gap carried through to retention, where first-gen students retained at 75.6% compared to 79.4% for non-first gen students. Similarly, Pell-eligible or low-income students saw a first-term GPA average of 2.66 compared to 2.91 for non-Pell classmates. These performance gaps were nearly identical for transfer populations during this same 5-year period.

Gaps in performance and outcomes also appear when examining underrepresented minority students (URM) at UNCG. From 2016-2021 first-time URM students' first-term GPA average was 2.65 compared to 2.92 for non-URM students. For transfers, the URM average was 2.57 compared to 2.99 for non-URM students. URM transfers retained at a rate of 72.7%, while non-URM transfers retained at 77.8%. With first-term success having a strong correlation to retention and graduation rates, these kinds of significant differences for URM students shine a light on the need for change.

Current DFW rates show similar disparities across student groups, some of which have experienced an outsized impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. For fall 2021, first-time first-generation students produced a DFW rate nearly 8% higher than fall 2020 and far above the rate of non-first generation students.

In addition, for fall 2021 first-time white students produced an F rate of 8.9% compared to 15% for Hispanic students and 16.4% for Black students. The DFW rate overall for first-year White students was 17.4% compared to 25.5% for Hispanic students and 30.1% for Black students, further illustrating the need for data-driven strategy and additive support systems for underrepresented minority populations.

Based on the 2019 iBelong report, 72% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "I know someone I trust I can go to when I need support." However, when considering respondents' backgrounds, it was noticed that 74% White students, 69.1% Black or African American students, and 70% first-generation students agreed or strongly agreed with this comment. Overall, 71% of students agreed or strongly agreed with feeling a sense of belonging at UNCG. However, in a 2021 assessment report conducted by the Division of Student Affairs, students responded with a lower sense of belonging and connection than before the COVID-19 pandemic with 56.7% of students reporting that their sense of connection decreased and only 59.7% feeling a sense of belonging.

All these data highlight the necessity of enhancing intentional, data-driven, and systematic campus-wide support for diverse student populations. These data call for the creation of systems to connect faculty and staff, so they have the right information at the right time to support students both academically and personally. Timely intervention for students can transform their entire academic career. If we can collectively become aware of students' strengths and struggles, we can connect them to the supports that will augment their talents to bolster their success.

Resources

This QEP would require three crucial forms of resources to shift the burden of identifying resources from individual students to a broad set of support services. This integration would also avoid placing the burden of supporting students from diverse backgrounds on faculty and staff from underrepresented groups who too often do more diversity work.

1. **Data and Technology** needs to create better systems of data sharing and tracking. Consider expanding or increasing systems' ability to communicate with each other e.g. Genie and Starfish. This would provide a more comprehensive view of the student.

2. **Professional Coaching and Triage** to build sustainable and scalable methods of intervention and support. This resource may include course tutoring by peers or faculty (e.g. TA's, retired faculty) to support academic performance and life/industry /coaching by industry mentors e.g. UNCG alum. This kind of coaching/mentoring may be characterized as professional development. Another resource may be mental health support/visits specifically as a standard practice e.g. once per month.

3. **Training** - While awareness among faculty and staff of resources for students exists in pockets, training for a broader range of faculty and staff in assisting diverse populations and building on students' strengths to overcome obstacles to their success. We may seek to send faculty to coaching programs, but we might also want to include training provided by academic support offices on campus. Such training would create a culture of support around students and connect faculty and staff to the broad range of student support services.

The proposing team acknowledges that we may need to include salary for a full-time director.

Identification of Potential Design Team Leaders and Members

Name	Department	email	Interest
Dana Saunders	Student First Office	dfsaunde@uncg.edu	Willingness to be on the design team
Ye He	TEHE	y_he@uncg.edu	Expressed interest
Liaison	Student Success		
Liaison	UTLC		
Liaison	iBelong		
Liaison	Advising Council		
Liaison	Enrollment Management		
Liaison	Faculty Senate Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion		