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Team Assignment #1 - Problem Statement

Problem:

Graduation rates are a concern for all universities, and CSUN is no exception. Although colleges purport graduation in four years, less than a quarter of CSUN students are able to graduate on time, and only half graduate within six years. The main cause of this problem is bad advisement; CSUN is a large institution that requires careful navigating to not only take the proper courses, but to take them at the correct time. Students who seek advisement often report receiving incorrect, incomplete, or inefficient help, especially as advisors oversee many students and may lose focus of a specific individual’s needs. Those who receive improper aid can have their prospects negatively impacted for years to come, as students may take courses they do not need or miss the prerequisites that are crucial to their continuation.

Who it Affects & Results:

* The Student Themselves. Students must juggle college courses with their other obligations and pay for the cost of tuition, books, and transportation, amongst others. Poor advisement can lead to delayed graduation, as well as negatively impacted financial aid (eg. if a student takes too many unnecessary classes, they may run out of aid). This may cause students to mistrust advisors, to the point where they no longer seek out help. The longer it takes for students to graduate, the longer they must handle these issues; in addition, they are prevented from committing to the work force.
* Other Students. Students that struggle to obtain their courses must also compete with incoming and existing students for school resources (classes, time with faculty or an advisor, parking space, and computer lab space, among others). This is further compounded by the fact that if a student mistakenly takes a class they don’t need, they’re taking space from students who may actually require those classes–especially in the case of new students, whose lack of seniority does not give them much leeway in getting the courses they need–while contributing to overcrowding.
* Parents. Parents who provide support to their college-attending children (whether that support be financial or not) must also carry their burdens for as long as their children are in college; alternatively, they may be unable to provide the necessary support or attention and expect the college to help. The longer it takes a student to graduate, the longer that student may be dependent on their parents.
* Faculty. Desperation to graduate leads students to ply professors with requests to get into a particular class. In addition, when administration fails the student, students will look towards faculty to supplement advisement. This leads to added work for faculty, as well as pressure that is not compensated or recognized, which indirectly causes lower performance and morale.
* Administrators. The longer a student stays with a college, the more likely they will be frustrated or have complex problems, which administrators must help with. For instance, students who change majors are more likely to take an additional few years to graduate. Administrators must help guide them through the decision and the new courses they must take, as well as keep records on their previous classes. In addition, because CSUN is a state institution, they must meet basic criteria for funding. If they cannot help their students, they may lose out on money and prestige.
* CSUN Partners. Prospective or current employers looks towards CSUN to connect with students, and many jobs hinge on the fact that a student must graduate on time. If the problem persists, it is not only the students that suffer, but the CSUN partners as well.
* Loans (Financial Aid and Banks). The longer it takes for a student to graduate and join the workforce full-time, the more they may need to loan and the longer they may need to pay it back.

Solution:

A proposed solution is software that streamline a student’s requirements in a comprehensive manner (for instance, indicate which courses will fulfill two or more of their requirements). In addition, this software will be able to access all relevant student information such as major requirements, financial aid, and course schedules to provide an efficient pathway for the student to successfully graduate on time. It would analyze current and proposed future schedules and error-check to ensure the student is not taking an unnecessary class or an improper workload. It will be able to provide basic Q&A functionalities as well, which will lower the number of students seeking advisement and allow advisors to focus their attention on more personalized issues. Unlike advisors, this system will be available 24/7 and will save time by allowing the student to access it from a computer or via phone.

The benefits of this solution is that students will be able to graduate on time, which will allow them to plan ahead and transition to the job market or continued education without bumps along the way. In addition, the student will be better informed and can more optimally choose what they need, both in terms of classes and majors. Both the student and the school will have to pay less per individual if students are able to graduate on time, and the school will have more resources free for newer students. Other benefits include improved efficiency, better financial management, and lower loans. Finally, this system will be flexible enough to move forward with CSUN as the college evolves, allowing the benefits to be long-lasting.