Program Assessment Plan for Proactive Advising

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Program Assessment Plan

As a program consultant, I have been sourced by Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) to help focus on revitalizing their academic advising department on the Riverhead (East) Campus located in Long Island, New York. Suffolk County Community College is a two-year public community college with campuses located in Selden, Riverhead, and Brentwood. Currently, the college administration is seeking to revitalize their efforts on the academic advising department, and how the advisor-advisee relationships can help impact their overall performance metrics. Suffolk County Community College (2017) reported that the college overall has a 24.18% graduation rate, 70% retention rate for full-time students, and 50% retention rate for part-time students (Suffolk County Community College, 2017).

Proactive advising, which is also commonly referred to as intrusive advising, involves advisors connecting with at-risk students and engaging in advising practices with students who do not normally seek assistance or interact with the academic advising department. Proactive academic advising studies have shown significant positive spikes on student retention, graduation rates, and average reported GPA. These strategies have also shown to increase the likelihood of students reporting an overall satisfactory college experience.

My aim is to create an assessment plan for developing a reliable academic advising framework that continues to align with the values of the institution, in addition to integrating qualities and functions of proactive advising practice. This proposal is sought to implement a proactive advising initiative as annual enrollments continue to grow exponentially over the next decade.

I. Source Analysis

Critical pieces of literature and past research have identified correlations between proactive academic advising methods that have impacted student success outcomes. Chiteng (2014) found in their cohort study of 2,475 full-time matriculated freshman students that those who were engaged in centralized (i.e. proactive advising) practices with advisors resulted in an increase in their first-term GPA, second-term GPA, and first-year cumulative GPA, in addition to students during their second term experiencing a decrease in their probability of first-year attrition (Chiteng, 2014). Finnie and colleagues (2017) found that proactive advising undertaken for first-year students in a longitudinal correlational study directly impacted learning outcomes for both male and female students (Finnie et. al, 2017).

Zhang and colleagues (2014) identified empirically through an early intervention program that was implemented at the college of business at PVAMU (Prairie View A&M University) that students who participated in this program held a higher probability of being successful academically in courses they were struggling with or were flagged at-risk for (Zhang et. al, 2014). Young-Jones and colleagues (2013) identified six factors which contributed to academic advising practices through an evaluation based on a survey that explored students' expectations of and experience with academic advising at their respective institutions. The following factors directly influenced positive student success outcomes: (1) Advisor

Accountability, (2) Advisor Empowerment, (3) Student Responsibility, (4) Student Self-Efficacy, (5) Student Study Skills, and (6) Perceived Support (Young-jones et. al, 2013).

Wheatley (2018) used a Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model to estimate the probability that a student from their 2012 cohort study graduated conditioned on a set of fixed effects at the individual/college levels, which the study indicated that academic advising contact and proactive advising variables associated with higher first-year GPA (Wheatley, 2018). Mottarella and colleagues (2004) crafted a study for the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) which sought to identify the key advising dynamics on student satisfaction and success. The study concluded that relational variables can exist across multiple approaches in advising and their effect likely depends on the advisors' interpersonal skills and style, with a focus on relationship building and strengthening advising relationships (Mottarella et. al, 2004). These comparable studies yield parallels with connections between proactive academic advising practice that have a positive influence on student outcomes and overall college satisfaction/experience.

II. Stakeholder Participation

Foremost, students are considered to be our most significant stakeholder as they will be providing feedback through the course of our assessment. This data will be presented to the board of trustees, executive dean of eastern campus, director of academic advising, associate directors for academic advising, and academic advisors within the department. The board of trustees will only be included in participation for the assessment plan towards the near end of our assessment timeline (outlined in Section VI) to discuss our research findings and work towards proactive initiative planning with each trustees' individual insight, along with the additional stakeholders identified. The board of trustees' guidance will be taken into account as our planning document is ready for a full proposal to discuss and critique accordingly.

The advising staff would be involved throughout the entire process, assisting in engaging their feedback through each area of the assessment. They will also be included in the data analysis of student feedback, helping to craft our customized qualitative survey, and discuss their own thoughts in the proposal meeting with the board of trustees near the final stages of our timeline. The executive dean of students will be involved in assessing our running planning document, act as a liaison/moderator to guide myself and the academic advising faculty working in collaboration, and present their insight on our findings to the board of trustees. All noted parties will be involved in the final stages of our timeline to help amend and come to a consensus for a proactive advising plan.

III. Methods

The assessment will involve a qualitative and quantitative (mixed-methods) process. Our assessment will be based on a convergent parallel design, as Mertler (2019) states this design involves quantitative and qualitative data being independently analyzed, but then the results are mixed to achieve an overall interpretation. The design includes a comparison and relational analysis of findings in order to convey an interpretation (Mertler, 2019). 100 students will be chosen at random with an equal representation of male and female students (1:1 ratio). The

demographics chosen for the study will involve a representative sample of students who range between various ages and ethnicities, including but not limited to White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, etc. The survey will be administered to second-year students, the rationale for this student group is in consideration for having insight completing their first-year.

There are three qualitative measurement instruments being utilized: (1) Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck & Steer, 1993), (2) General Advising Satisfaction Survey, and (3) Insight meetings with advisors. The Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck & Steer, 1993) consists of 21-multiple choice questions that serves as a self-report measure of anxiety symptoms in children and adults. The questions used ask about common symptoms of anxiety that the individual has experienced during the past month as each question inquires the severity of each symptom during that 30-day period. The inventory is based on a 0-3-point scale which categorizes 0 points as the specific symptom not appearing, 1 point the symptom mildly appears, 2 points the symptom is moderately present, and then 3 points the symptom is severe. The inventory has a maximum score of 63 with different levels of anxiety; 0-21 total points suggests a healthy-low level of anxiety, 22-35 points suggests moderate anxiety that should be managed, and 36-63 points suggests severe anxiety with symptoms becoming potentially harmful to the individual.

The General Advising Satisfaction Survey will be crafted as a joint-effort between myself and the academic advising department. The survey will consist of open-ended questions that will focus on measuring students' main criticisms on their advising experience, gauge the level of intervention, proactivity, and engagement they experience from the advising department. It will also seek to identify their feedback on college experience, satisfaction, and self-reflection for academic progression. The insight meetings with advisors will be one-to-one meetings with each advisor in the department to discuss feedback on current strategies, limitations, and thoughts on implementing a proactive advising plan. The quantitative measurements used will be the reported GPA of student participants in correlation with the current average GPA for enrolled students, current retention rate (70% for full-time students, 50% for part-time students), and the current graduation rate (24.18%).

IV. Data Analysis

Data analysis methods will be broken into two separate approaches between assessing the qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data will be analyzed using an inductive analysis via coding scheme, as Mertler (2019) discusses that the coding scheme is a system of categorization used to group data that provides similar types of information (Mertler, 2019). This approach was found most favorable for categorizing the concluded data (i.e. student trends in perceptions based on the advising survey, Beck's Inventory results, etc.) as it necessitates a great deal of precision, analyzation of all qualitative data, and helps the researcher reflect on the connections between the data and the original, or emerging, research questions (Mertler, 2019).

The quantitative data will be assessed using a data tabulation and descriptives method, which is a basic method for analyzing numerical data values (i.e. GPA, retention, and graduation rates). This method will be used to cross-check student performance variables in correlation with trends identified from findings based on the coding scheme analysis of our qualitative student feedback.

V. Validity & Safety Measures

Banta and Kinzie (2015) state a valid method provides a direct and accurate assessment of the learning described in program-or course-level outcomes statements. Additionally, issues of validity need to be addressed, and campus experts on instrument design should review data collection instruments and procedures (Banta & Kinzie, 2015). All students will be disclosed that their participation will solely be assessed based on their college experience and feedback on academic advising, with granted permission to review all survey data. Students will be reassured that their personal information and feedback will remain confidential. Myself and primary stakeholders involved will seek to clearly define our goals for administering the surveys and providing students with any information needed on proactive advising.

All measurement instruments will be reviewed by administrators in neighboring schools within the Long Island, New York area, such as Stony Brook University, LIU Post, and Hofstra to identify the effectiveness and scalability for acquiring data. The assessment will aim to align with displaying credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of findings.

VI. Assessment Timeline

The timeline will begin with creating our general advising survey, in addition to gathering all other qualitative instruments to be organized. We will then administer the surveys to students, then analyze the findings using our outlined methodology for data analysis. Following this would be the organization of main findings and research that will lead to a meeting with the board of trustees to propose an introductory version of our planning document. Next is a collaboration for proactive initiative planning with all stakeholders (i.e. board of trustees, executive dean of students, all noted advising staff) to create a finalized plan moving forward to implement a proactive advising initiative. Ideally, the timeline would take place within a six to twelve-month period to monitor concerns on validity and identify ample resources to craft a methodical proactive advising plan for the college.

VII. Limitations

In practice, limits of time, cost, and the organizational context may force compromises in assessment planning (Banta & Kinzie, 2015). Consistency and reliability of self-reporting surveys is an initial limitation. Additionally, funding for increased academic advising staffing, scalability of ample advising resources, and time restraints for academic advisors to use regimented proactive advising strategies are considerable challenges. Additionally, the expectation for students to accept or engage well with proactive strategies can rebound, and the plausibility for these strategies to solely impact an increase in GPA, retention, and graduation rates is ambivalent.

VIII. Future Vision

The future vision for this assessment plan is to implement a transition of strategies for the academic advising department at Suffolk County Community College. Proactive advising strategies have proven to be effective in improving overall student performance, retention, and satisfaction outcomes. These strategies can assist in paving the way into a more holistic and success-oriented experience at Suffolk County Community College.

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