

### **C. QEP White Paper: The Time Is Now**

**Title:** *Prepared for Life: Enhancing the Major to Career Trajectory through Early Career Exploration and Academic Advising Intervention.*

**Topic :** This proposed QEP addresses two of the high priority topics for Alabama State University: Academic Advising/ Retention -- Orientation Classes Career Readiness -- Career Assessment Inventory, Information Literacy

**Introduction:** According to the literature on academic advising and career decision-making for first-time/first-year freshmen, undergraduate students who receive intrusive advisement and early intentional career readiness support are more likely to persist towards completing their degrees (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Freeman, 2012; Kot, 2014). This proposed QEP will integrate academic advising and sustained career readiness development practices as a means of reducing the attrition rates among first and second year undergraduate students, and thus, increasing graduation rates within six years.

The Student Learning Outcomes for this proposed QEP are:

- Students will be able to have knowledge and participate in personal interests/values, academic strengths/weakness, and major choice/career preferences.
- Students will have knowledge of ASU's majors related to career preferences
- Students will have the ability to seek and utilize campus resources to support academic goals
- Students will have the ability develop supportive networks with faculty members within respective major/College
- Students will have the knowledge of career pathways and internships related to major
- Students will demonstrate the ability to develop a career portfolio (e.g. resumes, professional references, work samples, etc.)

Student Success Outcomes

- Students will have the confidence in selecting and committing to an academic major
- The institution will experience a decrease in repeating and/or enrolling in courses that are not within their major
- The institution will have an increased graduation rate within six years

## **Identification of Problem**

Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of undergraduate student attrition postulates that utility of degree has a possible effect on students' intent to stay at an institution, and a direct effect on a student's decision to leave. Lack of career to major alignment and lack of intrusive advisement support can cause students to change majors, disengage with academic pursuits, and extended time in College (Wilcoxon & Wildner, 2010). Because there is no intentional career exploration support or academic major selection advising for incoming first-time/first year students at ASU, there is a high rate of students who do not persist to the second year. According to the ASU's Office of Institutional Research [OIR] (2018), the average 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> retention rate is 60%, 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year retention rate is 49% which ultimately leads to an average 6-year graduation rate of 25.5%. Unfamiliarity of majors and career trajectories, student self-advising of courses not needed for their major, and the potential loss of financial aid eligibility due to repeated failed courses or enrolling in superfluous courses are salient factors that contribute to the low graduation 6-year rate.

## **Identification of Student Population**

All undergraduate students at ASU, with a focus on 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

## **Alignment with University Mission & Goals**

This career focused proposal aligns with ASU's mission of excellence in teaching and service as well as 'developing professional competence' and supporting students by being a 'bridge to success for those who commit to pursuing quintessential educational opportunities and lifelong endeavors.'

## **Strategies**

In table 1, the following strategies have been identified to address the two proposed topics:

- 1) Academic Advising/Retention
- 2) Career Readiness -- Career Assessment Inventory, Information Literacy

Table 1

<b>Proposed Advising and Career Readiness Strategies</b>		
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Academic Advising Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Career Readiness Implementation Plan</b>
Pre-Enrollment/ New Student Orientation	<p>Placement tests for students who do not meet college level course requirements according to University Guidelines</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Affairs (Orientation)</li> <li>• University College (U.C.)</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate placement in College level courses</li> <li>• Early academic support for students placed in Developmental course</li> <li>• Decrease in repeated courses</li> </ul>	<p>Survey of students' perceptions of college readiness, choice of major, and career interests</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional Research</li> <li>• First Year Experience</li> <li>• ACES</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding of first-year students' college readiness and career choice perceptions</li> <li>• Identification of strategies for recruitment and retention</li> </ul>
Semester 1 Freshmen	<p>Direct Admits*: Assigned Professional Advisor specializing in Major</p> <p>Non-Direct Admits**: Assigned to UC Advisors</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University College</li> <li>• ACES</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freshmen receive immediate and direct interaction with Advisors</li> </ul>	<p>Direct Admits: Orientation Class w/Peer Mentoring emphasis</p> <p>Non Direct Admits: Orientation Class w/Study Skills emphasis</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University College</li> <li>• ACES</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase purposeful student engagement</li> <li>• Increase College readiness</li> </ul>
Semester 2 Freshmen	<p>Direct Admits: Assigned to Professional Advisor specializing in Major</p> <p>Non-Direct Admits: UC Advisor</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University College</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate and direct interaction with Advisors</li> </ul>	<p>Direct Admits: Career Exploration Course</p> <p>Non-Direct Admits: Career Exploration Course</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University College</li> <li>• ACES</li> <li>• Career Services</li> <li>• Specialized Advisors</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early career readiness intervention</li> <li>• Decrease in attrition among first year students</li> </ul>
Semester 3	<p>Direct Admits: assigned Faculty/Professional Advisor</p> <p>Non-Direct Admits: assigned Professional Advisor specializing in Major</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University College</li> <li>• Major Colleges</li> </ul> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with Faculty Advisors</li> </ul>	<p>Direct Admits: Mentor students who are non-direct admits</p> <p>Non-Direct Admits: Mentored by Student Mentor from Major of interest</p> <p>All Students: Participate in Career Focus Lunch and Learn series with assigned Faculty Advisor</p> <p>Units involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACES</li> </ul>

<b>Proposed Advising and Career Readiness Strategies</b>		
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Academic Advising Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Career Readiness Implementation Plan</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased Faculty/student engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Major Colleges</li> </ul> Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase non-direct admit transitioning to their major college</li> <li>Decrease in attrition during the second year</li> </ul>
Semester 4	All Admits: students assigned Faculty/Professional Advisors  Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustained engagement with Faculty Advisors</li> <li>Increase Faculty/student engagement</li> </ul>	Career Professional Development series such as “What Can I Do with My Major” Units involved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career Services</li> <li>Major Colleges</li> </ul> Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase Faculty/student engagement</li> <li>Increase knowledge with career options</li> </ul>
Semesters 5-8	All Admits: continue advisement from Faculty/Professional Advisors  Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See Semester 4</li> </ul>	Career Professional Development series Internships Units involved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Career Services</li> <li>Major Colleges</li> </ul> Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase knowledge with career options</li> <li>See Semester 4</li> </ul>

**\*Direct Admits = students who do not need to take any developmental courses and have met the GPA requirement for their College**

**\*\*Non-direct Admits = students who need to take at least one developmental course**

In addition to the structured activities, it is recommended that all faculty advisors be trained on how to successfully advise students toward career goals. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Career Exploration course be taught by someone who has a minimum of a Master’s Degree in Counseling and Human Development. Career exploration is a specialized subject area that requires a facilitator who understands life-span development and the psychological factors that impede career choices (National Career Development Association, 2009).

**Assessment:**

The following metrics will be utilized to measure the impact of the initiative:

1. Student perception of college and career readiness -- pre-survey at beginning of 1st year, 1st semester and post-survey at the end of the 1st year, 2nd semester
2. Usefulness of early career assessment -- survey at end of 1st year, 2nd semester regarding usefulness of FOCUS assessment and the career exploration course.

3. Timely selection of major -- number of students who select and are accepted into their major at the end of the 1st year
4. Student retention -- number of students retained from year 1 to year 2 and year 2 to year 3.
5. Student academic focus -- number of students on academic probation after year 1.

## **Departments**

- University College
- ACES
- Institutional Research
- First Year Experience
- Career Services
- Major College Advisors

## **Research**

Retention research suggests that student commitment to educational and career goals is perhaps the strongest factor associated with persistence to degree completion (Wyckoff, 1999). Furthermore, Westry (2010), found that students with a lucid career plan and who receive effective support services from their institution, are more motivated to complete their degrees in a timely manner than students without any support or plan post-graduation. Students who decide to leave after their second year often leave because of their sense of disconnection to the academic community. According to Granuke & Woosley (2005), students who have not identified a major by their second year are especially at risk of attrition due to the lack of engagement with faculty. Finally, students who receive early career development support, intrusive advisement, and peer mentoring are more likely to identify and commit to a major that aligns with personal values/interests, academic strengths, career goals (Freeman, 2012; Kot, 2014).

## References

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