



# Identifying and Supporting Students with Academic Difficulties

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# I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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## Project Challenge:

Leadership at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

### Identification:

- *How do institutions identify entering freshmen with academic difficulty?*
- *What methods do institutions use to connect such students to accessible services?*
- *How do institutions mitigate the stigmatization that may come with identifying students with academic challenges and providing specialized services for them?*

### Programming:

- *What kinds of services do institutions provide for students with academic challenges?*
- *Do institutions have a dedicated office that provides and manages such services? How are such offices organized and who do they report to?*
- *Do other institutions have a 'conditional admission' student program? What does this program entail and how does it provide support to its students?*

### Assessment:

- *Is there data to support the effects of specialized services on students who struggle academically?*
- *What are some of the recorded successes and challenges of such services and initiatives?*

## Project Sources:

- Education Advisory Board's internal and online ([www.educationadvisoryboard.com](http://www.educationadvisoryboard.com)) research libraries
- *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

## Research Parameters:

- Per the requesting member's guidelines, the Council targeted its outreach to public universities with developed academic assistance services and programs.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief			
Institution	Location	Enrollment (Total / Undergraduate)	Classification
University A	Southeast Large City	26,300 / 19,200	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University B	Midwest Midsize City	31,200 / 23,800	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University C	Southwest Large City	27,200 / 21,300	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University D	South Large City	51,000 / 38,200	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University E	Mid-Atlantic Small City	30,900 / 23,600	Research Universities (very high research activity)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Key Observations:

- ❖ **Contacts identify students with academic difficulty in a variety of ways, including standardized test scores, high school rank, and grade point average.** In some states, institutions evaluate applicants with state-mandated admission standards, enrolling students who fail to meet standards in state-developed developmental education programs. Students who have academic difficulties later in their college career are identified through academic performance tracking tools and professor grade reports.
- ❖ **Contact institutions offer students who struggle academically a diverse range of opportunities to make progress in their academic performance.** Students are either enrolled in developmental education courses or encouraged to utilize academic assistance services at the institution's learning center.
- ❖ **At most institutions, a learning center operated within the division of academic affairs is the focal point of assistance efforts.** Learning centers are usually managed by an associate vice president for academic support services, retention and student success, and provide services for students at all academic skill levels.
- ❖ **Contacts report that peer tutoring and learning communities are especially helpful in addressing the needs of students with academic difficulty, because they provide a shared learning experience while building camaraderie.** Institutions provide peer tutoring and mentoring services and encourage students who have successfully completed developmental programs to recruit other students in academic need.
- ❖ **Although few institutions have collected sufficient data to thoroughly verify the effect of specialized support services, contacts agree that periodically assessing academic assistance programs is crucial to informing program and funding changes.** Program assessment enables academic leadership to prune academic support service offerings and invest in those programs likely to accrue the most benefit to students.
- ❖ **Despite the plethora of academic assistance services available, many students who face academic challenges still hesitate to enroll in learning assistance programs due to stigmatization.** Contacts emphasize the need to rebrand learning centers and other academic support services in order to remove the negative associations attached with seeking academic assistance.
- ❖ **None of the contact institutions have made admission conditional on first-year performance.** However, several institutions, particularly those with relaxed or open admissions require completion of developmental coursework before incoming students may begin credit-bearing work.

### III. IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WITH ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY

Contact institutions have developed several methods to identify both entering freshmen and current students who struggle academically. Incoming students are typically assessed by pre-enrollment standardized test scores in addition to other general admissions criteria. Students who fall into academic difficulty later in their college career are identified by academic performance tracking tools and performance reports submitted by professors and staff. Current students can also seek academic assistance individually.

#### Identifying Incoming Students

##### State required admissions

The **University A** and **University D** are directed by the state legislature to evaluate entering freshmen according to state-mandated admission standards. State A and State D both require incoming college students to attain certain scores on standardized tests in order to prove eligibility for college. Students who fail to meet these requirements are enrolled in an academic preparatory program. In State D, this program is called the State D Success Initiative (SI). To be exempt from SI developmental courses, students entering the **University D** must meet the following requirements:

Test	Score
SAT Reasoning Test composite score / Math score	1070 / 500
SAT Reasoning Test composite score / English score	1070 / 500
ACT composite test score / Math score	23 / 19
ACT composite test score / English score	23 / 19
TAKS Math score	2200
TAKS English/language arts score / essay score	2200 / 3

Source: State D Success Initiative web site

Similarly, in adherence to state admission standards, admission officers at **University A** evaluate students' basic proficiency in writing, reading and math by their performance on the ACT and SAT exam. To be exempt from the Academic Readiness Program (ARP) at University A, incoming students must meet the following requirements:

Test	Score
SAT Reasoning Test Math score	470
SAT Reasoning Test Verbal (English)	450
SAT Reasoning Test Verbal (reading)	490
ACT Math score	19
ACT English score	18

Source: State A Academic Readiness Program web site

### III. IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WITH ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY

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#### Categorical placement testing

At certain institutions, certain groups of students are pre-classified as academically at-risk students regardless of their admission credentials and are made to take placement tests to ascertain their academic readiness. At **University A**, for instance, all international students take placement tests in reading and writing to give administrators an opportunity to identify students who may need extra English language preparation.

Likewise, at **University C**, which operates open-enrollment admissions, administrators use placement tests in place of fixed admissions requirements. Students who do poorly on placement tests are put in developmental education courses to improve their basic math, reading and writing skills.

#### Institution-specific admissions criteria

At **University B**, incoming students who struggle academically are identified through general admissions criteria, such as SAT scores, high school class rank and grade point average. Students are categorized into four academic advising groups based on how strong their credentials are.

Those students who are most at-risk academically are put in advising group four; while those who excel academically are put in group one. Consequently, academic support services are targeted toward group four students throughout their time at the university.

#### No identification process

At **University E** only applicants deemed to be academically prepared are admitted. Consequently, there is no special identification process for academically unprepared students. Academic assistance is offered to current students who fall into academic difficulty later. Contacts acknowledge that because students are not required to seek academic assistance on admission, students who face academic challenges typically delay seeking academic assistance.

### III. IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WITH ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY

#### Tracking Enrolled Students with Academic Difficulty

##### Student Performance Tracking Tools

Contacts report that enrolled students with academic difficulty are identified by their academic performance. Various institutions have created performance tracking tools that alert student success leadership immediately when a student begins to struggle academically to enable timely intervention. **University A**, for instance, uses a software tracking tool, which tracks students who face academic difficulty by pulling data on grades from the student registration system. Students who make grades below C are immediately contacted and encouraged to make use of the institution's academic support services.

Similarly, at **University E**, the director of the learning center compiles a report each semester, categorizing students by race, gender, academic college and grades to identify students who struggle academically and to recognize patterns in their academic performance, demographics and fields of study.

##### Performance reports by professors and staff

**University A** operates an academic alert system comprising a network of all academic and residential life staff members. Professors or residential life directors electronically submit an alert form to a student's academic advisor when the student falls behind academically or struggles with behavioral issues. On receiving notification of a student's poor performance, the academic advisor creates a collaborative strategy with the student's professors and residential staff to help the student make progress.

At **University E**, Professors are charged with alerting the academic achievement center when students they teach receive failing grades in tests and assignments. These reports are usually submitted after midterm test results are released so that students can receive timely academic assistance, enabling them to make progress before the end of the semester.

##### Self Identification

Given that students at **University E** are not required to enroll in an academic preparatory program upon admission, the center for academic achievement relies on students who face academic difficulty to individually approach the center for academic assistance. Contacts have made efforts to create a welcoming environment for students who need academic assistance but hesitate to visit the center from fear of being stigmatized. *These efforts are described in greater detail in section VI of this report.*

## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Once students in need of additional academic assistance are identified, institutions offer a variety of academic support programs aimed at improving student success and retention rates. State-legislated programs target unprepared incoming students and train them in basic English and math skills in preparation for college-level work. Other institution-developed academic assistance programs offer supplemental instruction to enrolled students in specific subjects, train students in general learning skills and give students specialized academic advising to encourage academic progress.

### State-Mandated Academic Preparatory Programs

#### The Academic Readiness Program (ARP)

The Academic Readiness Program at **University A** provides academic support services to first-year students whose SAT and or ACT scores fall below state admission requirements. Students who have been identified as eligible for the ARP program are contacted in advance of arriving on campus and asked to take the COMPASS placement test in their area of academic deficiency.

Students work to improve their basic skills in writing, reading and mathematics by making use of supplemental instruction in courses that best match their particular course of study. ARP students are also offered online tutoring and are encouraged to join learning communities where students find personalized support to guide them through the typical academic and social challenges that freshmen face. ARP students are given personalized developmental plans to improve basic English and math skills based on their test scores. These developmental plans are described below.

Test Score	Developmental Plan
<b>Below 19 in ACT math</b>	Students who score less than 19 in the math portion on the ACT (or below 460 for the SAT) must take University A's Placement Exam (COMPASS Algebra test) under the direction of the Office of Retention and Student Success. If the student is required to take College Algebra for his or her major, and the student earns an appropriate score on the COMPASS Algebra test, then the student may either take the math department's Algebra test or <i>Introduction to Contemporary Mathematics</i> in order to be ready for college algebra.
<b>Below 18 in ACT English</b>	Students who score less than 18 in the English portion on the ACT (or below 450 in writing for SAT) are required to take a one-hour credit-bearing writing workshop. This course must be taken before the foundational English course. Writing workshop instructors, who facilitate the course, are selected for their experience and accomplishment in teaching first-year writing. Students can also access additional support at the University Writing Center.
<b>Below 29 in ACT reading</b>	Students who score less than 20 in the Reading portion on the ACT (or 470 on the SAT Critical Reasoning) will be required to take a one-credit-hour credit-bearing Reading Lab course, offered by instructors who have been trained in teaching college reading. The Reading Labs are offered in conjunction with certain social sciences and humanities courses and are taught by graduate students trained in how to teach critical reading skills and experienced in teaching the corresponding discipline.

## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

### Online Tutoring

At **University A**, ARP students are given free access to an online tutoring tool along with personal support from a University A subject matter expert. The software provides multiple assessment options to identify academic skill gaps and helps students develop individualized learning plans by identifying specific areas that a student has mastered and those that the student struggles with. The student takes several assessment tests; if proficiency is demonstrated in a certain subject area or module, the student may advance to another module otherwise; the student will continue the tutorial before testing again. The software system provides individual student progress reports that can be used to supplement reporting activities.

### State D Success Initiative (SI)

The State D Success Initiative is a state-mandated program designed to improve college success for students who do not meet state-mandated standardized test scores. The program consists of a test to assess student proficiency in basic reading, writing and math skills followed by developmental courses to strengthen academic skills that need improvement. SI students are also offered specialized academic advising and put into learning communities such as the First Year Transition Seminar, where students are trained in time management, study skills and overcoming test-taking anxiety. At the **University D**, the SI program has partnered with the learning center to provide SI students with access to five hours of free tutoring.

### SI Testing Tools

The State D Success Initiative allows students to take any one of four placement exams. Each exam is described in greater detail below.

#### **ACCUPLACER:**

The Accuplacer exam is a computer-based adaptive test that evaluates academic skills in mathematics, English and reading. The minimum score needed to pass the Reading section is 78, the Algebra section is 63 and the writing essay is a 6 (or a combined score of 80 on sentence skills and 5 on the essay).

#### **COMPASS:**

The COMPASS exam is also a computer-based adaptive college placement test that evaluates academic skills in mathematics, English, writing and reading. The minimum score needed to pass the Reading section is 81, the Algebra section is 39 and the writing essay is a 6 (or combined scores of 59 on writing and 5 on the essay).

#### **THEA:**

The THEA exam consists of three sections: Reading, Mathematics and Writing. The minimum score needed to pass the Reading and Mathematics section is 230. The minimum score needed to pass would be 220.

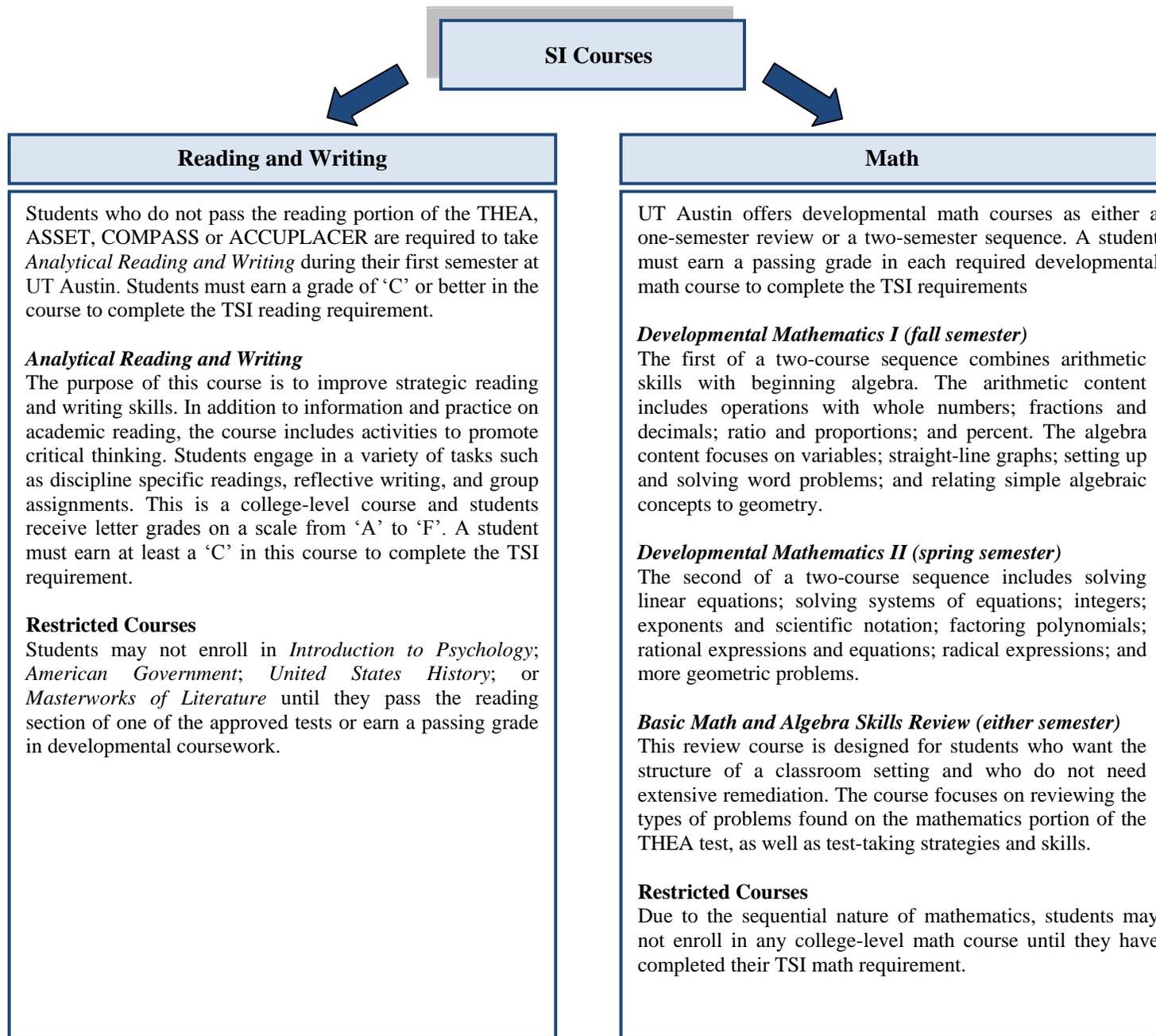
#### **ASSET:**

The ASSET exam is administered via paper and pencil and also evaluates skills in mathematics, English, writing and reading. The minimum score need to pass the Reading section is 41, The Algebra section is 55 and the Writing section is 6 on the essay, or combined scores of 40 on writing and 5 on the essay out of a possible 8.

*Source: State D Success Initiative web site*

## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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Source: State D Success Initiative web site

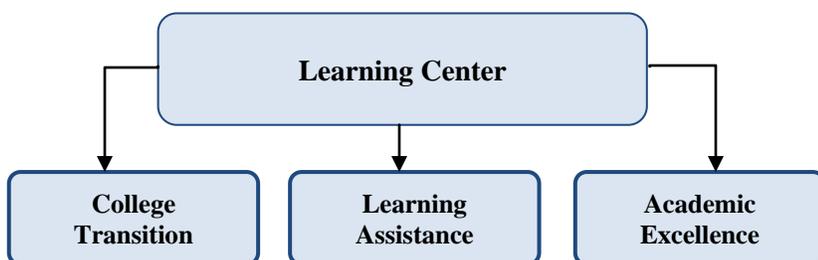
## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

### Learning Centers

Contacts state that learning or student success centers are integral to providing academic assistance programs and support services, as a single center can integrate several types of support programs. Learning centers offer students additional tutoring services, learning success workshops, as well as academic and career counselling and advising. At most institutions, the learning center reports to the office of retention and student success or its equivalent office and is managed by the director of student success, who is typically also the associate vice-president for academic support services and retention success. In order to address student concerns of stigmatization, centers broaden their appeal to students by providing academic services that are relevant to a variety of different types of student.

#### Learning Center – University E

At **University E**, the learning center provides three different academic assistance programs to cater to students of all skill levels. Contacts note that this arrangement helps reduce the perception of the center as a service for exclusively struggling students.



#### Learning Assistance Programs

These programs assist students who want to improve academic and non-academic skills such as time management, study skills and networking.

- **College Success Planner** - a management teaching tool provided by the learning center to support development of time management skills
- **Get on Track** - a four-week course offered at the end of the semester for students who are not satisfied with their academic performance during the semester.
- **Making the Grade** - a three-hour workshop offered before classes start to help students understand what skills they need (time management, studying tactics etc.) to be academically successful.
- **Nelson-Denny Reading Assessment** – a reading testing tool offered to students who want to learn more about and improve their reading skills.
- **Project Phoenix** - supports suspended University E students to help them stay connected to the university and be better prepared academically when they return to campus.
- **Project Success** - a semester-long program to help students on academic probation improve their academic performance and overall college experience.
- **Seminar Series** - a one-hour workshop designed to strengthen skills necessary to succeed at University E. Over 1,000 students attend at least one of these series during the academic year.
- **Study Retreat** provides students with a quality environment on Reading Day (the day before finals begin) to prepare for final exams.
- **College Success Strategies** - a three-credit course offered to students with 2.5 or lower overall grade point average to help them improve their academic performance and overall college experience.

## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

### College Transition Programs

These programs target freshmen and new transfer students, helping them to be make a successful academic and social transition to Virginia Tech.

- **Hookies 101** - a course offered the first four weeks of the semester and focuses on developing the skills necessary to be successful students.
- **University E Majors Fair** - a one-day event for student s to meet and ask question of faculty and staff in various academic departments.
- **College Success Strategies** - a freshman-only section of three credit course that covers various topics and skills relevant to academic success in college.

### Academic Excellence Programs

Academic Excellence Programs are available to students who are already excelling academically and want to further enrich their educational experiences.

- **McNair Scholars Program** - a federally funded program which helps prepare students for graduate study.
- **Project Success Peer Facilitators and Tutors** - a support group for students who work as peer facilitators for Project Success or are tutors.
- **The Student Success Grant Program** - designed to improve the retention and graduation rates of undergraduates and to contribute to the development of student leaders.
- **Underrepresented Outreach** - led by one of the Assistant Directors for Learning Assistance Programs, specifically making contact with first-generation, low-income, and under-represented minority students to increase their awareness about academic support and enrichment opportunities.

Source: University E Annual Report for the learning center 2007-2008

### Student Tutoring Center – University C

The **University C** provides a free tutoring center for all its students, many of whom require additional support to succeed as a result of the university's open access admissions policy. The tutoring center is a member of the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), which is an international association of student-oriented professionals who work in developmental education and provide learning assistance programs, tutoring and mentoring at the college/adult level.

For a small annual fee, CRLA provides tutor training for its members in the skills needed to effectively assist students who face academic difficulty. Apart from training the tutors that work at the tutoring center,

CRLA also requires that the center follow certain best practice procedures and keep stringent records of the services they provide; With each student who uses the center's services, the center includes a report in the student's university record detailing the specifics of the tutoring services provided. At the end of each semester, information is compiled to record how many students used the tutoring services and in what subjects they were tutored.

To ensure that the tutoring center is utilized by students, leadership at the University C require every student with a GPA below 2.0 as well as those on certain scholarships to attend tutoring sessions as part of an effort to improve or maintain their academic performance.

*"The tutoring center is very helpful to students, especially those who have been out of school for a while and may feel intimidated by the academic rigor on their return. CRLA helps provide top quality tutoring services at our center for a very small annual fee."*

**-Council Interview**

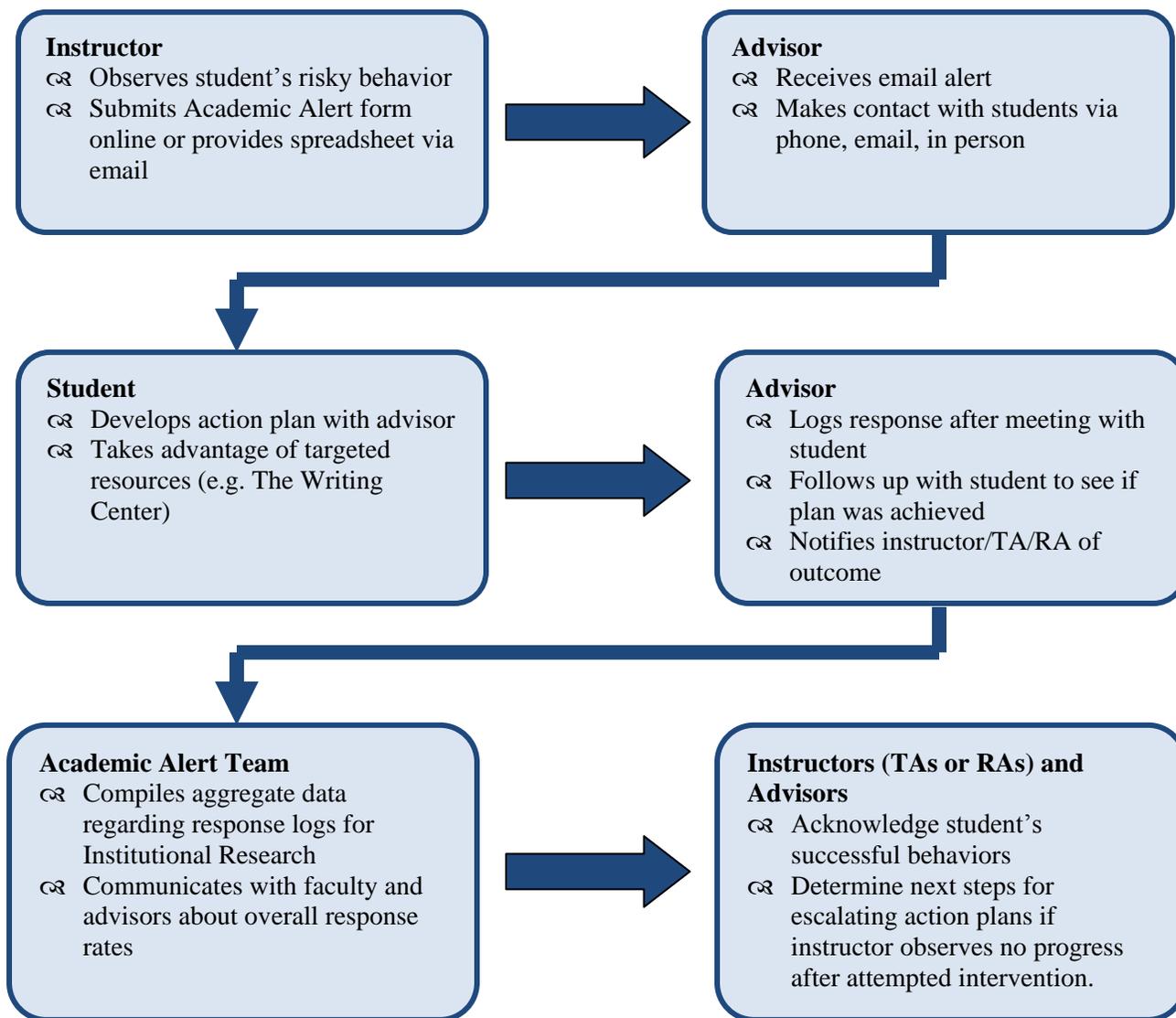
## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

### Academic Alerts and Advisor Intervention

Providing academic support services for current students relies on an institution's ability to track student performance closely and quickly intervene when a student shows signs of academic difficulty. Contact institutions have developed a range of practices to create alerts when a student's academic performance deteriorates and to provide relevant support through professional academic advising.

#### Academic Alert System at University A

At University A, a comprehensive academic alert system ensures that academic at-risk students are quickly tracked and offered necessary support service through the following process:



Source: University A Academic Alert System web site

## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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### Retention Software Program at University A

At **University A** the director of retention and student success tracks students who struggle academically through a software system. The system uses data retrieved from the student registration system and other sources, giving the director access to midterm and final exam scores each semester.

*“Some students are surprised when contacted about their poor academic performance, so it is very important that they are alerted quickly in order to give them a chance to improve.”*

**-Council Interview**

With direct insight into how students are performing, the student success director contacts students who make any grade below a C via e-mail suggesting academic support services that may be of help. Contacts at University A say that this intervention process has proved to be very effective in promptly refocusing students toward academic recovery.

### Robust Academic Advising System at University B

At **University B**, professional academic advisors form the foundation of all academic assistance programs. Academic advisors serve as the first point of contact for all students and are especially important in helping those that struggle academically regain suitable academic status.

Acknowledging the importance of trained academic advisors to student success, University B invests heavily in academic advising; by hiring more advisors to enable them reach a target advisor to student ratio of 1:200, and also by generously compensating academic advisors to prevent high advisor turnover rates.

Advisors are trained to focus on students' skills and to help students choose courses and eventually careers that highlight their strengths. Using a strengths-finder software tool, academic advisors help students adjust their study patterns to suit their strengths and, if necessary, change majors to areas more suited to their interests and capabilities.

University B has a number of alternate degree programs for those students who are unable to make the grade point average cut off points for selective programs such as journalism and nursing; academic advisors prepare students to make these academic transitions.

## IV. PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

### Learning Communities



A number of contact institutions indicate that learning communities can provide effective academic support to struggling students. Students benefit from peer mentoring and tutoring and gain a support group that helps them cope with both academic and non-academic difficulties. Learning communities usually unite students around common interests, promoting shared learning in a socially conducive atmosphere. Two such programs are examined below

#### Freshman Interest Groups at University B

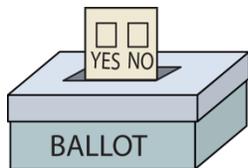
At the **University B**, freshman learning communities have been very successful in helping freshmen transition into the academic and social rigor of college life. These communities encourage participation from all freshmen especially those in Advising Group 4, who have been judged as being at the greatest risk. These joint living and learning communities facilitated by both academic affairs and residential life and aimed at helping students achieve a healthy balance between academic success and life. Groups are themed by academic interest and each group is assigned an upperclassman who serves as a peer advisor and lives with freshmen members of the group. The peer advisor is the first point of contact for students who have academic questions and can share personal anecdotes to guide freshmen as they make academic decisions. The peer advisor also works with a faculty coordinator to organize seminars for students, providing information on time management skills and on utilizing academic advising and student support centers.

#### Freshmen Transition Seminars at University D

Similarly, at the **University D**, freshmen are offered Freshmen Transition Seminars to help freshmen smoothly transition into college life. These seminars focus on assisting freshmen in developing the crucial skills for academic success. The seminars train freshmen how to effectively study in a time-efficient manner, how to manage testing anxiety, and how to best utilize academic support services such as academic advising and the writing center. Some seminars also provide career guidance and expose freshmen to available study-abroad opportunities. Freshmen Transition Seminars are offered in a group setting, promoting camaraderie and a shared learning experience among freshmen. Texas Success Initiative (TSI) students are encouraged to join these freshmen transition seminars in addition to the TSI developmental courses they take.

## V. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

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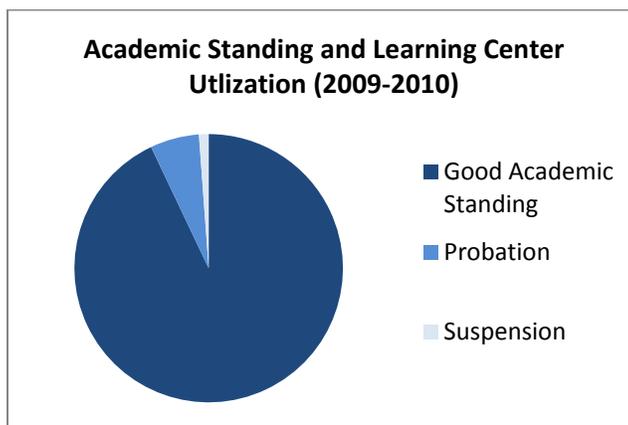
Contacts emphasize that periodically assessing student support programs is crucial, identifying four reasons to perform regular assessments. First, assessment gives leadership an opportunity to accurately recognize weaknesses in programming and to make data-backed improvements to academic support services. Second, attaining program performance insight gives leadership an opportunity to eliminate irrelevant programs and expand support for successful programs.

Additionally, assessment can provide useful data for academic support staff as they seek additional resources for learning assistance programs. Finally, strong assessment reports on academic support services provide a marketing tool to encourage more students to utilize academic support services. When students are informed of the impact that support services can have on their success, they more enthusiastically patronize these services

### Assessing the Learning Center at University E

The learning center at **University E** has a well-developed model for continuous improvement. The center's annual goals are based on detailed data-driven assessments from the previous year. Because students are required to scan their identification cards every time they use the center's services, annual assessment reports can include detail on the percentage of students that use each type of academic support service and the demographics and academic category of each of these students. Administrators use the annual reports to help guide outreach to students most in need of the center's services and to make informed choices on which academic assistance programs to invest in.

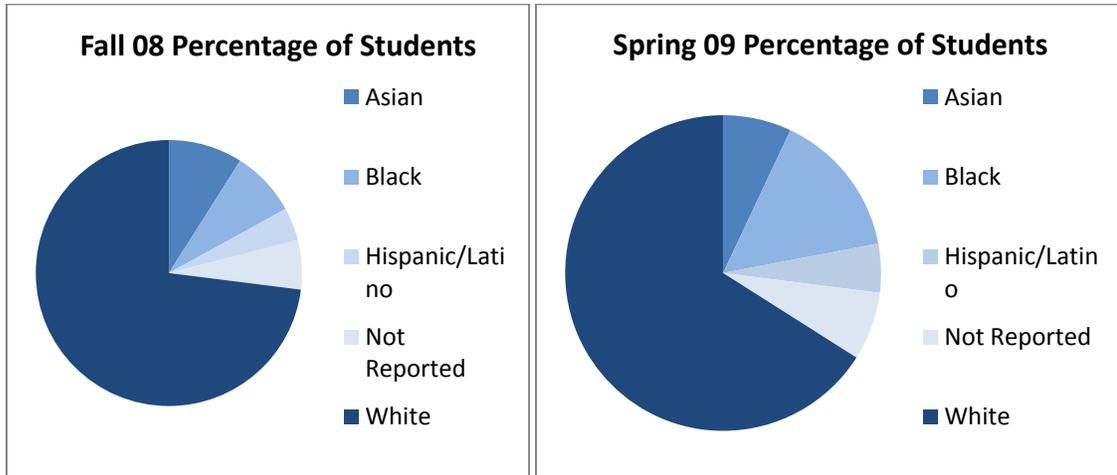
As the chart illustrates below, students in good academic standing form the greatest percentage of learning center students. Though contacts state that no firm causal relationship can be established between using the learning center and good academic performance, the data suggests that students most likely accrue some academic benefits from using the learning center.



*Source: 2009/2010 Annual Report, The Learning Center at University E*

## V. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

The learning center is also able to collect information the demographics of students that use its facilities. For instance, the data below illustrates a large increase in the percentage of black learning center students, suggesting the successful results of what contacts indicate was a targeted outreach to black students in the fall. Contacts report that this demographic data has been very helpful for the learning center leadership in streamlining outreach to particular groups of students in academic need.



### Assessing Student Success Rates at University B

Leadership at **University B** makes use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to track student success. The NSSE measures the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities, helping institutional leadership to efficiently deploy resources and organize curriculum to increase student engagement in activities that positively impact student academic performance.

*“Be absolutely sure that your decisions are data driven, because perception can be deceptive.”*

-Council Interview

Missouri also has a campus-wide student success commission that tracks student academic performance data to identify students who struggle academically and to recognize any demographic information or other characteristics that may correlate with academic performance.

The collection of student performance data at Missouri has been the driving force behind many investments in academic support services. For instance, leadership at Missouri decided to add \$120,000 to tutoring facilities in order to meet student’s need for supplemental instruction. Similarly, leadership increased academic advisor salaries after comparing Missouri advisor salaries and workload data to similar data at peer institutions.

## V. PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

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### Emerging Assessment Strategies

Some contact institutions are still in the process of developing comprehensive assessment strategies. Planned assessment strategies fall into two categories: student-response evaluations and data-driven analysis of learning outcomes.

#### Student-response Evaluations

At the **University D**, contacts are in the process of developing an end of semester seminar assessment for the TSI developmental education courses. Students will submit evaluations at the end of the semester that will examine course content, teaching delivery and course relevance. Contacts have yet to test how effective these evaluations will be.

#### Analysis of Learning Outcomes

Currently at the **University C**, the tutoring center staff generates end of semester reports detailing tutoring services rendered to students and students that patronize the center. Leadership is hoping to transform this evaluation process into a more comprehensive data-tracking tool that will identify how students use the tutoring center and the effects services have on student academic performance.

## VI. AVOIDING STIGMATIZATION

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Contacts note that ensuring that students are not stigmatized is just as important to their academic confidence as providing robust academic support. Contact institutions have attempted to mitigate stigmatization in two primary ways: rebranding support services and categorizing struggling students inconspicuously.

### Rebranding Academic Support Services

Often students avoid making use of academic services because of the stigma attached to needing academic assistance. Contact institutions have targeted their campaign against stigmatization by rebranding academic support services with more positive connotations. For instance, at the **University B** advisors are trained to emphasize the benefits of utilizing support services for every student rather than concentrating on specific deficiencies in a student's performance. Advisors help students discover their academic strengths by branding academic support services, such as tutoring, as tools to help strengthen academic skills rather than as solutions to academic problems.

Similarly, at **University E**, the university has endeavored to change popular opinion about the learning center. Rather than branding the center as a place for remedial students, the center is branded as the place where successful students go to maintain their high academic standing. In addition, the center uses students who have successfully passed through learning assistance programs as recruiting agents for their peers and facilitators for academic probation support groups. Contacts state that peer facilitators are most effective at persuading students to make positive academic choices.

### Inconspicuous Categorization

Students who struggle academically feel stigmatized when they are publicly categorized as students with special academic needs. Contact institutions reduce this stigma creating opportunities for students with academic difficulty to feel connected with the rest of the student population, while still providing them with specialized attention. At **University E**, the learning center caters to both students struggling to succeed academically and those who excel academically. Offering both Learning Assistance and Academic Excellence program in the same building makes students' need for academic assistance, less conspicuous. Instead, the center becomes a place where all students go to enrich their academic experience irrespective of their academic standing.

In the same vein, students who enroll in the Academic Readiness Program and the Texas Success Initiative in **University A** and **University D** respectively are informed of their need to take placement tests in a private letter sent to them prior to enrollment. As a result, students can make use of developmental courses and other academic support services without being noticed. Current students who fall into academic difficulty at University A are also contacted privately through the retention software system. The retention and student success director contacts students with failing grades via e-mail, offering academic support privately, which allows students access to academic assistance without the burden of being stigmatized.

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES NOTE**

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