

Graduation Initiative
Bi-Monthly Report – December 16, 2011
Sonoma State University

The Graduation Initiative Group (GIG) held its last meeting of the Fall Semester on December 12, 2011. As indicated in the last bi-monthly report, the GIG continues to work on a number of retention efforts.

Advising: The Advising Subcommittee of the SSU Academic Senate has been asked by the Provost to provide recommendations to enhance advising across campus. The GIG has specifically asked the committee to include in its recommendations suggestions for supporting our most at risk students, based on leading indicators, such as fewer earned units, low gpa, and undeclared status. The Chair of the committee presented initial findings of the committee at the December GIG Meeting and participated in a discussion with the GIG members about action steps to be taken in the upcoming semester. The Advising Subcommittee is fleshing out an early alert process for at risk students, which would be put into place in the Spring semester. The Advising Subcommittee has also drafted a summary of their discussions regarding advising (see attached), which served as a beginning discussion point with the GIG. This included what is already working regarding advising, what is not working as well as it should, what is needed to enhance the advising needs of students, and a “wish list” of ideas for implementation (some of which are already under way or under consideration).

Engaged Learning: A large team from SSU attended the Engaged Learning Workshop at Embassy Suites SFO and returned with a renewed commitment to improving the practices on campus. Several attendees of the workshop reported on what they learned and observed from the presentations by Dr. George Sanchez and Dr. Vincent Tinto, as well as from their conversations with other participants. While acknowledging that many “high impact” and engaged learning practices already exist at SSU, participants felt that what is lacking is systematic integration of these practices throughout the curriculum, intentionality in how these practices are delivered, and a clear “pathway” for students of how these practices can be integrated through the entire 4-years of students’ undergraduate experiences. Intentionality in both the types of activities and the types of students who need these experiences was also stressed. Participants also felt that the university needs to engage in better professional development and “in service” workshops to support faculty in their pedagogy and curriculum.

CMS Data Base of Current Students at Risk Based on Leading Indicators: In the last bi-monthly report, SSU shared that IT staff have created a data base that provides the following information on all students: gpa, number of units toward degree, class level, Pell status, major status, year of matriculation, and student name, id, and contact information. The GIG has asked that this information be provided to the Schools, departments, and advisors so that they can utilize the data to make advising more effective and to be able to determine which students are at higher risk for non-retention.

First Year Transition Courses: Planning continues for first year transition courses that will serve between 1400-1500 of SSU’s planned freshman class of 1800 in Fall 2012. A

website will be put up in January to allow prospective students to learn about the various learning communities and freshman transition programs that will be available to them. The Director of Undergraduate Studies and the Director of Academic Resources are working closely with Admissions to provide students with a list of choices for their first semester transition program. Students will be asked to select their preferences, and they will then be assigned to a transition program in advance of arriving at SSU for Freshman Orientation. Additionally, students will select a General Education “interest course” that will accompany the transition/learning community program, so that most students arriving at Orientation will already have pre-selected between 9-15 units of their first semester courses. We believe that this will support students in making a smooth transition to college life.

Issues for the Future: The GIG will reconvene in January to continue its work above and to engage with the following issues:

- The need for relevant data and analysis of retention efforts. With the loss of the Director of Institutional Research, we will need to reassess how best to retrieve and analyze data that is valuable to the retention and graduation effort. One of the GIG faculty members will be working in the Institutional Research office for the coming semester to specifically work on data needed by the group. He has a wealth of experience working with databases and a keen interest in the work as it applies to the graduation initiative.
- Development of an intentional plan for engaged learning and high impact practices throughout a student’s education. The GIG was intrigued by a schematic presented by Sacramento State University that provides a “connections” framework for student life (from both an academic and student affairs perspective). The GIG will begin work in the Spring semester to determine which “high impact practices” already exist across the development continuum of freshman through senior years and then begin a discussion of both how to provide greater intentionality to these practices of engagement and to infuse high impact practices where necessary.

A "Connections" Framework at Sacramento State: Student Affairs + Academic Affairs

