

# Sonoma State University

## Graduation Initiative Update

August 27, 2010

**Block Registration:** SSU conducted a block registration pilot for first time freshmen in two categories: all remedial (Math and English) and pre-Business majors. Utilizing the CMS functionality to do automated block registration, these students were pre-registered in May prior to SSU's Summer Orientations. In the case of remedial students, they were block registered into our English 100A (first semester of a new "stretch" program that uses a cohort model. Students take a year-long English composition course with the same cohort of students and the same instructor. They receive 6 units of baccalaureate credit (3 units for freshman composition, Area A2 of General Education, and 3 units of general elective credit). Students were also block registered into either elementary algebra or intermediate algebra. Also, pre-business majors (SSU's largest undergraduate major) were block enrolled into an Economics course and a General Education Mathematics course, which are required courses for the pre-major. During the current Fall semester a debriefing of the block registration process will be conducted, and plans will be developed for continued block registration and expansion to other programs. We have already learned a great deal about what the PeopleSoft program can and cannot do in terms of block registration. We also encountered issues around scheduling of courses across departments and school, and we will work on improving scheduling for these courses.

**Degree Audit:** A degree audit task force has been at work for two years in order to improve the functionality of the PeopleSoft DPR. Much progress has been made: (1) General Education requirements are built and accurate in the DPR; (2) All majors and concentrations are built, accurate, and updated as changes are made; (3) A process has been developed for capturing "legacy" information on substitutions and exceptions that have been granted but not posted to DPR. A temporary position has been funded to assist in the capture and posting of this data. (4) A form has been developed and distributed to department faculty for course substitutions and exceptions so faculty can approve these substitutions and have them recorded on the DPR at the time of approval and not at the time of filing for graduation. (5) Training sessions have been conducted for faculty and staff and will continue. (6) Students received a first view of

DPR during Summer Orientation and plans are underway to include additional training and exposure to DPR and its purposes through various first year programs. Several members of the DPR Task Force attended the CO sponsored webinar on degree audit and will carry some of the best practices ideas forward to the task force. We believe that we currently have a very accurate degree audit of all GE and majors and are working hard on getting students, faculty and staff to use the DPR as a retention tool.

**University Catalog:** The SSU catalog has included four year graduation plans for many years. For the 2011-2012 Catalog, departments will be asked to update their 4-year graduation plans to accurately reflect course offerings and rotation of courses. Given the difficult fiscal constraints SSU is facing, we need to make sure that the 4-year graduation plans give students realistic options for completing their degrees in a timely manner. Departments will be asked to also pay attention to General Education courses and provide students with appropriate suggestions for completing their GE.

**Improving first- and second- year retention rates:** SSU has lower retention rates than the CSU average for the following: Freshman to Sophomore Year and Sophomore Year to Junior Year. SSU's retention plans will thus focus on ways to improve those rates. Significant work has already been done by the Sophomore Year Retention Task Force, identifying strategies and methods to improve second year retention rates. We are currently engaged in discussing the following: (1) possibly requiring students to declare a major at 30-45 units (currently policy requires declaration of major at 60 units); (2) connecting students earlier with their majors and schools. Departments will be asked to review their curriculum to see if they should be providing gateway major courses earlier (in the freshman and sophomore years). Faculty representatives on the Core Implementation Group (CIG) have been tasked with meeting with their schools and departments to solicit ideas for improvement of retention and graduation rates.

**Improved Advising:** Advising has been identified as an area of concern by faculty, staff and students. In particular, GE advising and the hand off from the Advising Center of undeclared students to their new major departments have been identified as areas needing attention. Additionally, students with declared

majors who have not connected with their departments are potentially at risk for retention. These areas of concern will be addressed by faculty governance groups and by the academic advisors. 6. GE Reform: The School of Arts and Humanities has revised Area A and Area C requirements for native students. This new pattern will be implemented in the Fall of 2011. SSU faculty believe that this new approach, which provides students with a stronger Area A experience, will result in improved retention.

**The Role of SSU Library and Information Center on the Graduation Initiative:** The design of programs at colleges and universities to encourage academic success, timely graduation, and retention should focus on closing the gap between the involvement of a few participants and the total academic community. Library programs and services can provide a diverse and personalized approach to meeting differences in information processing capabilities and ability levels of students. Library faculty can perform participatory and advisory roles, such as teacher, consultant, facilitator and mediator to administrators and discipline faculty in their quest to design and implement strategies for developing academic success programs.

The following factors may impact students' ability to progress academically but may be addressed by intentional library programs focusing on instruction and research assistance.

High schools often have poor or no library facilities

Study skills need development

Research skills are underdeveloped

Students typically do not know how to write research papers

While familiar with the technologies they use personally, students are typically not familiar with library technologies, don't know how to access material in the library, don't know about academic library services like interlibrary loan, relevant databases, etc.

## **An expanded view of how the SSU Library can help**

### **Academic integration:**

Library interaction with others in the academic community, library faculty involvement with students, and academic strategies to enhance student success:

Library instruction to build information literacy and research skills through classes and workshops [the earlier the better to avoid the often-heard, “I wish I had known this two years ago” comment, by upper division undergraduates.

Librarians as team teachers in first year experience courses.

Library instruction in discipline research skills, collaborating with discipline faculty for the majors and upper division courses

One-on-one research assistance and appointments with librarians to advise on research assignments

Library orientations/introductions to groups of new students generally, and for specific departments and programs. Outreach to incoming students, EOP students, transfer students, graduate students, etc. as part of department or School orientation programs. Special tours and orientations for international students.

Library faculty subject specialists provide a personal and professional link to faculty and students in each academic department and program.

Library generated guides to resources in subject areas.

Working closely with students on committees.

Library participation in university-wide programs, such as residential hall cohort groups, honors groups, athletic teams, various clubs, through provision of special spaces in the library for those students, along with orientations and presentations. Library participation in student presentations, symposia, etc.

Library partnership with faculty members supporting opportunities for class projects that use the library as a locus or case study, e.g., collaborating with art students in the Art Gallery exhibits; management and organization studies, marketing studies, etc.

Sponsoring “open houses” to showcase resources for particular groups, e.g., graduate students.

Faculty author lecture series and receptions in which students are included

Library outreach to high schools and community college feeder schools, support for Early Start programs, etc. to prepare students prior to enrolling in undergraduate programs by developing good information skills.

### **Social integration:**

Study groups: Libraries provide group study rooms and other group study spaces. Many have coffee shops or cafes where students gather and socialize with each other. The “library as place” is important to students as reflected in surveys. They want a variety of study environments (“silent,” quiet and group), a comfortable environment, access to computers and printing, a safe environment, long hours, etc. “I’ll meet you at the library” is frequently heard on campus.

Personal contact with library faculty and staff to alleviate anxiety and uncertainty in use of what can be an intimidating large and complicated academic library compared to previous experience. Library faculty and staff stress that they are here to help students succeed.

Library participation in university-organized orientation activities for prospective students, new students, etc. Distribute handouts, and other Library-branded giveaways. Focus on welcome and reassurance of prospective/new students and their parents.

Libraries are large employers of students. This creates a mentoring opportunity.

Library programs such as lectures, concerts, exhibits, etc. provide opportunities for students to connect and socialize.

Libraries often have student advisory boards to assist with outreach to students, and have ongoing relationships with the student governance organization, articles and ads in the student newspaper, etc. They may sponsor town hall meetings or focus groups to get feedback from students on library collections, services and facilities, and conduct surveys to assess student satisfaction.

Libraries often have peer education programs in which students are trained to serve as peer advisors on research projects. Some have “roaming” librarians or students who go to locations where students gather, such as the student center, to offer assistance with research.

Libraries have celebrations of new services, anniversaries, etc. to which students are invited and student leaders are often involved in planning and participating as speakers.

Libraries offer an opportunity for one-on-one point of need interaction through in-person, phone, email, instant messaging, texting, etc. during long hours whether the student is on campus or not.