

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Baker College

Project Details		
Title	Financial Aid Literacy	Status IN REVIEW
Category	3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	Updated 11-02-2015
Timeline		Reviewed
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-01-2014	Created 06-03-2014
	Target Completion 12-31-2014	Version 1

1: PROJECT GOAL

A: The purpose of this project is to seek to modify academic advising processes resulting in academic advisers having specific responsibility and skills to help students make academic decisions with full knowledge of impact on financial aid.

2: REASON FOR UNDERTAKING THIS PROJECT

A: The student loan default rates have steadily increased over the past several years. The Financial Aid Department has an identified process for awarding aid and has requested that Academics intervene in this process. The academics division has not participated in a consistent and sustainable message to students regarding financial aid obligations and/or loan repayment.

3: ORGANIZATIONAL AREAS AFFECTED

A: Academic Advising
Financial Aid

4: KEY ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

A: The key process to be addressed will be the Baker College Academic Advising model. The College uses a consistent advising process to ensure that student needs are met across time. The process will be modified to include financial aid understanding as a key component of advising.

5: PROJECT TIMEFRAME RATIONALE

A: The project is expected to last long enough that changes to advising can be made and fidelity of implementation can be assessed. The overall timeline of 1 year will provide sufficient time for all stakeholders to provide input, for a sustainable process to be developed, for training to occur, and for a study of implementation to be completed.

6: PROJECT SUCCESS MONITORING

A: Baker College uses an Academic Advising Checklist that is complete by academic advisers during the advising appointment. The checklist provides a paper trail that can be audited to determine what is occurring in the advising session. Directors of Advising will be able to monitor changes in the advising process and ensure that changes are implemented.

7: PROJECT OUTCOME MEASURES

A: The immediate outcomes expected by the project will be an increased understanding by students of financial aid responsibilities and a change in the behavior of academic advisers. At the current time, the College has not identified a specific method to measure any change in student knowledge. Change in adviser behavior can be tracked through the advising checklist.

Project Update

1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A: General Project Status: ___x___ Completed ___ In-progress ___ Suspended ___ Reopened

Original Project Start Date: 01 / 01 / 2014

Originally Projected End Date: 06/15 /2015

Anticipated Completion Date If Not Completed: ___ / ___ / ___

The final presentation for this project was presented and currently available for all internal stakeholders to review. The Lean Six Sigma tools that were utilized for this project are included in the PowerPoint presentation. The Directors of Advising have an electronic report that is easily accessible and available for review. Directors of Academic Advising are performing weekly informal audits on advising checklists for each academic advisor. The goal is to ensure that the original intent of the consistent academic advising appointment or encounter is occurring for all students. As gaps are identified in these checklists, retraining and further conversations are being done immediately.

The original problem statement indicated: "...The student loan default rates have steadily increased over the past several years. The Financial Aid Department has an identified process for awarding aid and has requested that Academics intervene in this process. Academics has not participated in a consistent and sustainable message to students regarding financial aid obligations and/or loan repayment." This initiative surfaced as a result of ensuring that we had consistent message to all of our students regarding loan payment options. To date, the student loan default rates have slightly decreased. However, while this project may have assisted with that decrease, it is not the sole indicator for the decline.

2: ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A: The immediate outcomes expected by the project will be an increased understanding by students of financial aid responsibilities and a change in the behavior of academic advisors. At the current time, the College has not identified a specific method to measure any change in student knowledge. Change in advisor behavior can be tracked through the advising checklist.

The metrics being tracked are compliance with following the checklist policy. The updated version of the checklist is now web-based, and Directors of Academic Advising can track the number of students each advisor is advising, along with ensuring that the advisors are filling out an advising checklist. Also, an audit will be conducted to compare the missed opportunities and findings from the 2014-15 checklist to the first audit conducted in fall of 2013. This will allow the Directors of Advising to ensure compliance in usage of the checklist, along with training opportunities or gaps that still exist.

3: ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A: The quantifiable results have indicated that advisors are utilizing the checklist to provide a more thorough analysis of how academic decisions (such as withdrawing from a course, lack of attendance in a course, program major changes, etc.) will impact the use of financial aid availability in the future. This holistic approach allows students to see the entire impact of how their academic changes will impact their financial aid eligibility in the future. Immediate supervisors of the academic advisors can monitor the checklist conversations with students to ensure that there are no 'missed opportunities' in the advising appointment. In addition, the project provided major accomplishments in:

- Expanded knowledge base for the advisors who learned about financial aid issues in addition to academic issues
- The project leveraged the academic advising checklist to accomplish more with an existing tool
- The project empowered directors to take more ownership and has improved the student experience
- There has been a deliberate attempt to improve relationships between academic advising and financial aid personnel

4: INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A: Directors of Academic Advising, Academic Advisors, Financial Aid Directors, and Financial Services Advisors have all participated in the training opportunities regarding this project. The academic advising checklist was updated to include academic decisions by a student that would trigger a financial aid impact for this decision. The College has approximately 70 individuals within these job areas, so the breadth of involvement was a holistic approach to ensure students were well aware of the financial aid impact. Several training opportunities were conducted for this project, along with a follow up with academic advisors in an all-day training session

during the summer months of 2014.

5: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

A: Academic advisors have been trained to better understand financial aid, financial aid impacts, and the connection between student behavior (i.e. dropping a class) and financial aid consequences. Additionally, the academic advising checklist has been modified to include discussions about financial aid with students when they seek advising. As a result, academic advising has a defined role and a set of processes intended to engage students in conversations about financial aid and to help provide clarification to students about the impact of academic decisions on financial aid. The institution has identified as a good practice the ability to provide a more thorough conversation with students regarding the impact of their financial aid obligations. The advisors are much more aware of having quality conversations that may redirect the student in his/her academic decision based on this knowledge.

6: ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS

A: Currently, the time that it takes to advise a student has been increased. Filling out the advising checklist causes another step within the advising appointment that can produce slower advising appointments, which lead to a backup in the service to students regarding wait times. Culture shifts in ensuring that the quality of the advising appointment is adhered to versus fast in and out service continues to be a learning curve for the institution.

7: PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIMELINE

A: The College is in midst of transitioning to a new student information system (Jenzabar). As the project continues to evolve, it is anticipated that the utilization of the academic advising checklist will have a more integrated interface with this new system. The goal would be to have the advising checklist as an internal dashboard to provide early alerts, warning triggers, and other similar tools instead of having to utilize the web-based checklist that is currently utilized by the advisors. This integration will allow for a more effective and efficient process with other student records and processes. Work on the integration into Jenzabar will continue over the next 12 months.

8: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A: The project allowed for the institution to leverage an AQIP project that developed the advising checklist to provide a consistent, sustainable process for all academic advisors. Furthering the knowledge base of the academic advisors regarding the academic decisions that students made and how these decisions may impact the financial aid eligibility for students allowed for a much more robust conversation that may have led to a different outcome. The academic advisors can ensure that students are aware of the short- and/or long-term impact of these academic decisions. Even though there is no direct comparison for how this project has impacted loan default rates to decrease at the institution, there is certainly an awareness and accountability factor that supports the continued training for all academic advisors to be knowledgeable about financial aid obligations.