1. New & Reallocated Resources

The Steering Committee strongly believes that the success of the initiatives proposed in this document is dependent upon new resources and specifically dedicated personnel. Resources would be needed, as appropriate, for all campuses and teaching sites, as well as for the support of online students.

**Administrative position in student success and engagement (University Center for Student Success)**

1.1 University administration will establish an administrative position in student success and engagement.

**Technology support position for Student Success Center (University Center for Student Success)**

1.2 The University administration will designate a technology and data support individual to support the work of the Student Success Center.

**Supplemental instruction coordinator (University Center for Student Success)**

1.3 The University administration will establish a position for a supplemental instruction coordinator.

**Student Success Center**

Recommendation 1.4 The University will establish a reconceptualized “University Student Success Center” to serve as a centralized location for student academic and services support and for faculty development.

**University Services Center**

1.5 The University will establish a “University Services Center” to serve as a centralized location for student services.

**Center or Office for Student Success with Coordinator for each academic college**

1.6 Each academic college will house and adequately staff a Center or Office for Student Success to promote student retention by providing academic and career assistance to all students, with emphasis on second to fourth-year students with declared majors.
Support for Innovation
1.7 The University will establish grants and other incentives for curricular and student success innovation in order to support additional initiatives to improve student success.

Institutional Research
1.8 The Office of Institutional Research must be adequately staffed and supported to collect, analyze, and report data using appropriate predictive quantitative modeling to better identify at-risk students as well as to assess the effectiveness of retention initiatives.

Standing Committee on Student Success and Engagement
1.9 A university standing Committee on Student Success and Engagement will be established.

2. Curricular Issues & Faculty Involvement

UNV 101
2.1 UNV 101 or an equivalent discipline-based course will be required of all first-year students.

2.2 UNV 101 will undergo a curricular revision, with UNV 101 and equivalent courses in the disciplines addressing common issues and establishing common expected learning outcomes.

2.3 UNV 101 instructors will either be paid or the course will be included in the course load of faculty.

2.4 UNV 301 or a discipline- or college-specific equivalent course will be required of all transfer students.

Semester-by-Semester Guide Project
2.5 Departments, colleges and other units will undertake a review and revision of the semester-by-semester guides.

Curricular Initiatives to Engage Students
2.6 General Education Curriculum coursework will be utilized to implement cross-curricular engagement activities, such as a common first-year reading.

2.7 Curricular coordination will occur with the potential freshman residency requirement in order to create engagement activities and learning communities.

Recommendation 2.8 The University will explore the potential of student learning communities and implement at least one pilot program.

2.9 The University will evaluate ways to provide summer school opportunities for students who need summer school but may not be able to afford summer school due to new financial aid restrictions.
2.10 The University will create faculty, departmental or college incentives to develop summer programs, including

- Remediation programs
- Programs targeted at high achieving students
- Other Bridge-type courses & programs
- Active learning courses

2.11 Curricular options that might assist with the recruitment of high quality transfer students will be developed.

Supplemental Instruction
2.12 The implementation of a coordinated program of supplemental instruction (including the training of a faculty/staff member as a SI trainer) will be implemented for Historically Difficult Courses.

Course Redesign (with increasing student engagement as the goal)
2.13 Administrative initiatives and departmental and faculty incentives will be implemented to redesign historically difficult courses

2.14 Departments will develop, as appropriate to the disciplines, more 8W2 courses to meet student needs for courses to replace those dropped earlier in the semester.

2.15 All Historically Difficult Courses for first year students should have some form of front loading instruction.

2.16 Faculty should be encouraged to incorporate high impact curricular practices that enhance student success and engagement.

2.17 Faculty efforts for redesigning their courses to increase student engagement and success should be recognized and valued in annual evaluations and the tenure & promotion process.

Faculty Development
2.18 The University will institute training possibilities for all faculty, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants with a focus on best practices in teaching and student success.

2.19 Information should be provided to faculty, especially new faculty, so that they develop a better understanding of our student demographics and therefore be prepared to be better teachers at USM.

2.20 Focus groups with faculty should be held to learn what engagement activities are happening in departments already (instructional, programmatic, etc.), with results of best practices disseminated.

2.21 A best practices document can be distributed to all faculty annually. A brown bag series can be also utilized to share best practices to faculty.
3. Advising & Mentoring

**Training for Advisors**

3.1 The administrator for student success (or alternatively the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, and/or Student Success Steering Committee representatives) will host training sessions and expectation sessions for all faculty/staff advisors and mentors. New faculty should be required to attend at least one workshop.

3.2 Materials that facilitate the advising process and student support must be developed and shared within and across all six colleges. Information regarding services and innovative ideas in student support should be disseminated and shared across the University through the University Student Success Center.

3.3 To encourage quality advising, the Provost will issue a statement requesting that all departments include undergraduate and graduate advising, as well as faculty peer mentoring, in their tenure and promotion guidelines and annual evaluation guidelines. The statement should ask that departments develop their own qualitative standards that emphasize quality advising and mentoring. The Faculty Handbook should likewise include appropriate reference to the role and value of advising and mentoring.

3.4 Communications to increase awareness of the differences between advising and mentoring will be developed and disseminated to all University constituents.

3.5 Implementation and evaluation of innovative and creative advising practices as well as the utilization of evidence-based, empirically supported advising practices will be encouraged and supported. We also recommend the development of new best practices and suggest incentivizing the development of these ideas (See Recommendation 1.7 Support for Innovation).

3.6 “Intrusive advising” or specialized “advising interventions” should be used to maintain ongoing contact with the most at-risk students (based on probation, probation-continued, return from suspension, or other identified risk factors drawn from University data).

3.7 Academic departments will develop and publish retention guidelines for majors. Guidelines will address expectations for the major in terms of GPA, major GPA, course completion, timeline for graduation, actions to be taken by the major department as the result of deficiencies, support resources available within the department, etc.

3.8 For departments where advising takes place in a center, students are required to regularly meet with their faculty advisor/mentor (once per semester or once per year, as determined by the department) specifically to discuss optimally maximizing their experience in their major, to discuss graduate school options, expectations, and preparation, to explore career possibilities, and to seek other general advice for their professional development.
3.9 A technological solution will be established whereby students first register courses for the next semester, prior to meeting with an advisor, at which time that course schedule is verified and confirmed (a change in the advising/enrollment process).

**Recommendation 3.9.1** (if the change in the NEE indicator is not adopted) The time lag between advising and registration should be minimized so that students can register sooner after advisement.

3.10 A warning popup box in SOAR will be developed that informs a student when registering for a Historically Difficult Course.

3.11 The University should collect data on all first year students to better assist their individual needs and identify at-risk students. The goal is to connect students to resources and interventions early and get students connected to the career process.

3.12 Measures will be instituted to increase communication and improve the flow of the student mentoring and advising process.

3.13 A centralized use of the electronic scheduling of meetings with advisors will be implemented.

**Recommendation 3.14** All students must be assigned an advisor in SOAR. The assignment of an advisor in SOAR must also be part of the change of major process.

3.15 A mechanism and protocol for notifying students (e.g., warning when ID card is used) will be developed to tell students they have not registered for the next semester after some critical window/date has passed

3.16 A “Back on Track Program” for students on probation will be implemented

3.17 Current Student Orientations/Refresher sessions will be implemented.

**Peer Mentoring Programs**
3.18 Peer mentoring programs will be established.

**Faculty–Student Mentor Program**
3.19 A faculty-student mentor program will be established.

**Majors Exploration Fair**
3.20 A majors exploration fair will occur every year.
4. Policy

Declaration of Major

4.1 Students will be required to declare a major once they have completed 30 credit hours at USM. Transfer students entering the university with 30 hours or more must declare a major upon admission.

Academic & Financial Aid Calendar Modifications

4.2 The academic and financial aid calendars will be modified as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame (from start of the semester)</th>
<th>Class Day 1-6 “Open Enrollment”</th>
<th>Class Day 7</th>
<th>Class Day 7-50 “Withdraw with Academic Penalty”</th>
<th>Class Day 51-End of Term “Graded”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Calendar</strong></td>
<td>• Open enrollment in classes (includes schedule changes, Drop/Add, grading option changes). • Late registration remains possible. • Registration can be cancelled without penalty.</td>
<td>• Class registration is considered “final” and all courses, regardless of final grade, will be transcripted beginning on the 7th class day.</td>
<td>• Students may withdraw from individual courses, but will receive a transcripted “W” for each course. • The withdraw grade (“W”) will not lower the GPA but may impact financial aid. • Students may withdraw from a course through SOAR (with instructor permission and chair notification) and may add courses as a rare exception with instructor and chair permission using a form. In some cases, and only with department chair approval, students may swap classes within a department (e.g., SPA102 for SPA201). • Last day to withdraw from a class is the 50th class day.</td>
<td>• Students will earn a letter grade in all classes (only grades of A, B, C, D, F, I, P, AUD may be assigned).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Calendar</strong></td>
<td>Students who cancel registration receive a 100% tuition refund.</td>
<td>• No tuition refund will be provided beginning with the 7th day of class. • Official attendance begins. (See attendance recommendation.) • The University will begin processing Financial Aid refunds (the money remaining after tuition and fees have been paid).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Retention Initiatives</strong></td>
<td>• Early semester exams/graded assignments/diagnostic tests are encouraged (especially during days 7-14).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related recommendations:
4.3 Expectations that the first day of class is an integral, meaningful class day will be made clear to students and instructors.

4.4 Students with documented hardships who need to withdraw from a course after the 50th class day must appeal to the Withdrawal Committee (see below). The Withdrawal Committee may elect to award a “W” for a course taken during the current term depending on student circumstances.

4.5 WP and WF grading options are no longer valid for any student at any time.

4.6 Incomplete grades should only be assigned when the student has demonstrated commitment to the course and instructor and student have agreed to a plan for the student to complete coursework in a timely manner.

**Withdrawal Committee**

4.7 The University should establish a Withdrawal Committee to review requests for late withdrawal during the latter part of the semester.

**Course Repeat and Grade Replacement Policy**

4.8 The grade replacement policy should be extended to 12 credits for undergraduate students and that the following statement be adopted and then published in the Bulletin:

*Course Repeat and Grade Replacement*

Undergraduate students may repeat a course to improve their grade. When a class is repeated, the lower grade remains on the transcript but is marked as ‘Repeated’ and is not used to calculate the student’s grade point average. Students are allowed to take up to twelve credit hours of repeated course work during their undergraduate career. Students may only repeat a course by taking the same course and cannot take a course at another institution to replace a grade earned at Southern Miss. Once a course grade is marked as ‘Repeated’ students have used one of their opportunities to repeat a class and cannot reassign that repeat opportunity later in their academic career.

Grade replacement is not automatic. Some departments and majors have degree progression requirements that prevent students from taking a course multiple times and students may not replace a grade awarded for academic dishonesty. Students who have retaken a class must submit a request to the Registrar’s Office to have a grade marked as ‘Repeated.’ A successful request does not result in a recalculation of previously issued Dean’s and President’s Lists.

*Retaken Courses*

Unless the course is specifically designated as an exception, courses (taken since the fall of 2004) cannot be retaken for additional credit toward a degree. Courses that are retaken are marked on the transcript with the statement “Note: Retaken Course-included in GPA/no credit earned.”
**Probation and Suspension Reform**

4.9 The suspension policy will be revised to read:

A student placed on academic suspension may not enroll at The University of Southern Mississippi until one full semester (fall, spring or summer) has passed. However, the student may choose to take courses at another accredited institution of higher education and may transfer credits earned at that university or college, assuming the courses meet USM criteria for transfer credits. Students on suspension are strongly encouraged to contact their academic advisor in advance of taking courses at another institution to ensure that those courses are eligible for transfer credit at USM and will advance the student’s progress toward a degree. Courses taken at another institution while a student is on academic suspension will not affect the cumulative USM GPA.

4.10 The Provost’s Office will establish a list of certified probation/suspension remediation courses. Students who have received either a probation continued or a suspension will be required to take a remediation class during the first semester following probation continued or during the first semester they enroll at USM after a suspension.

**Academic Restart**

4.11 The following grade forgiveness policy will be adopted and published.

Undergraduate students who leave The University of Southern Mississippi without completing their degree and who wish to return to Southern Miss with a ‘clean slate,’ may apply for grade forgiveness under the Academic Restart policy. In order to qualify, the student must be out of school for at least 24 consecutive months (two full academic years) and have not taken classes at The University of Southern Mississippi or any other institution of higher education during that time. Grade forgiveness does not remove courses from the student’s transcript, but excludes those grades earned prior to returning to Southern Miss from use in calculating the student’s USM cumulative grade point average. Students who opt for grade forgiveness will have all previous credits earned at Southern Miss voided and no classes are exempt. The transcript will be marked to indicate the grades and semesters covered under the Academic Restart policy and students will have to retake all classes necessary to meet general education and major requirements for degree completion. Grade repeat opportunities for courses covered under the restart policy will be available to the student for future use based on the institution’s current grade repeat policy.

The Academic Restart policy may be used only once during a student’s undergraduate academic career and the decision to do so should not be taken lightly. Grade forgiveness is not automatic. Students must apply to the Registrar’s Office and sign an affidavit certifying that they have not taken courses at any institution of higher education since leaving The University of Southern Mississippi. This policy applies only to USM courses and does not affect transfer credit. It may
adversely impact student financial aid eligibility and may not be honored at other educational institutions. Students should also note that some departments and majors have degree progression requirements that prevent students from taking a course multiple times and, as a result, students who are granted an academic restart may not be eligible to pursue some majors.

**Early Enrollment Credit**

4.12 To encourage early enrollment, tuition payment, and financial aid application, we recommend reducing tuition by $100 for anyone who enrolls and pays the minimum payment (as determined by the Business Office and the student’s financial aid allotment) by May 15 for the fall semester and an equivalent date for all other semesters.

**Grading/Evaluation Policy**

4.13 The following statement will be adopted and appropriately published:

The University encourages early and regular evaluation of students believing that students are most likely to succeed when they are given prompt feedback on graded work. Students who have not been evaluated by the end of the “withdraw with academic penalty” period (generally the fiftieth day of the semester during the Fall and Spring terms), may request a withdrawal (and grade of “W”) from the Withdrawal Committee up to seven days before last day that classes meet if they are able to demonstrate that evaluation prior to the end of the withdrawal period was a reasonable expectation based on the course syllabus and yet no grades were assigned.

**Grading Practices**

4.14 Interim grades will be officially reported at the end of the sixth week of classes. Interim grades will replace the current midterm grades.

4.14.1 **Suggested Best Practice** Faculty should provide a brief graded assignment to be turned in on the first class day of the second week of class for undergraduate classes.

By assessing this initial assignment, faculty members could identify at-risk students in the second week of class and assist them in providing assistance they need to be successful in their course. This practice has been used successfully at the University of Texas El Paso, a school with a similar student demographic to USM.

4.14.2 **Suggested Best Practice** Faculty distribute and return a significant graded assignment at least three days before the date by which a student can drop a course without penalty. If students learn before the drop date that they are not going to succeed in the course, they would be able to drop without penalty and preserve their GPA and academic standing.
Amendment to Job Description #1
4.15 Human Resources will amend Job Description #1 for all university employees to include a statement regarding student success and retention initiatives.

5. Attendance Initiatives & Best Practices

5.1 For all courses offered at Southern Miss, especially the Historically Difficult Courses (HDCs), it is strongly recommended that instructors take attendance for all first-year students (recommendation from Noel Levitz).

5.2 Use of GradesFirst (or similar software solution, such as Starfish or the Retention Center in Blackboard) should be expanded beyond a focus on first-year at-risk students to include all first-year students with attention on both student attendance and performance issues.

5.3 The University will pursue technological aids to taking attendance in large classrooms.

5.4 Use of the Early Alert system will be encouraged and promoted, with response loops maintained to provide feedback to instructors.

5.5 The University will continue the emphasis on reporting Not Attending rosters early in the semester.

5.6 The following statement on class attendance will be adopted and published.

Studies show that class attendance can significantly improve academic performance and lower the time it takes to complete a degree. Regular class attendance promotes faculty/student engagement and allows for early assessment of the student’s strengths and weaknesses. Absences in excess of 10% of the scheduled classes are detrimental to a student’s chance of success. Therefore, the University encourages all course instructors to adopt an attendance policy and to include that policy in the course syllabus. While the University may take attendance in classes, particularly in Undergraduate General Education Curriculum (GEC 01-05), for the purpose of collecting data to promote student academic success, the course instructor is solely responsible for determining the penalty for not attending classes and assigning attendance grades.
6.0 Communication Plan

6.1 A coordinated and multifaceted communication plan is necessary and will be designed to promote these recommendations and provide outreach to the university community. This communication plan will begin as soon as the Steering Committee recommendations are approved.

**Mission** | Provide consistent communication for ONE brand of student success instead of promoting several separate steps or items. University Communications will help develop this message.

**Purpose** | Clearly define faculty, staff and student’s definition of student success at Southern Miss and promote the idea that all university constituents have an obligation to help students graduate. Communicate message through diverse avenues and clearly explain the significance of student success and retention.

**Time Constraints** | In order to disseminate knowledge effectively and accurately, the university administrator for student success (or alternatively, the Office of the President, Office of the Provost and the Steering Committee) should organize a communication plan that will strategically and effectively communicate the purpose and goals of the committee and university. This communication plan should be approved no later than spring 2014 in hopes the first branding message will take place in March during Founders’ Day.
Student Success Steering Committee
Recommendations with Commentary

1. New & Reallocated Resources

The Steering Committee strongly believes that the success of the initiatives proposed in this document is dependent upon new resources and specifically dedicated personnel. Resources would be needed, as appropriate, for all campuses and teaching sites, as well as for the support of online students.

Administrative position in student success and engagement (University Center for Student Success)

Recommendation 1.1 University administration will establish an administrative position in student success and engagement.

This individual will work collaboratively with department heads, faculty, staff, and university administrators to address and implement the initiatives recommended in this report. In particular, this individual will provide leadership in student success endeavors, direct the Student Success Center and its initiatives, and work with the college student success coordinators. The individual will have adequate authorization from the administration to carry out a wide range of student success initiatives. With such responsibility and accountability, the Steering Committee envisions that this individual will be appointed at an assistant vice-president/provost level or alternatively as a dean of undergraduate programs.

Technology support position for Student Success Center (University Center for Student Success)

Recommendation 1.2 The University administration will designate a technology and data support individual to support the work of the Student Success Center.

The technology staff member will work with web communications, general data collection and analysis, PeopleSoft, GradesFirst, AdvisorTrac, Turnitin, and other technological support for the University Success Center and the constituency of student support services it serves.

Supplemental instruction coordinator (University Center for Student Success)

Recommendation 1.3 The University administration will establish a position for a supplemental instruction coordinator.

Because the administrative individual is likely to deal with policy, advising, outreach, recruiting, and curricular issues, we recommend an additional supplemental instruction coordinator to oversee training in and the implementation of institutional efforts in supplemental instruction (See below).
Student Success Center

Recommendation 1.4 The University will establish a reconceptualized “University Student Success Center” to serve as a centralized location for student academic and services support and for faculty development.

The Student Success Center will have a number of functions coordinating student success efforts:

- Serving as a ‘student answer center,’ utilizing knowledgeable, cross-trained staff to assist with basic questions and connections to academic and student services departments (see University Services Center) for specific needs of students
- Coordinating UNV and LS courses and other related student support courses in the disciplines
- Overseeing university academic success programs (Writing Center, Speaking Center, Think Center, the Gulf Coast Learning Commons), providing some tutoring services, and serving as a clearinghouse for tutoring services offered through academic units
- Coordinating supplemental instruction initiatives across campus, including the training of students serving as SI session leaders
- Providing services to undeclared majors
- Providing academic coaching (study skills, note-taking, time management, goal-setting, etc.)
- Coordinating peer mentoring and faculty-student mentoring programs
- Providing outreach for students reported through GradesFirst, Early Alert/CARES, Not Attending rosters, interim rosters, attendance reports, etc.
- Maintaining accurate resources (web based) for Faculty, Advisors, and Staff best practices
- Delivering First Year Initiative
  - Collecting and analyzing the New Student Questionnaire or College Student Inventory on first-year class
  - Working with Admissions with the year-long orientation process (Orientation, Golden Eagle Welcome Week, and GS 100)
  - Coordinating the Strategic Communication Plan and outreach for first year students.
  - Overseeing Leadership Scholarship Program (currently programming is for only first year students.)
  - Working with at risk students during the first year (more proactive measure). This may include progress reports for faculty, academic coaching, understanding one’s financial situation in college, etc.
- Coordinating Student Support Services
- Coordinating McNair Scholars
- Coordinating the development and delivery, as appropriate, of faculty and staff workshops and other training mechanism for initiatives outlined in this document and serving as a clearinghouse for related faculty and staff development workshops delivered by other units (e.g. Service Learning Seminar, Writing & Speaking Centers Professional Development Seminars, etc.)
- Coordinating curricular developments and faculty involvement initiatives designed to enhance student learning.
- Coordinating recruit-back campaigns.
- Collaborating with Admissions, Financial Aid, Residence Life, the Dean of Students, and other offices within Student Affairs in the establishment and implementation of pertinent policies and initiatives.
The Student Success Center should be a place where all students (campus-bound and online), parents and visitors can go to ask questions and find information. The center would be staffed by individuals (“Success Coaches”) that have been cross-trained to assist students with questions relating to any service office. As all services are in the same location, the staff can quickly point the student to the appropriate office should the need arise. The center should be furnished with computers for self-service and also so that staff can assist students with SOAR and any other issues. SOAR issues include but are not limited to training on class search, add/drop issues, viewing a student’s financial aid and bill, and updating contact information.

Academic enhancement services are a major part of the Success Center. Academic Coaches should be available to help build skills in time management, study tactics, organization, and more. A centralized tutoring center should be available, as is feasible, for students to receive help in historically difficult courses typically scheduled during a student’s first two years in college. Staff should also be able to connect students to departmental tutoring services for upper level courses. This office should work closely with a Student Success Coordinator identified within each college and located in a College Success Center/Office in each college. Career resources like interviewing prep, resume building, internship and job information should be easily available for students in this center.

The Student Success Center should also serve the central university resource for faculty and staff development activities related to student success and engagement and as a clearinghouse for information on best practices, latest developments, training possibilities, etc.

**University Services Center**

*Recommendation 1.5 The University will establish a “University Services Center” to serve as a centralized location for student services.*

Many universities have implemented very successful “one stop” student services centers. The Southern Miss University Services Center would locate the following offices within the services center:

- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- Business Services
- Registrar
- Counseling Center
- Residence Life
- Career Services and Student Employment

The major benefit is the integration of services that aims to eliminate a potentially baffling run-around process (“Southern Shuffle”) that students commonly experience when needing assistance.

The Student Success Center could be located in the Services Center.

The University of Cincinnati has had great success with their Student Services Center and it would probably be advisable for the appropriate staff from USM to visit their campus or that of another university before implementation of the Student Success Center.

**Center or Office for Student Success with Coordinator for each academic college**

*Recommendation 1.6 Each academic college will house and adequately staff a Center or Office for Student Success to promote student success and engagement by providing academic and career assistance to all students, with emphasis on second to fourth-year students with declared majors.*
University resources would provide support to the colleges, as needed and appropriate, to establish this college-level student success administrative structure, with each college having the flexibility to propose its framework and organization for student success and submit a request for funding.

- Some colleges, for example, might set up (or maintain, as in the case of the College of Business BASE) a center-like structure offering a range of services and student support activities.
- Other colleges may opt for a less centralized approach by establishing an office with a coordinator who works with both students and faculty and staff in the college to support student success.

The college coordinator’s duties are to promote and manage the activities of the College Success Center/Office and assist students with academic or career issues, as appropriate for the college structure for student success. The coordinator would work closely with the university administrator for student success and with coordinators in other colleges and would function as the college resource point on advising and student success. Preferably, the coordinator would participate in the regular meeting of college chairs and directors. The coordinator will be a member of a university-wide Student Success Council.

The Success Center/Office for each academic college, depending on its organizational structure, might offer study skills consultations, private and group study space with computers, tutoring or guidance on tutoring and academic support resources at the university, writing assistance, public speaking assistance and referrals to other centers and programs as necessary.

- The Student Success Centers/Offices should offer day and evening hours (to be flexibly available for students) and should employ well-trained staff, which could include professional advisors, graduate assistants, and/or high-achieving undergraduate volunteers (juniors and seniors).
- The Student Success Centers/Offices will support a comprehensive approach to promote student success, such as assisting with scheduling of classes, monitoring and tracking degree progress, providing tutoring as appropriate, linking students to a variety of campus support services, promoting student engagement, providing information about career options or future graduate studies, and serving as a resource on student success initiatives for departmental faculty and staff.
- Adequate staffing and space must be provided to ensure success of the Student Success Centers/Offices. As such, this recommendation will require an investment of a significant amount of resources. However, we believe that implementation of this recommendation will ultimately be a key component to increasing student success.

Support for Innovation

1.7 The University will establish grants and other incentives for curricular and student success innovation in order to support additional initiatives to improve student success.

These grants could be awarded to colleges, departments and other units through a request for proposal process and then an evaluation-by-committee process like that formerly used for the Summer Grants for the Improvement of Instruction. Initially, the priority should be on Historically Difficult Courses. Ongoing support for initiatives that show an impact through assessment should be built into the process. Awardees would be expected to share the results of their projects through the Student Success Center.
Institutional Research

Recommendation 1.8 The Office of Institutional Research must be adequately staffed and supported to collect, analyze, and report data, especially for the initiatives of the Student Success Center, using appropriate predictive quantitative modeling to better identify at-risk students as well as to assess the effectiveness of student success initiatives.

- Key demographic information (such as eligibility for Pell grant, age, race, home zip code, major, ACT scores, high school GPA, college GPA, entered as freshman or transfer, among other variables) as well as the student outcome (graduated, still enrolled, or withdrew/dropped out) should be employed in multivariate analyses to predict who persists and who does not.
- One or more cohorts of incoming students should be followed annually for 6 years (e.g., incoming Fall 2006 class followed through Summer 2012). Outcome data at each year should be examined to identify characteristics that best predict persistence at different points in students’ educational career.
- Multivariate modeling techniques should be utilized to more accurately profile the at-risk students who can be helped so that they can be targeted for intrusive advising.
- Multivariate modeling techniques can also be used to identify which student success programs are most effective (based on persistence and retention). Likewise, current retention rates by department—which are better at retaining students—could be determined and modeling techniques could be used to predict why. Such information needs to be considered within a broader context but can be helpful in identifying best practices.
- Student feedback (i.e., “customer satisfaction”) regarding the use of the Student Success Centers should be collected and used to guide changes in procedures for the centers (e.g., hours open, services available).
- Data on retention and other student success variables pre- and post-center implementation should be gathered. Ongoing data collection and comprehensive data analysis will be essential in meeting and continually improving the University’s student success initiatives.

Standing Committee on Student Success and Engagement

1.9 A university standing Committee on Student Success and Engagement will be established.

This committee would serve as an advisory board to assist in the development and implementation of student success initiatives.

2. Curricular Issues & Faculty Involvement

UNV 101

Recommendation 2.1 UNV 101 or an equivalent discipline-based course will be required of all first-year students.
UNV 101 or an equivalent should serve as key means for integrating students into the University and preparing them for more success in their studies. The recommendation (2.2) to revise the curriculum of such a course must accompany the requirement for the course.

Recommendation 2.2 UNV 101 will undergo a curricular revision, with UNV 101 and equivalent courses in the disciplines addressing common issues and establishing common expected learning outcomes.

UNV 101 sections could be connected to colleges to make them more engaging. Within the revision process, attention should be given to ensure that the UNV curriculum constitutes a serious course with meaningful academic content and that it also includes more SOAR and advisement prep for students.

Recommendation 2.3 UNV 101 instructors will either be paid or the course will be included in the course load of faculty.

Recommendation 2.4 UNV 301 or a discipline- or college-specific equivalent course will be required of all transfer students.

Semester-by-Semester Guide Project

Recommendation 2.5 Departments, colleges and other units will undertake a review and revision of the semester-by-semester guides.

These efforts should include the following:

- A formal request from the Provost that chairs, directors, and undergraduate advisors review their semester-by-semester guides and consider the following: 1) GEC course placement; 2) combination of WDF courses per semester; and 3) the number of writing-intensive courses per semester and whether or not they are taken after students take ENG 102. (ENG 102 is where students are introduced to and practice writing research papers.)
- Clarification to faculty, advisors, preview coordinators, and students that the role of the semester-by-semester guide (as a guide—not a mandate—and that it is only applicable as a four-year completion guide).
- Preparation of a new header for semester-by-semester guides in an effort to make the goal of the guides more obvious (Examples are available from Departments of Chemistry and English).
- Consideration of an adaptable, online system that will help devise a semester-by-semester guide that is individualized to student’s entry level scores and experiences. The committee requests such a system be linked to the interactive workload calculator, as well as SOAR.
- Identification of appropriate sequencing of GEC courses within degree plans.
  - Departments offering GEC courses self-define where in the first four semesters their courses are best suited as based on a progressive view of the GEC. Departments will be asked to include this information in revising the semester-by-semester guides as appropriate/feasible.
  - Clarification of who “owns” the semester-by-semester guides as published in the Undergraduate Bulletin and work with that person/office to create efficient process for revision.

Curricular Initiatives to Engage Students

Recommendation 2.6 General Education Curriculum coursework will be utilized to implement cross-curricular engagement activities, such as a common first-year reading.
The committee recommends a committee with representation from all colleges and representatives from student affairs to discuss implementation of a common read and a potential text to be read summer of 2014 and discussed Fall 2014. The initiative could be integrated into a more coordinated UNV101 course (see above).

The following website includes book choices for a number of universities with common reads tied to their first-year experience for students:
http://tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/summer_books_list.php.

**Recommendation 2.7** Curricular coordination will occur with the potential freshman residency requirement in order to create engagement activities and learning communities.

**Recommendation 2.8** The University will explore the potential of student learning communities and implement at least one pilot program.

Initially, learning communities through block scheduling could be developed through a pilot program, where a group of students are enrolled in a block of classes together. The size, scope, and success of such a program would need to be assessed, and the relation to University course scheduling must be considered. If successful, variations on learning communities for different student populations (e.g., online students, commuters, transfer students) should be developed.

**Recommendation 2.9** The University will evaluate ways to provide summer school opportunities for students who need summer school but may not be able to afford summer school due to new financial aid restrictions.

Possibilities could include the initiation of a fund-raising/scholarship program to provide the necessary support.

**Recommendation 2.10** The University will create faculty, departmental or college incentives to develop summer programs, including

- Remediation programs
- Programs targeted at high achieving students
- Other Bridge-type courses & programs
- Active learning courses

Within any such summer-directed initiatives, the University needs to explore ways of promoting summer enrollments (e.g., innovative course combinations, connections with study abroad opportunities, courses delivered in alternative formats or locations, etc.)

**Recommendation 2.11** Curricular options that might assist with the recruitment of high quality transfer students will be developed.

**Supplemental Instruction**

**Recommendation 2.12** The implementation of a coordinated program of supplemental instruction (including the training of a faculty/staff member as a SI trainer) will be implemented for Historically Difficult Courses.
The International Center for Supplemental Instruction provides the following definition of SI:
“Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an academic assistance program that utilizes peer-assisted study
sessions. SI sessions are regularly-scheduled, informal review sessions in which students compare notes,
discuss readings, develop organizational tools, and predict test items. Students learn how to integrate
course content and study skills while working together. The sessions are facilitated by “SI leaders”,
students who have previously done well in the course and who attend all class lectures, take notes, and
act as model students.” (http://www.umkc.edu/asm/si/overview.shtml)

Course Redesign

Recommendation 2.13 Administrative initiatives and departmental and faculty incentives will be
implemented to redesign historically difficult courses.

Redesign takes many forms and can be applied to a variety of scenarios. These initiatives may or may
not involve a request-for-proposal process depending on the breadth of the redesign, whether or not
the ideas are piloted in advance, and the resources required for the redesign.
- Target incentives to redesign large lecture courses to be more effective.
- Encourage departments to develop and offer potential “fall back” courses for students who are not
  progressing to graduation at an appropriate rate.
- Encourage faculty to consider supplemental instruction alternatives for their courses. Supplemental
  instruction can be small, peer-facilitated sections.
- Provide additional training to faculty on the use of technology initiatives that encourage
  engagement (clickers, hybrid courses, etc.).
- Utilize the resources for course redesign of the National Center for Academic Transformation
  (thencat.org) for “the improved student learning outcomes, increased completion rates and reduced
  instructional costs that resulted from all NCAT programs.”
  - Apply the NCAT model of sharing of cost savings with departments as an incentive.
- Encourage faculty to incorporate active learning in course design or to take advantage of existing
  active learning experiences already established at the institution.
- Implement incentives for faculty to work with community organizations to offer internships as part
  of their coursework when appropriate.

Recommendation 2.14 Departments will develop, as appropriate to the disciplines, more 8W2 courses to
meet student needs for courses to replace those dropped earlier in the semester.

Recommendation 2.15 All Historically Difficult Courses for first year students should have some form of
front loading instruction.

During the Noel Levitz conference, sessions regarding creating a campus culture around student success
included the importance of front loading instruction for all first year courses. Front loading curriculum
includes but is not limited to making sure students receive some form of grade before the academic
drop deadline, all courses must have a syllabus (including online courses), and examples of assignments
showing “A” work during the first few weeks of class. Front loading helps the faculty member set
expectations for the course and allows the student to truly understand the requirements for each
course.

We would like for all courses to have a Blackboard component where the syllabus, instructor contact
information and office hours, list of assignments, expectations for the course (including attendance,
grading, study tips, etc.) is available for students online before the first day of courses. We also recommend that all HDCs for first year students receive a grade (quiz, paper, exam, etc.) before the academic deadline.

**Recommendation 2.16** Faculty should be encouraged to incorporate high impact curricular practices that enhance student success and engagement.

High impact practices could include involvement with the Center for Undergraduate Research, Service Learning and the Center for Community and Civic Engagement, internships in partnership with community businesses, and study abroad, among others (cf. Support for Innovation)

**Recommendation 2.17** Faculty efforts for redesigning their courses to increase student engagement and success should be recognized and valued in annual evaluations and the tenure & promotion process.

**Faculty Development**

**Recommendation 2.18** The University will institute training possibilities for all faculty, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants with a focus on best practices in teaching and student success.

As stated at the Noel-Levitz conference, we must change what we are doing in the classroom (traditional and online). We recommend emphasizing the Provost’s role as the chief advocate for professional development and for the value of student success. This training should include cross-training across departments and utilize esteemed faculty in the disciplines and departmental resources (like the Think Center and/or Honors College) to create workshops on different types of teaching methods. Topics should include but are not limited to active learning, developing research opportunities for students, creating an environment conducive for learning, and student learning theories/styles. Additionally, Blackboard training should be conducted through the Learning Enhancement Center for persons teaching fully online or hybrid courses. University standards should be set to promote best practices and policies regarding student success.

This training should be in addition to, but in coordination with, the resources and services currently available to faculty/instructors, which include:

- New Faculty Orientation
- Faculty First Year Experience
- The USM Teaching Forum
- The Scientific Teaching Seminar
- The Faculty Development Seminars on Speaking & Writing Pedagogy
- Service Learning Seminar
- Study Abroad
- Center for Undergraduate Research
- Learning Enhancement Center (LEC) provides other optional services for faculty training
- Other tools and resources offered through schools/departments
- Provost web site with policies and procedures such as classroom conduct, grade review
Recommendation 2.19 Information should be provided to faculty, especially new faculty, so that they develop a better understanding of our student demographics and therefore be prepared to be better teachers at USM.

Recommendation 2.20 Focus groups with faculty will be held to learn what engagement activities are happening in departments already (instructional, programmatic, etc.), with results of best practices disseminated.

Recommendation 2.21 A best practices document can be distributed to all faculty annually. A brown bag series can be also utilized to share best practices to faculty.

3. Advising & Mentoring

Training for Advisors

Recommendation 3.1 The administrator for student success (or alternatively the Office of the President, Office of the Provost and/or Retention Steering Committee representatives) will host training sessions and expectation sessions for all faculty/staff advisors and mentors. New faculty should be required to attend at least one workshop.

Advisement should be more than course scheduling; it should focus as well on career mentoring and student support. University wide workshops could be held each semester on effective practices for academic advising and mentoring.

- Training Items (All advisement should be consistent across campus.):
  - Best practices for advising students
  - Using the Semester-by-Semester guide but understanding that they should advise to student individual needs and capabilities and not to strict adherence to the guide. A four-year; five-year semester-by-semester guide that includes some remedial courses or moderated academic loads (in math and science) for the students might be developed.
  - Informing advisors of the issues surrounding Historically Difficult Courses, with a contextualized approach that takes into consideration individual student preparedness, time availability for studies, academic major and needs, etc.
  - Using a university form (Course Load Calculator) to help the students understand their course load, hours of employment, and when they will have time to study and do homework.
  - Explanation of UNV 101 and the value and purpose of the course.
  - University resources on campus that can assist students with academic needs.
- Faculty workshops on mentoring should be regularly offered (with new faculty being required to attend at least one workshop).

Recommendation 3.2 Materials that facilitate the advising process and student support must be developed and shared within and across all six colleges. Information regarding services and innovative ideas in student support should be disseminated and shared across the University through the University Student Success Center.
Draft 11/21/13 – Recommendations only

The University Success Center will have the responsibility for maintaining a centralized website to provide advising and mentoring resources, innovative practices, and relevant advising forms.

**Recommendation 3.3** To encourage quality advising, the Provost will issue a statement requesting that all departments include undergraduate and graduate advising, as well as faculty peer mentoring, in their tenure and promotion guidelines and annual evaluation guidelines. The statement should ask that departments develop their own qualitative standards that emphasize quality advising and mentoring. The Faculty Handbook should likewise include appropriate reference to the role and value of advising and mentoring.

The Steering Committee maintains that good advising leads to academic success. Faculty involvement in the advising and mentoring process is critical and should be strongly encouraged and supported. Contributions toward advising and student success should be considered in the tenure and promotion process to underscore their importance and value to the University. The Committee acknowledges that a department needs flexibility in determining the role of advising and mentoring responsibilities within the department.

**Recommendation 3.4** Communications to increase awareness of the differences between advising and mentoring will be developed and disseminated to all University constituents.

**Recommendation 3.5** Implementation and evaluation of innovative and creative advising practices as well as the utilization of evidence-based, empirically supported advising practices will be encouraged and supported. We also recommend the development of new best practices and suggest incentivizing the development of these ideas (cf. Support for Innovation).

To implement this recommendation, we need to have a full and formal assessment of the current advising protocols within each college, each department, and each program within a department. This information will help structure a logical starting point for shared policies and procedures across the six college Student Success Centers/Offices.

**Recommendation 3.6** “Intrusive advising” or specialized “advising interventions” will be used to maintain ongoing contact with the most at-risk students (based on probation, probation-continued, return from suspension, or other identified risk factors drawn from University data).

Proactive communication campaigns targeting at-risk students should encourage or possibly require interaction with their college Student Success Center/Office not only for intensive advising but also at other dates during the semester for support services.

If students are on probation, probation-continued, or returning from suspension, interaction with their college Student Success Center/Office for a pre-determined required number of hours for engagement in activities/tasks beyond those outlined in an academic contract to enhance success as defined by the College Success Center/Office or department should be implemented.
Focus should be on intervening with students in the semester following initially being placed on probation, rather than waiting on further failure (e.g., until academic probation-continued or suspension).

**Recommendation 3.7** Academic departments will develop and publish retention guidelines for majors. Guidelines will address expectations for the major in terms of GPA, major GPA, course completion, timeline for graduation, actions to be taken by the major department as the result of deficiencies, support resources available within the department, etc.

**Recommendation 3.8** For departments where advising takes place in a center, students are required to regularly meet with their faculty advisor/mentor (once per semester or once per year, as determined by the department) specifically to discuss optimally maximizing their experience in their major, to discuss graduate school options, expectations, and preparation, to explore career possibilities, and to seek other general advice for their professional development.

**Recommendation 3.9** A technological solution will be established whereby students first register courses for the next semester, prior to meeting with an advisor, at which time that course schedule is verified and confirmed (a change in the advising/enrollment process).

Currently the NEE service indicator can block enrollment and is meant for the students to meet with their advisor first then select their classes. We recommend the NEE service indicator not block enrollment. Instead, the student would select classes for the upcoming semester(s) and then meet with his/her advisor to verify and confirm the schedule and then release the service indicator, which will officially enroll the student in the approved courses. Without advisor confirmation, that registration would be cancelled after a set time.

This process would ensure that the student is taking greater responsibility in the development of a program of studies and using their personal time to find classes that meet their needs (work, organizational meetings, and interest) and then that the time spent with the faculty/staff advisor was designated for schedule verification, career advice, and internship/research opportunities.

**Recommendation 3.9.1 (if the change in the NEE indicator is not adopted)** The time lag between advising and registration should be minimized so that students can register sooner after advisement.

**Recommendation 3.10** A warning popup box in SOAR will be developed that informs a student when registering for a Historically Difficult Course.

The popup, in conjunction with greater awareness among advisors about the potential impact of multiple HDCs in the same semester, will assist students in setting a course load best suited to their program of studies, individual needs and strengths, etc.
Recommendation 3.11 The University will collect data on all first year students to better assist their individual needs and identify at-risk students. The goal is to connect students to resources and interventions early and get students connected to the career process.

As a pilot program for fall 2013, First Year Initiative has implemented the New Student Questionnaire. This questionnaire has been approved by IRB to collect data for first year students at Southern Miss and data is being collected. All first year freshmen were emailed the link to the questionnaire and given many opportunities to complete it at Orientation. This 32-item questionnaire allows students to provide information regarding their high school academic ability, parent educational level, expectations of university life, and other areas where they may need additional resources while in college. All data is collected through Qualtrics and is coordinated in First Year Initiative. FYI staff will use data throughout the entire first year to find ways to connect students to academic and departmental resources on campus. They will also provide data to academic advisors and departmental chairs when appropriate. This information would also be given to the “Success Coaches” so they can reach out to students, if the recommendation for a Student Resource Center is approved.

College Student Inventory - After this pilot year using the New Student Questionnaire, we recommend that an assessment be made to see if the New Student Questionnaire is successful. If we feel like another approach is needed, we recommend the College Student Inventory with Noel Levitz be implemented for fall 2014. We also recommend that someone/department (Student Resource Center) be designated to analyze and use data. At this time, there is no department/person assigned to retention efforts for the entire university population. To pay for the College Student Inventory, we recommend that a lab fee be charged for UNV 101 (only if this course is approved and required for all first year students).

Recommendation 3.12 Measures will be instituted to increase communication and improve the flow of the student mentoring and advising process.

Students and their advisors must be provided with accurate and consistent information, which starts with better communication among academic affairs and student affairs. Collaborative integration is a key component.

- Campus-wide information disseminated each semester when it is time for student advising and available through a dynamic (interactive and updating) website to provide consistent information.

- Department chairs and individual student advisors should receive a list of students who have not yet been cleared for registration so the students can be directly contacted about scheduling an advising appointment.

- Department chairs should be immediately informed of new majors so they can receive orientation materials for their department.
• Department chairs and individual student advisors should receive a list of students who have not yet registered so they can be contacted about and assisted with the registration process. Early (still during semester before) and later (during winter interim for Spring semester or summer for Fall Semester) recruit-back campaigns should be used. An email or phone call may suffice for early recruit-back (more of a reminder/nudge). A more formal mechanism with more detail and selling points (public relations) can be used for late recruit-back.
  1. Students with high number of hours completed should be of particular focus.
• Advisors and faculty mentors should have access to financial aid information to factor in eligibility for aid for semesters to help in degree planning.

**Recommendation 3.13** A centralized use of the electronic scheduling of meetings with advisors will be implemented.

AdvisorTrac and GradesFirst, both available at the University, have that capability. SOAR/PeopleSoft could also be utilized.

**Recommendation 3.14** All students must be assigned an advisor in SOAR. The assignment of an advisor in SOAR must also be part of the change of major process.

**Recommendation 3.15** A mechanism and protocol for notifying students (e.g., warning when ID card is used) will be developed to tell students they have not registered for the next semester after some critical window/date has passed.

**Recommendation 3.16** A “Back on Track Program” for students on probation will be implemented (see Recommendation.

The Success Center and coordinator would implement and facilitate a “Back on Track” program. The program’s focus would be centered on students placed on academic probation and probation continued. The coordinator could meet with these students and ask questions to figure out what happened during the unsuccessful semester(s). Each student would then be connected to academic and campus resources that could help get the student “Back on Track”. (Recommendation from Noel Levitz conference)

**Recommendation 3.17** Current Student Orientations/Refreshers sessions should be implemented.

The College Success Center/Office in each academic college within the University will host annual orientations for their current students. There could be one dedicated towards sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Within the first couple of weeks of each fall/spring (for new transfer students only) semester, each academic college will hold current student orientations. These orientations will be unique because they will be designed to inform students of what they need to do in order to succeed within that specific academic college. Although these sessions will be uniquely designed by the specific academic colleges, they will have some of the same following basic components:
Sophomore Orientation/Refresher: Sophomore year symbolizes the time when most students begin to take their Major courses. The Sophomore Orientation/Refresher will allow academic colleges the opportunity to inform their students of academic expectations. This Orientation/Refresher can also allow academic colleges an opportunity to offer their student tips to succeed in the classroom, as well as a preliminary insight into future career opportunities. It will also inform the students of all the resources that are available within their academic college, as well as within the general university community. There will also be a representative from each program within the college to provide information.

Junior Orientation/Refresher: Junior year symbolizes the time when most students have already taken some of their Major courses. Although they should now have an idea of academic expectations, the academic colleges should also highlight course expectations for upper-level courses. It will also inform the students of all the resources that are available within their academic college, as well as within the general university community. It will also include sessions from career services on career opportunities. There will also be a representative from each program within the college to provide information.

Senior Orientation/Refresher: Senior year symbolizes the time when most students have already taken the majority of their Major courses. Although they should now have an idea of academic expectations, the academic colleges should also highlight information specific to seniors, such as making sure they are on track to graduate, completed or about to complete any mandatory internships. It will also inform the students of all the resources that are available within their academic college, as well as within the general university community. It will also include sessions from career services on career opportunities. There will also be a representative from each program within the college to provide information.

For all current student orientations/refresher, the following university departments will also be represented to offer information that is specific to each academic classification (sophomore, junior, senior): Office of Financial Aid, Office of the University Registrar, Office of Business Services, Career Services, etc.

Peer Mentoring Programs

Recommendation 3.18 Peer mentoring programs will be established.

Peer mentoring program within UNV 101: A pilot program is being implemented in the fall 2013 semester in UNV 101. Each section (12 sections total) will be assigned two Southern Style Orientation leaders to facilitate certain topics. All orientation leaders were trained in the spring 2012 semester through UNV 325 and facilitated Priority and Summer Orientations for freshman students. These Southern Style Peer Mentors are not paid and must volunteer 20 hours during the fall semester to maintain their membership for the group.

They will make initial contact with each student in their course before the semester arrives to establish a relationship, make an introduction, and welcome them to Southern Miss. From there, they will meet with the class at least twice a month during class time (50 minutes). During class period, they will facilitate and lead group discussion on managing your time in college, finding ways to get involved and meet new people, managing your money/budget, helpful tips on how to take notes and understanding class syllabi, etc. Outside of class, they will meet with each member on an individual basis two weeks before midterms. During this meeting they will discuss their progress and see if they can connect
students to university resources and departments. They will also plan at least one group outing outside of the classroom. Throughout the entire fall semester, they will communicate through @eagles account, text, and Facebook about important calendar deadlines, events on campus, and ways to get involved on campus.

In addition to analyzing grades and persistence to the next semester, the First Year Initiative office will send out short questionnaires to UNV Instructors, Southern Style Peer Mentors, and UNV 101 participants to assess the success of the program. (Recommended at Noel Levitz conference) Materials and ideas were gathered from several colleges and universities across the country due to communication on the FYE listserv. Several ideas were obtained from Sarah Mosier, Director of First Year Experience, at Becker College. This college is a private, four-year college. Their mentors are selected, trained and paid $500 per semester through scholarship.

**Peer-mentoring programs in introductory courses within majors** Another pilot program is being implemented in the fall 2013 in the School of Accountancy with assistance from the BASE center in the College of Business. Accounting honor students who are members of Beta Alpha Psi will be matched with students in Introductory Accounting courses (ACC 200 and 220). Participation by students will be strictly voluntary (emails are sent to students in all introductory courses) and both the mentor and mentee will sign an agreement concerning their respective responsibilities. The mentor relationship will last for the current semester. Mentors will meet with mentees at least twice a month for one hour per meeting to provide students with tutoring, develop relationships and offer personal support. Mentors will tutor students for a maximum of six hours at no charge and any extra hours can be compensated at a rate of $10 per hour (at the option of the mentor; the mentor can assist the student at no charge if they so choose). Mentors will be instructed that they are to assist the student with understanding the accounting concepts and problems, but they are not to do assignments for the mentee. Mentees will be encouraged to do their best to understand the material before meeting with the tutor in order to get the most benefit from the meetings. Short questionnaires will be sent to all participants at the end of the semester to determine if the program was effective. If this program is determined to be successful, it could be a model for mentoring programs with students in other departments and student organizations on campus.

**Faculty–Student Mentor Program**

*Recommendation 3.19 A faculty-student mentor program will be established.*

Research overwhelmingly shows the improvement in retention rates as a result of, and the benefits of, faculty-student mentor programs. At USM, there are approximately 350 – 400 students who are considered major at-risk (determined by regression model in FYI) when starting their college career and these are the students that are most likely to benefit from participation in the program.

Among other goals, the major objective of the program is to foster relationships in which the student feels that there is someone on the faculty who cares about his or her academic success, and to whom he or she can turn to when the need arises ([http://www.diversitybenefitseveryone.com/setupafacultystudentmentoringprogram.html](http://www.diversitybenefitseveryone.com/setupafacultystudentmentoringprogram.html)).

The program should be handled by a coordinator who is responsible for all aspects of the program, including orientations, training, matching mentors and students, and year-end evaluation of the
program. Target students participate on a voluntary basis with the goal of reaching the majority of the identified major at-risk students. During the year of implementation, mentors and students should meet at least three or four times during the semester (monthly meetings would be ideal in future years).

Preferably, the students are matched with mentors in their academic major. There are two views regarding the participation of faculty members. At many universities, participation by faculty is strictly voluntary. The coordinator would meet with faculty in each college to explain the program and the opportunity to significantly impact the lives of undergraduate students. Alternatively, faculty members would receive a three-hour course release per semester to mentor a specified number of students. At a minimum, we recommend that the university recognize faculty who participate in mentor programs as providing a service to the student and these faculty members should be acknowledged in the annual review process.

**Majors Exploration Fair**

*Recommendation 3.20* A majors exploration fair will occur every year.

Currently, there is no Majors Fair for students at USM. As modeled at the University of Mississippi, a Majors Fair would expose students with undeclared majors to the academic options available to them and give all students a chance to explore career opportunities (similar to an involvement fair). At a minimum, the Majors Fair should have faculty representatives present from each academic department that offers a major. Ideally, each academic department would also invite outside professionals to attend. Have Career Services or the Student Success Coordinators for each college to link students to community members for internships and mentor relationships. Students enrolled in UNV 101 and also students with undeclared majors are required to attend; attendance is optional for any other interested students. Students attending speak with representatives from multiple departments to determine their areas of interest. After the Majors Fair, faculty/staff advisors or “Success Coaches” follow up with students who attended to encourage them to declare a major.

## 4. Policy

### Declaration of Major

*Recommendation 4.1* Students will be required to declare a major once they have completed 30 credit hours at USM. Transfer students entering the university with 30 hours or more must declare a major upon admission.

### Academic & Financial Aid Calendar Modifications

*Recommendation 4.2* The academic and financial aid calendars will be modified as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised Academic/Financial Calendar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Frame</strong> (from start of the semester)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame (from start of the semester)</th>
<th>Class Day 1-6 “Open Enrollment”</th>
<th>Class Day 7</th>
<th>Class Day 7-50 “Withdraw with Academic Penalty”</th>
<th>Class Day 51-End of Term “Graded”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Calendar</strong></td>
<td>● Open enrollment in classes (includes schedule changes, Drop/Add, grading option changes). ● Late registration remains possible. ● Registration can be cancelled without penalty.</td>
<td>● Class registration is considered “final” and all courses, regardless of final grade, will be transcripted beginning on the 7th class day.</td>
<td>● Students may withdraw from individual courses, but will receive a transcripted “W” for each course. ● The withdraw grade (“W”) will not lower the GPA but may impact financial aid. ● Students may withdraw from a course through SOAR (with instructor permission and chair notification) and may add courses as a rare exception with instructor and chair permission using a form. In some cases, and only with department chair approval, students may swap classes within a department (e.g., SPA102 for SPA201). ● Last day to withdraw from a class is the 50th class day.</td>
<td>● Students will earn a letter grade in all classes (only grades of A, B, C, D, F, I, P, AUD may be assigned).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Calendar</strong></td>
<td>Students who cancel registration receive a 100% tuition refund.</td>
<td>● No tuition refund will be provided beginning with the 7th day of class. ● Official attendance begins. (See attendance recommendation.) ● The University will begin processing Financial Aid refunds (the money remaining after tuition and fees have been paid).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Retention Initiatives</strong></td>
<td>● Early semester exams/graded assignments /diagnostic tests are encouraged (especially during days 7-14).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Related Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 4.3** Expectations that the first day of class is an integral, meaningful class day will be made clear to students and instructors.

**Recommendation 4.4** Students with documented hardships who need to withdraw from a course after the 50th class day must appeal to the Withdrawal Committee (see below). The Withdrawal Committee may elect to award a “W” for a course taken during the current term depending on student circumstances.

**Recommendation 4.5** WP and WF grading options are no longer valid for any student at any time.
Recommendation 4.6 Incomplete grades should only be assigned when the student has demonstrated commitment to the course and instructor and student have agreed to a plan for the student to complete coursework in a timely manner.

Academic/Financial Calendar Justification
There has been little research into the role of the registrar’s office, University policies, and the academic calendar/financial calendar on retention.¹ However, the Steering Committee believes that student success increases when students are fully engaged in their courses at the start of the semester and grading and financial aid policies are kept simple so that students can make informed decisions about their academic and personal lives. We propose a simplified academic calendar that encourages students to move toward completion of their classes and their degrees.

Students require time to select classes, but a long open registration period results in students who miss the start of class, have not been fully appraised of the course requirements, and soon are at risk of failing. A short open registration period followed by a period in which there is an academic penalty, a “w” withdraw grade, for students who abandon the class, will encourage students to make a firm commitment, will allow instructors to monitor and identify attendance problems earlier, will make it possible to test early in the semester so that students can identify their weaknesses and adopt better study plans, and will allow for the quick dispersal of financial aid so that students can purchase books and be more fully vested in their academic experience. We believe that a revised academic calendar will foster a scholarly learning community.

A simpler academic and financial calendar will also make it easier for students to make important decisions about such issues as to whether to withdraw from a class or purchase books. Clarity, in itself, will reduce poor decisions that can have academic and financial consequences that lead to retention problems.

We have shaped the dates and policies of our revised calendar to address USM’s concerns, but the shorter open enrollment period and withdraw grade (in place of the often abused WP and WF) are consistent with many of our peer institutions in and outside the state. The schedule we are offering is a model. It will need to be adapted to half-semester and summer classes.

Implementing the new, simplified calendar requires some changes in procedures. Added and dropped classes during the “open enrollment” period (first six days of the semester) can be done in SOAR as is the current policy; however, we are recommending a new process for handling withdrawals during the “withdraw with academic penalty” period (through the fiftieth day of the semester). During this period, students will be able to withdraw in SOAR, but the process will include a warning that states that while “w” grades do not count against a student’s GPA, (1) the student is still responsible for tuition, and (2) that future employers and admission officers may view a record of excessive withdrawals unfavorably.

¹ Marguerite Dennis, “Registrar’s Role in Retention and Student Success,” Recruitment and Retention in Higher Education 26, n. 4 (April 2012), 7.
When the student withdraws from a class in SOAR after the open enrollment period and before the fiftieth day of the semester, the system will also ask the student for a reason and generate an electronic request which will be sent to the course instructor who will have a chance to read the student’s reason for withdrawing and to approve the withdrawal in SOAR. (Similar to the process used to communicate grade changes to Department Chairs that we currently employ.) While in most cases we expect that the instructor’s permission will be a formality, we feel there needs to an opportunity for the instructor to discuss the withdrawal request with students who are in a position to succeed in the course and need intrusive advising. The notification will also help faculty keep track of student withdrawals for purpose of tracking attendance.

We are also recommending policies for less common, but nonetheless important procedures. Prior to the fiftieth day of class, students will also have the opportunity to add a class or, in some cases, swap a class in the same academic department. Since the goal of the new academic calendar is to encourage students to get a quick start to the semester, late additions will be strongly discouraged. However, we recognize there may be occasions when the instructor or the student will need to add a course late. (A student, for example, might withdraw from a full semester course and take half semester course in order to maintain their financial aid.) We also recognized that in some cases, departments wish to “swap” students from one class to another in the same department. (An instructor of a student in German II, for example, might advise the student to switch to German I because, while the student is doing the work, he or she needs more remedial skills.) An added class would require a paper form and an instructor’s signature. A “swap” could happen only within a department and would require signatures from both instructors and the department chair. (We have included a sample of an add/swap form.)

Finally, by design, after the fiftieth day of the semester, students can no longer withdraw themselves from a class and should complete the course for a grade. However, there may be exceptions in the case of hardship (or the unusual instance when the faculty member has failed to assess the student). We recommend the creation of a Withdrawal Committee to handle late semester withdrawal requests due to hardship (as discussed in one of the following recommendations).

We urge the University to adopt this new calendar and to accompany its publication with publicity that explains that the calendar is designed as a “timetable to success.” We also feel that given the lack of research on the relationship between the academic calendar and retention, the calendar’s impact on retention should be carefully studied and evaluated.

**Withdrawal Committee**

*Recommendation 4.7 The University should establish a Withdrawal Committee to review requests for late withdrawal during the latter part of the semester.*

There may be occasions when students, either because of personal hardship or because the instructor has failed to access the student prior to the end of the “withdraw with academic penalty” period (generally the fiftieth day of the semester during the Fall and Spring terms), feel they cannot complete a course. The committee, to be made up of faculty and administrators (in equal number) and at least one
student representative, will have the power to assign a “W” grade. Students seeking the W grade will have to submit a late withdrawal form and verifiable evidence, including in cases of hardship, a signed statement from the course instructor confirming satisfactory participation in the course prior to the hardship. The form and evidence would be submitted to the academic dean of the college in which the student is majoring for verification and then forwarded electronically to members of the Withdrawal Committee. For the Withdrawal Committee to hear an appeal, it would have to receive the appeal seven days prior to the final day that classes meet.

Course Repeat and Grade Replacement Policy

Recommendation 4.8 The grade replacement policy should be extended to 12 credits for undergraduate students and that the following statement be adopted and then published in the Bulletin:

Course Repeat and Grade Replacement

Undergraduate students may repeat a course to improve their grade. When a class is repeated, the lower grade remains on the transcript but is marked as ‘Repeated’ and is not used to calculate the student’s grade point average. Students are allowed to take up to twelve credit hours of repeated course work during their undergraduate career. Students may only repeat a course by taking the same course and cannot take a course at another institution to replace a grade earned at Southern Miss. Once a course grade is marked as ‘Repeated’ students have used one of their opportunities to repeat a class and cannot reassign that repeat opportunity later in their academic career.

Grade replacement is not automatic. Some departments and majors have degree progression requirements that prevent students from taking a course multiple times and students may not replace a grade awarded for academic dishonesty.² Students who have retaken a class must submit a request to the Registrar’s Office to have a grade marked as ‘Repeated.’ A successful request does not result in a recalculation of previously issued Dean’s and President’s Lists.

Retaken Courses

Unless the course is specifically designated as an exception, courses (taken since the fall of 2004) cannot be retaken for additional credit toward a degree. Courses that are retaken are marked on the transcript with the statement “Note: Retaken Course-included in GPA/no credit earned.”

The University currently allows students who are unsatisfied with their grade in a class to retake the same class and replace the grade. Students can currently retake up to six credits (or eighteen credits for those who were grandfathered after a policy change in 1999). We recommend that the grade replacement policy be extended to twelve credits for undergraduate students (consistent with the policies of the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University).

² The University assembled an Academic Integrity Task Force last spring. If its recommendations are implemented, students who fail a course due to an academic integrity violation will receive an XF grade. Adoption of the XF grade will make designating a course “repeated” easier.
Invariably, students struggle to balance the demands of work, life, and school. Repeated classes and grade replacement recognizes that good students occasionally have difficult academic experiences. We believe that students deserve this second chance and that more opportunities to repeat a class and improve the grade may encourage students to persist who are considering leaving The University of Southern Mississippi to complete their academic career elsewhere. In some cases, this policy may also assist a student who performed poorly in a selected major early in his or her career to achieve the necessary grade point average required by many departments to change majors.

**Probation and Suspension Reform**

*Recommendation 4.9* The suspension policy will be revised to read:

A student placed on academic suspension may not enroll at The University of Southern Mississippi until one full semester (fall, spring or summer) has passed. However, the student may choose to take courses at another accredited institution of higher education and may transfer credits earned at that university or college, assuming the courses meet USM criteria for transfer credits. Students on suspension are strongly encouraged to contact their academic advisor in advance of taking courses at another institution to ensure that those courses are eligible for transfer credit at USM and will advance the student’s progress toward a degree. Courses taken at another institution while a student is on academic suspension will not affect the cumulative USM GPA.

Students enrolled at The University of Southern Mississippi are subject to probation if their grade point average falls below the required minimum, probation continued if the GPA remains low for two consecutive semesters, and suspension after a third consecutive semester. Students who have been suspended are prohibited from registering for classes at USM. In addition, they cannot take classes at other institutions of higher learning without prior written consent from their advisor or dean.

While the Steering Committee believes it is in the interest of students to seek advising before they take classes at another institution so that they can verify in advance that the class will be accepted for credit at USM and so that they take the courses they most need to complete their degrees, we feel that “prior written approval” creates an unnecessary barrier for students who are trying to improve themselves in preparation for returning to USM. For these reasons, the suspension policy should be revised as outlined above.

*Recommendation 4.10* The Provost’s Office will establish a list of certified probation/suspension remediation courses. Students who have received either a probation continued or a suspension will be required to take a remediation class during the first semester following probation continued or during the first semester they enroll at USM after a suspension.

The course list would be assembled from existing and to-be developed courses, both University courses and courses being taught in various colleges (which might be nominated by the colleges). All courses...
included on the list would have to submit a syllabus to the Provost’s Office for recertification every two years.

During a probation continued semester or following a suspension, the student would meet with their advisor to determine which of the remediation courses would work best. The student might, for example, need a study skills course or a basic math course or even a stress management course. The advisor would ensure that the student registered for the appropriate course and completed it satisfactorily. Both eight-week and full-term courses would be eligible for the remediation designation.

**Academic Restart**

*Recommendation 4.11 The following grade forgiveness policy will be adopted and published.*

*Undergraduate students who leave The University of Southern Mississippi without completing their degree and who wish to return to Southern Miss with a ‘clean slate,’ may apply for grade forgiveness under the Academic Restart policy. In order to qualify, the student must be out of school for at least 24 consecutive months (two full academic years) and have not taken classes at The University of Southern Mississippi or any other institution of higher education during that time. Grade forgiveness does not remove courses from the student’s transcript, but excludes those grades earned prior to returning to Southern Miss from use in calculating the student’s USM cumulative grade point average. Students who opt for grade forgiveness will have all previous credits earned at Southern Miss voided and no classes are exempt. The transcript will be marked to indicate the grades and semesters covered under the Academic Restart policy and students will have to retake all classes necessary to meet general education and major requirements for degree completion. Grade repeat opportunities for courses covered under the restart policy will be available to the student for future use based on the institution’s current grade repeat policy.*

The Academic Restart policy may be used only once during a student’s undergraduate academic career and the decision to do so should not be taken lightly. Grade forgiveness is not automatic. Students must apply to the Registrar’s Office and sign an affidavit certifying that they have not taken courses at any institution of higher education since leaving The University of Southern Mississippi. This policy applies only to USM courses and does not affect transfer credit. It may adversely impact student financial aid eligibility and may not be honored at other educational institutions. Students should also note that some departments and majors have degree progression requirements that prevent students from taking a course multiple times and, as a result, students who are granted an academic restart may not be eligible to pursue some majors.

Sometimes retention involves providing opportunities for students to return to school and start over. All of us have known bright students who arrived at college unprepared for the rigors of classes or the distractions of living away from home. In some cases, these students may benefit from real-life experiences and the opportunity to return to The University of Southern Mississippi to complete their degree.
Early Enrollment Credit

**Recommendation 4.12** To encourage early enrollment, tuition payment, and financial aid application, we recommend reducing tuition by $100 for anyone who enrolls and pays the minimum payment (as determined by the Business Office and the student’s financial aid allotment) by May 15 for the fall semester and an equivalent date for all other semesters.

Going to university involves preparation and planning, and we believe that students who commit to The University of Southern Mississippi in a timely manner are better able to make plans about the courses they will take, books they will need, how much financial aid they are eligible for, where they will work, and the other sundry decisions that beginning a new semester require. The Steering Committee maintains that it is better to work out these challenges before the semester begins than during the start of the semester and an early enrollment credit would encourage students to commit to their education in a timelier manner. Such a commitment is not only good for the student, but allows the University to better allocate its resources.

The Steering Committee is aware of conversations that have taken place in recent months calling for the elimination of “last minute” enrollment. Regardless of what new policies emerge from those conversations, we believe the early enrollment credit should be enacted.

Grading/Evaluation Policy

**Recommendation 4.13** The following statement will be adopted and appropriately published:

The University encourages early and regular evaluation of students believing that students are most likely to succeed when they are given prompt feedback on graded work. Students who have not been evaluated by the end of the “withdraw with academic penalty” period (generally the fiftieth day of the semester during the Fall and Spring terms), may request a withdrawal (and grade of “W”) from the Withdrawal Committee up to seven days before last day that classes meet if they are able to demonstrate that evaluation prior to the end of the withdrawal period was a reasonable expectation based on the course syllabus and yet no grades were assigned.

The Steering Committee believes strongly in academic freedom and recognizes that evaluation of students should reflect the instructor’s educational goals. However, in most cases, students benefit from early and regular evaluation as well as the timely reporting of grades. Students need to know their weaknesses in order to address them and succeed. In light of this, the Steering Committee recommends the adoption and publication of the policy statement above.

We believe it is rare that instructors fail to assess and grade students during the first half of the semester, but we also feel that students must have access to the information they need to succeed. In the rare case where an instructor has failed in his or her responsibility, students should have the option to withdraw from the class.
Grading Practices

Recommendation 4.14 Interim grades will be officially reported at the end of the sixth week of classes. Interim grades will replace the current midterm grades.

Noel Levitz suggests that faculty report grades early in the semester so students will know the status of their grade before the academic drop deadline. Without adding more grading reports to faculty load, we recommend a practice of reporting grades six-weeks into the semester. These sixth-week grades will replace of midterm grades.

Suggested Best Practice 4.14.1 Faculty should provide a brief graded or diagnostic assignment to be turned in on the first class day of the second week of class for undergraduate classes. By assessing this initial assignment, faculty members could identify at-risk students in the second week of class and assist them in providing assistance they need to be successful in their course. This practice has been used successfully at the University of Texas El Paso, a school with a similar student demographic to USM.

Suggested Best Practice 4.14.2 Faculty distribute and return a significant graded assignment at least three days before the date by which a student can drop a course without penalty. If students learn before the drop date that they are not going to succeed in the course, they would be able to drop without penalty and preserve their GPA and academic standing.

Amendment to Job Description #1

Recommendation 4.15 Human Resources will amend Job Description #1 for all university employees to include a statement regarding student success and retention initiatives.

For example “Adheres to all University and Departmental Policies and actively contributes to the success and retention of our students.”

5. Attendance Initiatives & Best Practices

5.1 For all courses offered at Southern Miss, especially the Historically Difficult Courses (HDCs), it is strongly recommended that instructors take attendance for all first-year students (recommendation from Noel Levitz).

Similar to an attendance policy implemented at Ole Miss, freshman students that have been absent three times or more should be reported weekly to the “Success Coaches” (or faculty advisors) for intentional outreach. The focus on this initiative would be on monitoring student engagement, with any academic penalty determined by the instructor.
Recommendation 5.2 Use of GradesFirst (or similar software solution, such as Starfish or the Retention Center in Blackboard) should be expanded beyond a focus on first-year at-risk students to include all first-year students with attention on both student attendance and performance issues.

A possible approach might see the monitoring program expand by a set percentage of students over several years.

Recommendation 5.3 The University will pursue technological aids to taking attendance in large classrooms.

This attendance practice would be addressed at Orientations for all first year students.

The First Year Initiative staff is conducting a pilot program with two history courses during the fall 2013 semester. They will have their history tutors take attendance (using card swipes) during two large HIS 101 and 102 courses on Tuesday and Thursday. The tutors will stay and listen to the instruction so they can better assists the students when being tutored. They will also give the attendance list to the History instructors and First Year Initiative staff. FYI staff will do intentional outreach to these students throughout the semester.

We are encouraged by the current experiment with card swipe readers cosponsored by the Student Success Center and the College of Arts & Letters. If the procedure can be perfected, we recommend further implementation in large classes. Simplifying the process of taking attendance will make it easier for faculty to report students who are not attending classes and for the Office of the Provost to contact students who are at risk of not completing their degree.

Electronic attendance taking is quick, but it requires resources and it is unlikely that it will be adopted by every course. However, we want to encourage faculty to report attendance, especially in the early weeks of the semester when students are most at risk. To facilitate attendance taking, we are suggesting that funds be made available so that student success coordinators in the various colleges or the Student Success Center can hire temporary student workers at the start of the semester to assist with collecting and processing attendance data (supplemental instruction leaders could also serve this purpose). Student workers could be made available to help with early semester attendance taking in larger classes using swipe card readers and other electronic means and/or could process attendance taken on paper into an electronic format that could then be forwarded to the Office of the Provost. With proper training, student workers might also supplement the University’s efforts to contact students who are deemed at risk.

The use of iClickers in large classrooms, in addition to the primary purpose of encouraging student engagement, provides attendance records as well. Promotion of and training in the use of iClickers should be enhanced.
Recommendation 5.4 Use of the Early Alert system will be encouraged and promoted, with response loops maintained to provide feedback to instructors.

Access/buttons to the Early Alert system must be easy to find. Consideration should be given to consolidating the Early Alert and CARES systems to reduce confusion.

Recommendation 5.5 The University will continue the emphasis on reporting Not Attending rosters early in the semester.

Recommendation 5.6 The following statement on class attendance will be adopted and published.

Studies show that class attendance can significantly improve academic performance and lower the time it takes to complete a degree. Regular class attendance promotes faculty/student engagement and allows for early assessment of the student’s strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, the University encourages all course instructors to adopt an attendance policy and to include that policy in the course syllabus. While the University may take attendance in classes, particularly in Undergraduate General Education Curriculum (GEC 01-05), for the purpose of collecting data to promote student academic success, the course instructor is solely responsible for determining the penalty for not attending classes and assigning attendance grades.

Attending classes will lead to success, but it is difficult to envision a single attendance policy that addresses all of the course needs and objectives at a university as large and diverse as The University of Southern Mississippi. Faculty generally create attendance policies to meet their specific educational objectives, and we have found that it is rare for universities with the Southern Miss academic profile to impose a universal attendance policy.

Early outreach to students, especially students who are new to the university, can help to create an engaged scholarly community, something that every expert agrees is essential to retention. Formal policies that require attendance do not necessarily create self-motivated students, but outreach will produce students who feel they are part of an academic endeavor and thus are more likely to succeed.

6. Communication Plan

Recommendation 6.1 A coordinated and multifaceted communication plan is necessary and will be designed to promote these recommendations and provide outreach to the university community. This communication plan will begin as soon as the Steering Committee recommendations are approved.

Mission | Provide consistent communication for ONE brand of student success instead of promoting several separate steps or items. University Communications will help develop this message.

Purpose | Clearly define faculty, staff and student’s definition of student success at Southern Miss and promote the idea that all university constituents have an obligation to help students
graduate. Communicate message through diverse avenues and clearly explain the significance of student success and retention.

**Time Constraints** | In order to disseminate knowledge effectively and accurately, the university administrator for student success (or alternatively, the Office of the President, Office of the Provost and the Steering Committee) should organize a communication plan that will strategically and effectively communicate the purpose and goals of the committee and university. This communication plan should be approved no later than spring 2014 in hopes the first branding message will take place in March during Founders’ Day.

**Suggested communication and outreach initiatives include the following:**

- **Centralized web resources** on student success and engagement should be maintained by the University Student Success Center, with an organized plan for the diffusion of time-relevant, consolidated information to the university community.

- **Campus-wide Convocations** should include some messaging centered on the University Student Success Campaign. These convocations include but are not limited to Dr. Bennett’s Inauguration Address, Fall Convocation and Founders’ Day Celebrations. During these convocations, Dr. Bennett could institute an “Excellence in Teaching” recognition process with an emphasis on student success efforts. This recognition should be designated for full-time professor, adjunct, instructor and staff roles.

- **Promotional Videos and Emails** should be disbursed to the university community stating important student success messaging. Dr. Bennett should be the first person to communication his ideas and goals for our campus. Dr. Wiesenburg should follow with communication directly to faculty and other instructional personnel explaining the importance of student success in the classroom, during advisement, and with faculty development. Dr. Paul should follow to stress the importance of student engagement and how student success should be the focus of all departments within Student Affairs. The SGA president and other students could conduct videos focusing on barriers and advice for student success including but not limited to academic and financial issues. These videos and emails should provide consistent messaging and be repetitive in nature.

- **Special Meetings for key groups on campus centered only on Student Success** should be scheduled to show the importance of developing a campus culture centered on student success in the academic areas. These meetings should begin with the academic deans led by Dr. Bennett and Dr. Wiesenburg. Another meeting should be schedule with Faculty Senate, the Council of Chairs and ACAs led by Dr. Wiesenburg and Staff Council led by Dr. Paul. At each academic college convocation or retreat, Dr. Wiesenburg should speak about the importance of student success and how every person should take ownership in helping our students graduate. Dr. Bennett could facilitate discussion on student success with the Board of Trustees and all cabinet members.
Special Memo from Dr. Bennett should be in every new hire’s packet. Human Resources should go over this memo when performing in-processing duties.

Campus Employee Workshop should be held right before the academic year begins. All university faculty and staff who hire student workers on campus should attend. This meeting should facilitate messaging centered on student success and helping our student employees find their place on campus.

Residence Life Workshop should be held during their training sessions. This workshop should be led by Dr. Paul and Dr. Scott Blackwell to emphasize and explain the importance campus housing can play in a student’s collegiate experience.

Faculty Workshops and Training Sessions should be held to increase faculty interest in and awareness of student success dynamics and the initiatives being implemented at USM (recommendation from Noel Levitz conference). Sessions should be data informed to show how the student population is changing on a national level. During these training sessions, Dr. Wiesenburg and the deans should discuss incentives for faculty members to develop new co-curricular activities, outline opportunities for faculty development in the area of student success and retention, and possibly promote an “Excellence in Teaching” award that would be announced at Fall Convocation or Founders’ Day Celebration. A respected faculty member could facilitate a “best practices” for teaching and student engagement. Develop best practices for student resources and share good examples from departments that they are willing to share.

Student Voices/Focus Group Sessions with Students should be implemented as outlined below:

- Focus groups on the student-related recommendations in this document should take place as soon as possible, preferably before the end of the Fall 2013 Semester, but no later than early in the Spring 2014 Semester, to obtain student input before broad implementation.
- End-of-first-year focus groups to gather information about curricular issues and students’ experiences in relation to staying at USM, including course sequencing, historically difficult courses, and preferences regarding academic assistance. Information gathered can be used in combination with SSI data to inform institutional decisions.
- Periodic focus groups to gather feedback on policies, best practices and initiatives associated with student success efforts.

Resources for Students Encourage departments to make student resources available to students via their websites, undergraduate newsletters, handbooks, Blackboard shells, syllabi, and other departmental postings. This will require a coordinated effort in which this information is distributed to chairs and directors at the beginning of each semester.

- The proposed Student Success Center should function as a clearinghouse for the promoting awareness of tutoring, academic support and student services available at the University. It should develop best practices for student resources and share good examples from departments.
- The Student Success Center should maintain a list of tutoring and student support resources on campus for regular distribution to students, parents, faculty and staff.
Promotional Materials  We will develop a family of pieces to promote our recommendations. These print materials, signs, maps will have a similar design and message centered around student success on campus. They will be placed in strategic locations around campus. Posters and/or Door Hangers will be placed in residence halls and classrooms

i. **Ground Signs** will be placed around campus during the first few weeks of each semester to help direct students to important buildings like Financial Aid, Business Services, Student Success Center including the First Year Initiative, Registrar, Thad Cochran Center, Parking Management, Imaging Center, Barnes and Noble, etc.

ii. **Building Markers** will be created and mounted on buildings designated as Student Success offices like Financial Aid, Business Services, First Year Initiative, Registrar, etc.

iii. **Campus Maps** (print and map on the iSoutherMiss app) will include a section or image showing important Student Success departments and offices on campus.

iv. **Info Center web page** (info.usm.edu) will include a section for Student Success messaging and important deadlines.

v. **Eagle Vision and other television screens** will have strategic messaging regarding student success information.

vi. **Ads in Student Printz** will have strategic messaging throughout the year to promote student success tools.

vii. **The USM homepage** will be enhanced to better promote student success initiatives

All markers, maps, ads should have an image that is unique and designated for the University Student Success Campaign.

**Annual luncheon.** It is important to have a designated time to report progress and success stories. We suggest hosting an annual luncheon to recognize faculty, staff, and students who have implemented new and successful strategies for retention efforts. This luncheon could include a thank you video and/or pictures of the success stories. This would also be an opportunity to give “Excellence of Student Success” awards to faculty, staff, and students.