

## **Title III Final Report (2014-2021)**

### **Utah Valley University**

**Title:** Strengthening Engagement and Completion at Utah Valley University

**PR Award Number:** P031A140224

**Program:** U.S. Department of Education, Title III, Strengthening Institutions Program

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**Program Evaluation, comprehensive for 7 year project**

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## PART III: EVALUATION OF AREA 2 OBJECTIVES

**Area 2 Goal: Increase student completion by strengthening academic advising and improving course scheduling.**

**OBJECTIVE 2.1 Use the PSI advising model to assist students to prepare a graduation plan (utilizing Wolverine Track), improve their academic outcomes, and take advantage of engagement opportunities.**

*Activity 2.1.1* Enhance the existing advisor training program by:

- a. Creating and integrating a module on relationship building
- b. Enhancing training on Wolverine Track, Stoplight, and the Advisor Dashboard to emphasize advising that integrates all appropriate tools.

*Activity 2.1.2* Enhance the existing advisor training program by:

- a. Creating and integrating a module on the value of planning engagement activities into student graduation plans and the use of the new engagement dashboard;
- b. Creating and integrating a module on the new noncognitive assessment tool and BCSSE (Beginning College Student Survey of Engagement) into advising.

*Activity 2.1.3* Administer the non-cognitive assessment and the BCSSE to all incoming students at freshman orientation.

*Activity 2.1.4* Place a registration hold on each student's record requiring them to meet with their academic advisor once a year. Advising sessions will accomplish:

- a. Review graduation plans for all students and help students enter their plans in Wolverine Track; well-prepared, full-time students will receive info on "15 to Finish" beginning in their first year;
- b. Review student information from the non-cognitive assessment, Stoplight, and other advising tools as appropriate.

### **Implementation**

This objective was implemented by Academic Advising which was under Student Affairs in 2014, but moved to Academic Affairs (with dotted-line reporting to Student Affairs) in 2015. This objective was completed and institutionalized by the end of Year 2.

- During Year 1, all advisors had completed the New Advisor Training Program that integrated PSI (personalized, seamless, intentional advising) through-out. The training format of 4 10-hour in-person sessions included a module on relationship building.
- In Year 2, all advisors were trained on using the Planner feature in Wolverine Track to help students plan what courses they would need for graduation and when to take them. Advisors were trained on using the non-cognitive evaluation and BCSSE survey data in student advising.

- A non-cognitive assessment (Beacon) and the BCSSE survey were administered to freshmen to help determine at-risk factors for UVU students.
- A process was set in place to encourage students to meet with their advisor each semester and to require students to meet with their advisor annually. An academic hold was placed on students' records requiring them to meet with their academic advisor annually.
- All of the above components that advisors were trained on were implemented in student advising: PSI and relationship building, use of the Advisor Dashboard and the Planner feature in Wolverine Track, use of the non-cognitive surveys. Students were meeting with their advisors annually and entering their graduation plans into Wolverine Track by the end of Year 2.

### **Institutionalization**

This objective was institutionalized under University Advising by the end of project Year 2, that is, by September 2016.

- All of the training elements, within a PSI framework, were incorporated into Advisor Training and remain there. These include relationship building, the use of advisor tools, and assisting students in planning, including using Wolverine Track.
- The requirement for students to meet with their advisors at least every year, enforced by a registration hold, continues to be in place.
- The requirement to have students enter their graduation plans into Wolverine Track was implemented and continues. Students and their advisors are using Wolverine Track and its Planner feature to plan for future semesters. This effort has been aided by having each department enter a graduation plan template into Wolverine Track (Objective 2.2).
- The non-cognitive assessment was replaced after Year 3 by services provided by Civitas, but the element of non-cognitive data is still important in advising.

### **Short-term Impact**

Student advising has continued to move forward since this objective was institutionalized in 2016; however, what was accomplished under the Title III project has been foundational for the what has come after.

- According to Wade Oliver, Director of University Advising, even though the format of the advising program has changed to a blended format of online and in-person training, PSI is still one of the foundational principles in the advising, training, and certification program. Use of the Advising Dashboards and related advisor tools are integrated into training.
- In 2014, there was a problem with getting Academic Advisors to use the planning features of Wolverine Track. Not only has training been ramped up so that all advisors have been trained to use these tools with students, but new reporting structures have made advisors more accountable for implementing planning with students.
- 100% of degree programs have a graduation template build into Wolverine Track. Students are introduced to it during New Student Orientation and advisors follow up

and help students make adjustments annually. This change has been made in the UVU Course Catalog as well, so that the requirements for each program are now in the catalog.

- Students now have graduation plans they can discuss with their advisors and use in course selection. As the original proposal presented scholarly research documenting that tying students' graduation plans to their required participation in a PSI advising program is demonstrated to increase graduation rates, it is quite likely that these efforts have contributed to the rise in UVU's graduation rates.
- One of the biggest challenges for Academic Advising was changing the culture of Academic Advising within UVU. With the help of the Title III project, among other institutional efforts, the stakeholders feel that role of academic advising is now recognized on campus as a high priority and acknowledged as impactful for students.

## Long-Term Impact

*(See Long-Term Impact for Area 2.)*

**OBJECTIVE 2.2 Provide tools and reports for Academic Advising to support informed decision making by students and advisors, including decisions about taking classes that emphasize engagement; implement additional accountability measures through electronic reporting.**

*Activity 2.2.1* – Each department will enter a graduation plan template into Wolverine Track (from the remaining 52% of departments).

*Activity 2.2.2* – Provide advisors with reports indicating which students have and have not entered an advisor-approved graduation plan into Wolverine Track and the term it was last updated.

*Activity 2.2.3* – Customize a non-cognitive assessment report to reflect UVU's systems and interventions and integrate with the advising tools.

*Activity 2.2.4* – Create a repository of engaged learning activities so that advisors can better assist students and students will know what is available.

## Implementation

This objective was completed and institutionalized by the end of Year 2.

**Graduation Templates.** To facilitate student planning, all bachelors and associates degrees had a graduation template entered into Wolverine Track, the online tracking system for student degree auditing. The creation of graduation plans was an institution-wide effort that involved every college or school and department. Requirements for each degree program and related Graduation Plans appear now in the online UVU Course Catalog as well (see <https://www.uvu.edu/catalog/current/departments/degrees-programs.html>). Advisors have access to information about which students have and have not entered graduation plans and when the plans were last updated. They can tell if students are on track to graduate.

**A non-cognitive assessment tools** – Beacon and NCSSE, specifically targeting first-year students, was implemented in the first two year of the project. The BEACON survey was

designed to help determine at-risk factors for UVU students, including “hidden” issues that may put students at risk. This helped advisors focus their outreach and intervention efforts. Advisors and deans received summative reports on students who have taken the non-cognitive assessments and their needs. However, evaluation of the instrument in operation showed that while it was helpful, it was not robust enough to meet UVU’s advisement needs, so it was not integrated into the Advisor Dashboard. The NCSSE (Beginning College Student Survey of Engagement) also proved not to be useful, so it was not included in the Advising Dashboard. These experiences laid the foundation for the institution’s investment in Civitas, which is proving to be a game-changer for student advising.

**The Repository of Engaged Learning Activities**, created by the Title III Program Directors and described earlier, was the first step in documenting engaged learning activities campus-wide. It was intended to become a resource that would allow advisors and students to know what engaged-learning courses were available. Drs. Qudisat and Alsarhan reviewed the course catalog descriptions of over 3,500 courses as well as other course lists looking for components of High-Impact Practices. The database they compiled was useful to administrators in determining what engaged-learning (HIP) courses were being offered in their programs, but it faced limitations that made it less suitable for use as an tool for student and advisor use. For instance, the course catalog descriptions were not always up-to-date and the accuracy of some of the descriptions concerning course engagement was in doubt. Updating the Repository proved to be too cumbersome and time-consuming to be cost-effective. However, the Office of Engaged Learning and Title III’s efforts to inform the UVU community about the potential impact of student engagement on retention and persistence lead to advisors becoming more aware of engagement options and to present them to their students.

**Accountability in Advising.** The Title III proposal planned to implement advisor accountability measures through electronic reporting, which was done. The greater impact on accountability however, was initiated in 2015 outside of the scope of this project. Academic Affairs and Student Affairs worked together to restructure the Academic Advising program and make advisors more accountable for their advising work. Directors were hired in each of the colleges and schools to oversee and supervise the advisors.

### **Institutionalization**

All academic advisors now have tools that provide them with current, easy-to-access information they need to inform students’ decision making. Advisors are trained on the use of these tools. Of the tools focused on in this Title III project, the Graduation Templates in Wolverine Track and the accompanying Planner feature have been the most directly beneficial and remain in place.

UVU institutionalization of the non-cognitive assessment has been done by UVU’s purchase of Civitas, a predictive analytics platform, which proved to be a more powerful tool for data-informed outreach. Michelle Kearns, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management reports that: “Civitas has been fully implemented and is being used by advisors. They are trained on Civitas and the majority of them are using it to supplement their other tools and expertise in helping to support students.”

### **Short-term Impact**

Wade Oliver indicates that the quality of data to advisors has increased significantly, which is important, because UVU’s advising pool has grown from about 50 in 2014 to 108 in 2021. He

says that some of what was done through Title III became necessary stepping stones to other interventions and provided greater direction.

### **Long-Term Impact**

*(See Long-Term Impact for Area 2.)*

**OBJECTIVE 2.3 Provide tools and reports from student graduation plans to course scheduling personnel in the schools and colleges so they can anticipate student needs and schedule courses to keep students on track for graduation.**

*Activity 2.3.1* – Pilot the creation of tools and reports (6-8 departments) that indicate anticipated student course demand based on the graduation plans they have entered into Wolverine Track.

*Activity 2.3.4* – Distribute reports to colleges and schools with tools and reports from student graduation plans to facilitate scheduling; provide training on the use of these tools.

### **Implementation**

This objective project sought to improve course scheduling because many students' graduation plans were delayed because they could not schedule the courses they needed. Objective 2.1 above sought to have students enter graduation plans into Wolverine Track in part so the plans could be used to predict university needs in course scheduling.

A problem has been, however, that while students complete the graduation plans, they are reluctant to “lock in” their plans, at which point data become available for scheduling future needs. So while the graduation plans have been very helpful to students and advisors, they have not been as helpful as anticipated for course scheduling. Other institutional efforts helped alleviate scheduling problems.

### **Institutionalization**

Objective 2.3 was closed in Year 2 or 3. Michelle Kearns reports that scheduling has definitely improved since 2014, especially with the inclusion of more online and hybrid courses, but there is still work to be done. The increase of UVU's headcount enrollment from 31,332 students in 2014 to 41,262 students in 2022 and space shortages have exacerbated the problem. However, now that more students are locking in their graduation plans, this approach may be revisited.

### **Short-Term Impact**

While many institutional efforts have contributed to easing problems in course scheduling, the Title III project may have played a role in this improvement by having students enter their plans for graduation into Wolverine Track and discuss their plans with their advisor. Better student planning may be helping to ameliorate what was perceived as “scheduling problems.”

## Long-Term Impact for the Area 2 Goal

The primary long-term impact of the Area 2 Goal to “increase student completion by strengthening academic advising and improving course scheduling,” has likely been to increase student completion. While no direct evaluation of this objective was done, and while all of the Title III efforts were done in conjunction with other institutional work, the completion of these objectives was significant. They were designed to have a high likelihood of increasing completion rates because the proposers reviewed considerable scholarly research on methods of advising demonstrated to impact completion. The proposal was based on this research and key researchers were cited.

Much of what was implemented, especially under 2.1 has become so foundational to Academic Advising that it is hardly recognized as innovative at UVU anymore. But it was when it was implemented. Additional changes have been built upon this foundation.

When asked about the long-term impacts of the Title III project in separate interviews, Dr. Wade Oliver, Director of University Advising, and Dr. Michelle Kearns, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, offered these insights.

**Dr. Oliver:** “The project served as a catalyst to move us to where we are now. I think just documenting some of these ideas was important. A lot of these plans were things we discussed in those early meetings when I was still in Student Affairs. Michelle and I felt that if we could somehow get our aims down in a grant on paper, that would be a catalyst for seeing something happen and that getting a grant would make it important enough for people to do something. And so I do believe that. Well, maybe not a direct line for the all of it. But putting these initiatives into the framework of a grant, I believe, was a really significant positive step. It changed the accountability for advisors; they were no longer reporting through whomever on campus. They now had a director that knows advising, and that they know was a previous colleague or peer. . . . I believe that the kinds of the things we codified or identified in this grant got things rolling to where we could actually have the Chutzpah and have what we needed to be able to confidently move forward with recommending these changes.”

**Dr. Kearns:** I think the emphasis on High-Impact Practices has become part of the conversation and part of the planning in both curricular and co-curricular opportunities. I think we've become more intentional with our outreach for students. Now that we've implemented Civitas, that tool, I think, has changed the culture so that our efforts are more grounded in the data than just assumptions or historical practices. I do think that we have made some progress on being more student centric in our schedule course scheduling practices, and while there's still room for improvement, I would say that we've made some great strides in that space.

And, you know, there's a million reasons why retention and completion numbers go up and down, but we have seen a significant increase in both retention and our eight year outcome measure since we began this grant. And so I think it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to attribute some of that increase to the to the objectives of this grant.



\$14.4MM to \$21.6MM in 2020. About 64% of new grant awards involve student engaged learning. These efforts contribute to meeting the institution's needs to fund HIPs.

**Lessons Learned:** The kinds of incentives OSP was able to provide faculty in order to encourage and facilitate their participation, such as stipends for the Summer Grant Writing Seminar, guest speakers, and travel for networking opportunities are beyond the typical OSP budget, but were a good investment for involving faculty. When polled, faculty felt supported by OSP in their grant-seeking activities and grant-award management responsibilities. More faculty are submitting and receiving funding for their projects.

**AREA 2 GOAL: INCREASE STUDENT COMPLETION BY STRENGTHENING ACADEMIC ADVISING AND IMPROVING COURSE SCHEDULING.**

**Obj 2.1 Use the PSI advising model to assist students to prepare a graduation plan (utilizing Wolverine Track), improve their academic outcomes, and take advantage of engagement opportunities.**

**Initial Problem:** Over 50% of students do not work with their advisors beyond initial course registration; about 60% of students do not have a graduation plan entered in to Wolverine Track; advisors' tools for working with students are incomplete and under-utilized.

**Institutional/Project Achievement:** A process was set in place to encourage students to meet with their advisor each semester and to require students to meet with their advisor annually. Students now have graduation plans entered in Wolverine Track; they can discuss these with their advisors using the Planner feature and use them in course selection. All academic advisors have tools that provide them with current, easy-to-access information, and they have been trained on the use of these tools and in the PSI advising model.

**Obj 2.2 Provide tools and reports for Academic Advising to support informed decision making by students and advisors, including decisions about taking classes that emphasize engagement; implement additional accountability measures through electronic reporting.**

**Initial Problem:** There is no systemic means to require all students to establish a graduation plan: about half of departments have not entered a graduation plan template into Wolverine Track; advisors do not have efficient access to student graduation plan information.

**Institutional/Project Achievement:** An academic hold is placed on students' records requiring them to meet with their academic advisor at least annually. 100% of degree programs have a graduation template build into Wolverine Track. Advisors have access to student's graduation plans and to information about which students have and have not entered plans. All academic advisors have tools that provide them with current, easy-to-access information they need to inform students' decision making.

**Obj 2.3 Provide tools and reports from student graduation plans to course scheduling personnel in the schools and colleges so they can anticipate student needs.**

**Initial Problem:** One-third of non-returning students indicate that course availability was a major or minor reason for not returning; advisors report that some students fail to complete on time because of the unavailability of required classes. [The actual percentage of non-



returning students cited in the text of the proposal was 35.7% (Non-Returning Student Survey, 2010).]

***Institutional/Project Achievement:*** According to the 2021 Non-Returning Student Survey – 11.4% of students indicated that Class Scheduling Issues were a major or minor reason for not returning. This is an improvement of 24.3% from the earlier report. While many institutional efforts have been made to address course scheduling, the Title III project may have played a role in this improvement by having students enter their plans for graduation into Wolverine Track and discuss their plans with their advisor. Better student planning may be helping to ameliorate what they perceived as “scheduling problems.”