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CU I&E Submission: SASC Upgrade [1]

Description

The Student Academic Success Center is a multicultural learning community that serves first-generation, low-income, under-served, and other under-represented or high-need students, including students with disabilities, veterans, and other non-traditional learners. Our mission is to increase the recruitment, persistence, and graduation rates of eligible students enrolled in our programs, courses, and services. Among the evidence-based, high-impact practices embedded in our learning community is an “early warning system” that solicits progress reports from a campus-wide network of instructors, tutors, advisors, and mentors. This 360-degree feedback compiled for each SASC student during fall and spring midterm examination period provides us with both quantitative and qualitative data that determine the type, degree, timing, and frequency of academic support or other needful interventions for each student. An early warning system such as our 360-degree midterm progress reporting is “especially important for students who start college with two or more risk factors, or who appear to be struggling academically” (Kuh et al. 2006: 60). Not only does this system foster retention and persistence of SASC students toward a timely graduation, it serves as a real-time assessment of support and intervention strategies, enabling each SASC program to evaluate the demand for support while identifying unmet need for services in design or implementation of a program that is specific to its under-served student population.

Our fall and spring midterm progress reporting project is managed by the SASC IT Coordinator David Lawlor whose expertise also supports other special data projects while providing daily information technology service to 20 faculty, 20 staff, and 1000+ students in our learning community. In a period of increased compliance, reduced resources, and data-driven decision making, his one-person IT office is an inevitable locus for innovation and efficiency. In 2000 when David Lawlor inherited our in-house “FrankenFileMaker” database that collates SASC student data from various campus systems, he also inherited our old-school bulk mailing system for midterm progress reporting. From 1999 to 2012, our paper-based project required dozens of work study students (alongside dozens of staff volunteers) to print forms, stuff envelopes, and hand-deliver solicitations to a network of over 1200 instructors. Although in later years each letter contained a unique password and URL pointing instructors to access our SASC web server, linked to our SASC database server, we mostly received hardcopy replies, and often no replies at all – a measure of a well-intentioned legacy system with its critical outcomes compromised by its laborious inefficiencies in scale, service, and support.

Faced with this needful, yet unreliable outreach to our campus-wide network, David Lawlor undertook a multi-year 2013-2015 upgrade of the entire project – from envelope lick to keyboard click – effectively reinventing this best-practice for 21st century digital natives while

restoring its historical mission-driven support of under-served students.

Kuh, George D., et al. 2006. What Matters to Student Success: A Review of the Literature. National PostSecondary Education Cooperative.

How does this impact the University?

This innovation improves the feedback of over 1200 department-based instructors and other affiliates; the support of over 1000 under-served students; and the assessment of over 5 academic support programs, 3 instructional programs; and 3 core services operating in SASC. From the perspective of faculty, our digital invitation to provide midterm feedback is timely, rather than time-consuming; and the opportunity to click on additional links to learn more about SASC – students, programs, and mission – creates a strong connection between each instructor's classroom goals and the campus-wide goal to improve student outcomes by practicing inclusive excellence, one student at a time. From the perspective of students, this personal feedback from their campus-wide "success team" – instructors, tutors, advisors, and other mentors – enhances their sense of belonging, even with tough love, because it supports their academic achievement and personal development holistically, one term at a time. From the perspective of SASC, this digital project improves outreach to faculty by sharing our mission; it improves support of our students by aligning our interventions; and it improves assessment of our programs by identifying in-demand services and unmet needs. Above all, it preserves an evidence-based, high-impact practice as an innovative, efficient system that meets the triple standard of improved service, reduced cost, and measurable impact on under-served s-EndFragment-->

Implementation Status

David Lawlor fully implemented the upgrade to our 360-degree midterm progress reporting project between Spring 2013 and Fall 2015. Starting in Spring 2013, he eliminated the paper-based mailings by e-mail merging the 1200 solicitation letters directly from the SASC database which pulls current ISIS data into relational tables for instructors, students, courses, and enrollments. The email (Figure 1) contains a unique password which gives each instructor access to the secure SASC web server (Figure 2) which in turn feeds into the secure SASC database server. Upon login, an instructor views a pre-populated roster of SASC students enrolled in the course (Figure 3). Clicking on a student's name opens an individual evaluation webform for that course (Figure 4). Once submitted, the data is captured by the SASC database and displayed as a confidential, collated 360-degree feedback report from the student's entire "success team" that is shared with the student in the context of a holistic advising and academic support program (Figure 5). A polite reminder email is automatically generated after a two-week period if no response is received from an instructor. This upgrade improved the response rate from 30-40% (paper-based) in prior terms to over 60% (webform) in Fall 2015. It also eliminated bulk-mailing labor and campus mailbox misdeliveries while improving FERPA compliance and overall success team communication. In 2014, David Lawlor undertook a major year-long redesigning of the project from instant web publishing (IWP) to PHP scripting when FileMaker raised licensing fees on their web-hosting technology. This in-house recoding of the database interfaces from scratch not only saves SASC proprietary fees, it also solves browser compatibility requirements and facilitates alternative device use, including access by smart phones and tablets which improves the

response rate. In 2015, David Lawlor launched the new interface on the new version of FileMaker on the new server hardware, improving the user's experience along with the project's response rate and cost structure (Figure 6).

Given the multi-year timeline of this project as well as the high-impact of this practice, his supervisor and colleagues enthusiastically recommend David Lawlor as the recipient of the 2016 CU Innovation and Efficiency Award. We know that we can rely on him for ongoing project innovation, service efficiency, and performance improvement. He is a one-person IT wizard who uses his technical expertise to serve daily the under-served students in SASC and to support overall their persistence to graduation at CU Boulder.

Thank you for your consideration of this nomination from the Student Academic Success Center.

Submitter's Information

Submitter's Name: Corinna S. Rohse?
Submitter's Email: corinna.rohse@colorado.edu [2]?
Additional Team Members:

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[2] mailto:corinna.rohse@colorado.edu