Annual Report 2007-08

Advisory Council for Enhancing Student Success

INTRODUCTION
The Advisory Council for Enhancing Student Success (ACCESS) serves as an advisory council to the Provost regarding student recruitment, retention, and graduation matters. In this capacity, ACCESS assists in recommending policies, strategies, and best practices that support, facilitate, and otherwise optimize the success of students at NC State. This report is intended to highlight accomplishments and activities of the 2007-2008 academic year. Proposals containing recommendations and other action items will be submitted throughout the year.

In September 2004, the Office of the Provost at NC State University showcased its commitment to improving the student retention and graduation through the formation of a retention workgroup under the directive of former Provost James Oblinger. The workgroup morphed into the Advisory Council for Enhancing Student Success. The Council reasoned that positive “ACCESS” to students is the key to retention. From this standpoint retention is everyone’s responsibility because each person at NC State may have either a positive or negative impact on a student’s experience. The Council defined student success broadly as there are many perspectives on how a student enrolled at NC State could be successful.

The Council has been researching and studying phenomena related to retention and progress to graduation at NC State. Workgroups were formed to collect and synthesize information in order to provide recommendations to the Provost on retention strategies. Members have been giving feedback regarding proposed recommendations.

Currently, the institutional retention rate is 89% and the six-year graduation rate is 71% (See University Planning and Analysis web site (http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/) for more information. The graduation rate for African American students has remained close to 60% for the past three years. The retention rate for this population is one point higher than the rate of the general body (90%). Asian students are surpassing the institutional rates by 1-4 percentage points. Hispanic, Native American, and International students are below the institutional rates. White students are surpassing the graduation rate by two percentage points, but are slightly below the institutional retention rate. The Council brings together professionals to discuss and study phenomena impacting these rates.

CHARGE
The Council’s charge is outlined as follows:
1. Facilitate the development and implementation of a functional university retention network that seeks to integrate all segments of the university directly or indirectly responsible for undergraduate students;

2. Ensure that each participating unit identifies its role, sets objectives for its focus on retention, and identifies measurable outcomes that provide information for ongoing improvement;

3. Share broadly information about successful retention efforts and identify best practices in retention; and where appropriate

4. Propose and design new policies, programs, and initiatives to have a positive impact on the retention and graduation rate of our students.

MEETINGS
To meet the objectives of the charge, the Council meets on the last Wednesday from August to April for an hour and a half (See the ACCESS web site link below for the 2007-08 meeting schedule under the Agenda/Meeting Summary Menu). The meetings consist of presentations, discussions, action items, and networking. The Council’s workgroups (currently three issue groups: Assessment, Policy and Practice Review, and Student Engagement) continue to meet during the summer months. The Council publishes summaries of its eight full-body meetings online.

MEMBERSHIP
The membership composition of ACCESS is dynamic since NC State operates on the principle that student retention is everybody’s responsibility. Anyone who is interested in contributing to the effort is encouraged to serve. The Council is made up of representatives from the nine undergraduate academic colleges, representatives from offices in Enrollment Management and Services, Student Affairs, Undergraduate Academic Programs, and University Advancement. The coordinator for retention studies facilitates council meetings.

Throughout the past year, the following members had to step down from their post on the Council for numerous reasons: Karrie Dixon, Kenneth Esbenshade, Amy Hays, Dawn Henderson, Taylor Holland, Rance Jackson, Carrie Leger, William Oxenham, Janice Wetherbee, and Barbara Windom. Ryan VanGundy, the only remaining student appointment and a fantastic contributor to ACCESS activities, graduated in May. ACCESS appreciates the input and contributions of this members.

The Council has gained the following members throughout the year: Megan Albidrez, Edward Brown, Jenny Foster, Barbara Kirby, Dara Leeder, Jo-Ann Robinson, David Washington, Tierza Watts, and Brooklyn Winters. There are now 35 members serving on ACCESS.

For up-to-date council and workgroup membership, including department/unit, college/division, and contact information, visit ACCESS online (http://www.ncsu.edu/uap/committees/access/). Workgroup composition is also available on the membership roster.
COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS
The Council has engaged in rich discussion regarding barriers to student success and the Council’s workgroups have made tremendous strides to alleviating these barriers. Below are highlights of the council’s activities, presentations, and workgroups.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES
1. ACCESS Annual Assessment: In March, a survey was established to assess the outcomes of ACCESS. The results were extremely positive and led to the creation of a sustainability diagram, created by Dr. Carrie Zelna, which explains what ACCESS does and how it affects the success of students at NC State.

2. ACCESS Workgroup Presentations: In November 2007, the ACCESS workgroups (Assessment, Policy and Practice Review and Student Engagement) presented their progress to Provost Nielsen. The provost provided positive feedback to the group encouraging them to move to accomplishments by the next time he meets with them (See the section on ACCESS Workgroups below for more information).

3. NC State’s Projections of Graduation and Retention Rates Presentation: In August 2007, Dean Conway informed the group that UNC-General Administration has projected our six-year graduation rate to be 74% by 2012. NC State will be challenged to increase this rate. He asked ACCESS to review data, especially college data, and look for areas and opportunities that may improve the institution’s chances of reaching the 74% rate. He cited opportunities in a number of areas, including policy changes, process changes, and financial procedural changes.

4. Campus Awareness and Notification System (CANS): In February 2008, student Ryan VanGundy presented on the Campus Awareness and Notification System (CANS). This system offers a user-friendly digital personal organizer and notifier to be used by the university community. The information may be delivered through a variety of platforms ranging from mobile phones, Facebook, or desktop application. Information is prioritized by time-relevance to increase user-response. The software helps faculty and administrators deliver urgent alerts to students over these platforms. Council recommended that a pilot be done to demonstrate how the system would work for NC State. After a meeting with Dean Conway, VanGundy was asked to talk with Vice Provost Sam Averitt about this project.

5. Reading: ACCESS members received, and were asked to read, Richard Light’s Making the Most of College: College Students Speak Their Minds. This book was given to the inaugural workgroup as they began looking at retention and the assessment of retention program at NC State as a seminal reading. New members were given the book as a reference while continuing this charge. Light’s book is also featured on the ACCESS resource web site (http://www.ncsu.edu/uap/committees/access/resources/).

6. Student Success Inventory Presentation: The Student Success Inventory was created in February 2005 to catalogue institutional efforts regarding retention. The inventory tool serves as a management tool for retention efforts as it incorporates data fields to better evaluate the programs, services, and initiatives at NC State. Each college or division is accountable for its own database inventory. The ACCESS Strategic Planning Team (SPT) reviewed the 168 projects in the Student Success Inventory and coded the additional eight fields. The Council was asked to review projects in their areas for accuracy. What makes it useful is that it maps intentional investments. Buy-in from
campus continues to be a challenge. Dean Conway presented the tool at an ACCESS meeting in October to foster buy in. He related that if we were successful in categorizing our efforts now, NC State would be a model of administrative efficiencies in the area of student success to other UNC-System institutions later. The SPT will discuss ways of securing this buy-in during the coming academic year.

7. **Student Success Symposium Survey Feedback:** The assessment of the Student Success Symposium revealed that ACCESS would like to hold a retention symposium on campus. UNC System institutions will be invited to attend and present to foster interest in campus attendance. The ACCESS Symposium Planning Team met to synthesize planning details into a final proposal to submit to Dean Conway. Due to budgetary constraints, the symposium is on hold until money is acquired.

8. **Student Success Web Site:** Ryan VanGundy, a senior in Chemical Engineering, worked with ACCESS to finalize the Student Success Web Site (http://www.ncsu.edu/success/) on August 30, 2007. The web site went live during the first week in September. ACCESS members agreed to advertise this site to students.

9. **UNC Retention Conference:** Eleven representatives from NC State, including six members from ACCESS (Samara Burnette, Thomas Conway, Karrie Dixon, Monica Leach, Trey Standish, and Tracey Ray), attended the 4th Annual Retention-Graduation Conference, titled *Student Success - A Campus Wide Commitment*, on October 24, 2008. The annual conference was designed to be a time of exploration of institutional profiles, best practices, but also a time to discuss current rates and strategies to improve these rates.

10. **UNC Tomorrow:** In March 2008, Dean Conway presented on the process of UNC Tomorrow. See the web site for more details (http://www.ncsu.edu/unctomorrow).

11. **Zelna’s Model of Student Retention at NC State:** In March 2008, Dr. Carrie Zelna presented the student retention map she created to understand the relationships of the different programs and activities at NC State. The map is dynamic and demonstrates the complicated nature of retention.

**WORKGROUPS**
Workgroups function as issue-oriented task groups. Workgroups may divide into subgroups to tackle narrower topics within the broader issue. Each workgroup has leadership (a chair or co-chairs) that facilitates the group and works out meeting logistics. The workgroup leaders are also responsible for submitting the group’s final report, including recommendations and requests. Summarized below are the progress and accomplishments for each workgroup during 2007-08 academic year. Next steps are also summarized.

1. **Assessment:**
   a) **Purpose:** The Assessment Task Force was created to help identify the most important strategies for improving assessment that NC State may adopt. The task force communicated with the principles to understand what information they wanted to analyze. Then, the task force identified strategies to collect the information and organize such that actionable decisions can be made. The results were presented to the Provost. This workgroup is divided into four working groups looking at longitudinal data, institutional dashboards, withdrawal
forecasting, and why students leave. Stop Out Surveys were piloted in February and May 2008 to gain a better understanding of the attrition data.

b) **Leaders:** Trey Standish, and Carrie Zelna (*Pamela Steinke, past co-chair*)

c) **2007-08 Accomplishments:**

- **Assessment Criteria Subgroup:** A brief outline on the type of assessment information that should be included in the Student Success Inventory when updating or revising projects was submitted. In addition, a longer explanation of what to include with examples is in the process of being prepared.

- **Exit Coding Subgroup:** A Stop Out Survey was created and piloted. An e-mail was sent to a total of 787 undergraduate students requesting that they complete the survey. The group was pleased with the response rate of 16%. Ninety-one out of the 126 who responded were planning to return to NC State. Twenty-seven of those 91 did not know when they wanted to return. Thirty-two students asked to be contacted. Fifteen of these students left in good academic standing. The Office of Advising Support, Information and Services has contacted the students and the academic coordinators in the colleges have been informed of the students’ interest in returning. A second pilot is scheduled for May 2008 and further assessment will ensue. A one hundred dollar Target gift card was given to one randomly selected participant per each pilot.

- **Withdrawal Forecasting Subgroup:** The feasibility of a withdrawal forecast was explored; the withdrawal forecast would identify the students most at risk for withdrawing from NC State given information known at the end of the fall semester. It would allow colleges to intervene with students likely not to return for the entire spring semester. A withdrawal forecast was created and forwarded to the College of Engineering for review. The accuracy will be calculated in the fall but initial tests suggest the tool can identify the 50 most at-risk students with 98% accuracy.

- **Longitudinal Study Subgroup:** The feasibility of a longitudinal study of persistence at NC State was explored and presented to the Provost. Creating a longitudinal study can be done if manpower from UPA can be directed towards the project or a temporary worker is hired. The longitudinal study will be a benefit because it will combine quantitative and qualitative data about students for additional study.

- **Retention Dashboard Subgroup:** The feasibility of a retention dashboard designed for college officials was explored. The intent is for Deans and Associate Deans to track retention measures in real time and intervene earlier. Samples of existing retention dashboards were collected from NC State’s colleges. The Deans and Associate Deans were also asked what information they would like included on the retention dashboard. The retention dashboard can be created by UPA or a temporary employee and would require long-term maintenance by a UPA staff member.

d) **Future Direction:** In 2008-2009, the Assessment group hopes to implement projects and expand the dialogue with campus officials to make university assessment more accessible and encourage data-driven decision-making.

2. **Policy and Practice Review:**
a) **Purpose**: The main purpose is to identify policies and practices (with a focus on policies under the purview of Enrollment Management and Services and the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs) that negatively affect student success at NC State and to develop a policy review cycle.

b) **Leader**: Carrie McLean (*Michelle Johnson and Carrie Leger, past co-chairs*)

c) **2007-08 Accomplishments**:
   - Identified critical impact policies and policies currently under review
   - Edited the current PRR process and guidelines to enhance the efficiency of the process and expand communication across constituents
   - Edited the PRR flowchart to reflect proposed changes to the PRR process
   - Developed a proposed review cycle
   - Developed and included in the process and flowchart a policy “vetting” process

d) **Future Direction**: The workgroup is currently drafting final summary and recommendations to be submitted by June 14, 2008.

3. **Student Engagement**:
   a) **Purpose**: The main purpose is to look at student engagement both within the colleges as well as outside the classrooms. The group has formed two subgroups to identify strategies for success under the broad categories of academic career, personal, and social and to create a “bucket list” of activities that are proven to produce positive student outcomes.

   b) **Leaders**: Susan Grant, Gabe Wical (*Karrie Dixon, past co-chair*)

   c) **2007-08 Accomplishments**:
      - Created First Year Students Success Strategies - an online resource with hotlinks of campus resources that address student success
      - Created *You: Successful@NC State!* - a checklist of activities that support student success
      - Conducted survey at spring commencement asking seniors for their advice to first year students; data will be available in July 2008.
      - Gathered information to produce a list of activities to encourage students to participate in University life. This list will be merged with the outcomes for students.

   d) **Future Direction**: The workgroup will continue to research and study resources and activities to support success through engagement at NC State and to find ways of delivering these engagement opportunities to students in a consistent manner.

**FUTURE DIRECTION**
ACCESS will continue to dialogue and discuss ways of fulfilling its charge. The Student Success Inventory will be a prominent issue during the 2008-09 academic year. The Council will need to discover strategies to foster broad buy-in regarding cataloguing current retention practices to foster student success. Another priority is to train members on how to use the inventory as an effective administrative resource.
TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY
ACCESS welcomes other committees and groups into the student retention dialogue with the goal of holistically capitalizing on increased student retention and success. ACCESS seeks to position itself as a facilitation group, forming partnerships with other groups. Members who are representatives on other groups should weigh in on what ACCESS is doing and how ACCESS may help and weigh in on their progress (see Attachment).
Sustainability Diagram

ACCESS Purpose:

- **Communication**: Sharing information regarding how areas are addressing retention
- **Education**: Educating ACCESS members and others on retention issues
- **Networking**: Interacting with colleagues
- **Action**: Initiating action based on our work

ACCESS Meetings: (Format - presentations and discussion) Communication, Education, Networking, Action

Workgroups: Networking, Education, Action

Conferences: Education, Networking

Database: Communication

Current retention programs and initiatives on campus

Diagram Credit: Dr. Carrie Zelna (March 2008)