



## **Student Success Initiative**

# **Final Project Report**

## **Streamlining the First Year: Credit Accumulation Initiative**

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*Project Sponsor: Nikos Varelas, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs*

*Project Leads: Tom Moss*

*Project Team: Lillye Hart, Elsa Soto, Philip Vasquez, Joey Volpe*

**Prepared By: Tom Moss**

**Date: January 31, 2017**

### **Content**

- Project Description
- Project Outcomes and Impact on Student Success
- Project Sustainability
- Assessment Plan
- Lessons Learned
- Project Deliverables and Documentations

## **Project Description**

The purpose of the Credit Accumulation Initiative was to promote students attempting and earning enough credit hours each semester to allow them to finish their undergraduate degree in four years. The working group was charged with developing a brand for the campaign, reviewing data and literature that supports the initiative, initiating a campaign to educate students, advisors, and other key staff members about the advantages associated with expedient degree completion.

## **Project Outcomes and Impact on Student Success**

- The team met regularly starting in March 2015.
- Early meetings were devoted to understanding the data regarding the relationship between degree completion and credit-taking patterns among students.
- A presentation was made to campus advisors on May 20 and May 21, 2015; slides are available at <http://bit.ly/2k079q7>.
- With support of the project sponsor, the working group settled on the brand “Finish in Four.”
- The team partnered with UIC Market and Brand Management to work on a Finish in Four campaign.
- Surveys and focus groups were conducted to inform the marketing campaign.
- An infographic piece was created by Marketing and distributed to students during Orientation 2016.
- Impact: It is clear that students who take an average of 15 credit hours per semester will most likely graduate within four years. Data also indicates that students who average 15 credit hours per semester also have higher rates of success in academic performance as well. We would expect to see retention and graduation rates increase as credit accumulation rates increase.

## **Project Sustainability**

As the work of the project implementation team draws to a close, the ongoing work of managing the marketing campaign will move permanently to the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs. Tom Moss will supervise the ongoing execution of the campaign, working closely with Marketing and Brand Management, Orientation, Recruiting, the Advising Leadership Council, the Office of Advising Development, the Council of Assistant and Associate Deans.

The ongoing project will have a number of components:

- Annual outreach to students and parents during Orientation;
- Communication with families underlining the importance of “Finish in Four” prior to student matriculation.
- Professional development and outreach to advisors throughout each academic year.
- Marketing materials updated regularly including light boxes, banners, brochures.
- A well-designed web presence articulating the importance of “Finish in Four.”

The scope of the above items will depend on resource availability within the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and the Student Success Initiative.

## **Assessment Plan**

The purpose of the Finish in Four campaign is to encourage most students to take an average of 15 credit hours per semester; therefore, the measures of success will include the following:

- The rate at which students attempt at least fifteen credit hours per semester;
- The rate at which students earn at least fifteen credit hours per semester;
- The rate at which students who attempt/earn fifteen credit hours are retained into the second year;
- The rate at which students who attempt/earn fifteen credit hours graduate within 4, 5 and 6 years.

## **Lessons Learned**

- The committee learned that promoting Finish in Four involved a change in the culture of some units on campus and change in preconceptions of some colleagues. Unlike many projects in the SSI, this project aims to solve a problem based on persuasion, ongoing gathering of data, and outreach to a number of constituents.
- This project also emphasized the value of quantitative and qualitative evidence to make the case for this initiative to a broad range of campus partners.
- Finally, the group learned that success depends on open communication and collaboration among all affected units.

## **Project Deliverables and Documentation**

- Meeting minutes from March 2015 through July 2015, the period the working group was meeting regularly.
- Status reports, which are posted on [studentsuccess.uic.edu](http://studentsuccess.uic.edu)
- OIR Presentation to CAAD
- Presentation to Advising Staff
- Focus group report
- OIR Data Analysis Report
- Infographic/brochure for incoming students