

Part V The Impact Report of the Quality Enhancement Plan

V-1 The Impact Report of the Quality Enhancement Plan

Narrative

Quality Enhancement Plan Executive Summary

The University of Memphis' Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is designed to improve students' retention and success by implementing an academic coaching program for students who have been placed on Academic Warning in their freshman and sophomore year. The Academic Coaching for Excellence (ACE) program is a one-on-one interaction with a student focusing on strengths, goals, study skills, engagement, academic planning, and performance. It will pair at-risk students with an academic coach for individual bi-weekly meetings throughout a term. Graduate students specializing in counseling-related fields and selected faculty and staff across the university will receive professional development and mentoring to equip them with the tools necessary to guide students in the development of their academic and career goals. The managed expansion of the ACE (which will allow for booster sessions for upperclassmen who have been through the program) will retain central academic coaching and also move to a decentralized model that will include wider faculty and staff participation as coaches and in oversight capacities.

The QEP topic emerged from campus-wide discussions related to increasing student success. Its principal research question developed from two premises: 1) Low retention is the most significant obstacle impeding the University of Memphis from achieving its academic core goals; 2) While the university has made recent strides in targeting programs to enhance academic preparedness, advising, course redevelopment and financial assistance to support student success, there remains a persuasive case for an expansion of the existing student support network to fill identifiable gaps.

The five interrelated learning outcomes of the ACE program are:

1. The student will demonstrate an improvement in academic self-efficacy.
2. The student will show an increase in resiliency.
3. The student will demonstrate an increase in educational commitment.
4. The student will demonstrate an increase in time management skills.
5. The student will identify an academic pathway to degree completion.

Within this institutional context, the QEP Selection Committee carefully considered several proposed topics and endorsed academic coaching as the QEP theme. Once selected, a two-term pilot study that provided academic coaching to at-risk freshmen was launched as a pilot project of the QEP and returned encouraging results. In fact, the academic coaching pilot program, initiated AY14, revealed that participating students who attended five or more sessions earned a 2.50 GPA for the term, considerably higher than students attending fewer sessions or those invited but opting not to participate at all. Subsequently, the QEP Development Committee developed the implementation and assessment plans. Throughout the QEP development process, the team invited input from the university community through meetings with a broad range of university stakeholders.

The university demonstrates its commitment to sustaining the QEP by establishing a permanent Office of the QEP, Academic Coaching and Support Services to implement the plan and incubate future QEP proposals, as well as to maintain the program's budget, assessment, and revision as needed. To assure the continuing involvement of the university community, an ACE oversight committee will monitor the progress and evaluation of the ACE program and issue its findings periodically. This committee, chaired by a newly created director of QEP, academic coaching and support services will include key academic and student affairs personnel, faculty, staff and students.

SECTION 1: Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes of the QEP

The University of Memphis (UofM) identified Academic Coaching for Excellence (ACE) as its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The principal objective of ACE was to improve students' retention and success by designing and implementing a program for freshmen and sophomores who were placed on Academic Warning (overall combined GPA < 2.0 or term GPA < 1.0). In 2013, the provost asked each college dean to nominate individuals to serve on a QEP Selection Committee, which was comprised of nine faculty members, including the president of the Faculty Senate, and staff from academic affairs and student affairs. Over the course of several meetings that took place from May 2013 to January 2014, the team considered several ideas as possible QEP topics that revolved around how to improve retention rates as that is the route to increasing the graduation rates and thus, greater student success and how to minimize the obstacles that lead students to drop out of classes and eventually leave school. After careful deliberation and discussion of the topics proposed, review of the pertinent literature, and study of the relevant empirical data, a consensus was reached on the proposal to implement a comprehensive academic coaching program for freshmen and sophomores on Academic Warning. The QEP targeted freshmen and sophomores on Academic Warning because this population had a historically high dropout rate. Our data showed that the one-year retention rate for the Fall 2013 first-time, full-time freshmen on Academic Warning was 38%, which was half the rate of the general freshmen population. Further, the retention rates for students on Academic Warning in subsequent terms followed declining trends as those of the general freshmen population. Consequently, the success of these Academic Warning students as measured by their six-year graduation rate was a mere 9.4%. Therefore, targeting students who fell on Academic Warning in their freshman and sophomore years would have the greatest impact on our overall student success. To give support to the QEP, UofM hired a QEP director who was responsible for leading and coordinating all aspects of ACE including planning, implementation, and evaluation. In addition, this position worked collaboratively with the Office of Institutional Research to promote and guide meaningful implementation and assessment plans.

The overarching goals of the QEP were to:

Goal 1: Help freshmen and sophomore students on Academic Warning develop a clear vision of their own personal and academic goals while demonstrating progress toward graduation outcomes. The interrelated progress toward graduation outcomes were:

1. The student will demonstrate an increase in GPA at the end of the intervention term.
2. The student will demonstrate an increase in the number of earned hours at the end of the intervention term.

Goal 2: Assist freshmen and sophomore students on Academic Warning to develop noncognitive skills related to academic success and manage psychosocial issues. The interrelated student learning outcomes were:

1. The student will demonstrate an improvement in academic self-efficacy.
2. The student will show an increase in resiliency.
3. The student will demonstrate an increase in educational commitment.
4. The student will demonstrate an increase in time management skills.
5. The student will identify an academic pathway to degree completion.

SECTION 2: Changes to QEP and the Reasons for Making Those Changes

Changes made during the implementation of the QEP occurred at two levels: university and program. The succeeding paragraphs detail the rationale for the changes made during the QEP cycle.

University Level Changes

During year 1 of the QEP implementation, freshmen on Academic Warning were required, according to UofM's Academic Warning policy, to attend bi-weekly coaching sessions with the coaching duration lasting for one term. In year two, an implemented targeted expansion was made when the population of students required to attend academic coaching included freshmen and sophomores on Academic Warning. As a result, the Academic Warning policy was updated in Fall 2015 and was submitted and

approved by the University Undergraduate Council to accommodate sophomores who were on Academic Warning beginning in Fall 2016. Moreover, the original Academic Warning policy had the stipulation that students who failed to meet with a coach on a bi-weekly basis had a hold placed on their account that prevented them from registering for the subsequent term. In order to have the hold removed, the student needed to schedule regular appointments with an academic coach and the hold was lifted once the student made satisfactory progress in attending their meetings. Conversely, if a student went the entire term without meeting with an academic coach, then the hold was left on their account until the student set up a meeting with the QEP director. However, it was found that placing holds on students' accounts created one more obstacle to overcome and did not align with the UofM's mission of retention and graduation. Therefore, from Fall 2016 onward, there were no holds placed on students' accounts due to noncompliance and there were no consequences for nonattendance. This change was made to ensure that no student was hindered from registering.

Program Changes

Programmatic changes fit into four categories: (1) software, (2) assessment, (3) incentivization for participation, and (4) program delivery.

2.1. Software

Throughout the first two years of implementation, UofM utilized the scheduling software AppointmentPlus to schedule and track appointments. However, AppointmentPlus was phased out and in Fall 2017, UofM partnered with the Educational Advisory Board's (EAB) Student Success Collaborative in order to improve student outcomes and the student experience. Part of the partnership included the integration of Navigate, which is EAB's Student Success Management System. The platform connected administrators, faculty, advisors, and student support personnel (e.g., academic coaches) to provide a centralized place to share information. ACE was one of the first programs on campus to utilize Navigate; however, departments across campus quickly adopted and integrated the software, which created a streamlined, triaged based approach to student support. Navigate provided a structured onboarding experience using student-centered tools. Academic coaches used the platform to view students' academic histories, schedule appointments, file session notes, track and view faculty progress reports, track and view student interactions with student support personnel, and used the platform to communicate with students using multi-modal approaches (e.g., email, text). Navigate was instrumental in evaluating student performance and interaction trends of the ACE eligible population.

2.2. Assessment

During the QEP cycle, there were a couple changes and one addition made to the assessment portion of ACE. These changes are described in the succeeding subsections.

2.2a. Student Learning Outcome Assessment Tools - Pathway to Degree Completion

The original QEP stipulated that one of the student learning outcomes, academic pathway to degree completion, would be measured by whether the students accessed UofM's degree planning tools (i.e., UMDegree, Degree Compass, and Focus 2) at the beginning and end of the intervention term. However, Degree Compass and Focus 2 were discarded due to student underutilization and UMDegree was the tool that remained to identify whether students' pathway to degree completion benchmark was met.

2.2b. Longitudinal Tracking of Outcomes

The original QEP intended to measure five student learning outcomes (SLOs): 1) academic self-efficacy, 2) resiliency, 3) educational commitment, 4) time management, and 5) pathway to degree completion for three cohorts each fall and spring: 1) The treatment cohort (TXcohort) (i.e., freshmen and sophomores who attended five or more sessions); 2) Control cohort one (AWcohort) (i.e., freshmen and sophomores who attended four or less sessions); and 3) Control cohort two (GSc cohort) (i.e., freshmen and sophomores in good academic standing). However, the original plan neglected to measure change over time. These data were not collected for each of the three cohorts over time given that the abbreviated four question survey could not be compared to the full scales measuring the SLO constructs.

2.2c. Coaching Alliance Survey

Starting in Fall 2017, a coaching alliance survey modeled after the Working Alliance Inventory - Short Form (Horvath, 1981; Horvath & Greenberg, 1986, 1989; Tracey & Kokotovic, 1989), was implemented. In recognizing the importance of the working relationships between students and coaches in order to meet desired outcomes, the purpose of administering this survey was to gain students' perceptions of the work with their coaches. The survey was administered at the midpoint of the intervention term. This additional method of assessment aided in improving the program's relationships with students during the intervention period.

2.3. Incentivization for Participation

In the original QEP, there were no participation incentives to entice students to regularly attend academic coaching nor were there rewards for those students who regularly attended. Further, students frequently reported that a main barrier to academic success was their financial instability. As a response to help students overcome this common obstacle and to increase attendance, in Fall 2017, the ACE book scholarship was created. This was a one-time \$200 scholarship given to eligible students to purchase educational related materials for the subsequent term given they attended five or more coaching sessions during the intervention term. Monies came from UofM's diversity and access fund, so eligible students needed to either be part of an underrepresented ethnicity, be a first-generation student as indicated on the FAFSA, or be a resident of a rural West Tennessee county.

2.4. Program Delivery

The original QEP called for academic coaches to meet with students in-person unless they were fully online, in which they received virtual coaching. However, COVID-19 necessitated a change in program delivery midway through the Spring 2020 term as all instruction pivoted online. Therefore, ACE transitioned to operate fully remote, which left students who met in-person no choice other than to have virtual sessions via video conferencing or phone.

SECTION 3: Impact on Student Learning and Success, Goals and Outcomes, and Unanticipated Outcomes

Once the QEP Selection Committee endorsed academic coaching as the QEP theme, a two-term pilot study in Fall 2013 and Fall 2014 provided academic coaching to at-risk freshmen and returned encouraging results. The pilot studies revealed that students must receive a minimum of five coaching sessions in order to demonstrate improvement in student success outcomes (i.e., earn higher GPA and earned hours, return to Good Standing and retained at higher rates) compared to those who attended four or less. Coming from the understanding that a QEP is action research oriented, data were collected and analyzed following each assessment cycle (i.e., term) and provided a basis for appropriate improvements and modifications to the ACE program and the assessment plan. Assessment occurred throughout all stages of the QEP and strategies gathered input from both students and academic coaches. The comprehensive assessment plan included separate assessments of three program components: 1) longitudinal student success outcomes and progress toward graduation (i.e., attempted and earned hours, GPA, academic standing, and retention); 2) coaching sessions, which included the assessment of student learning outcomes and students' perceptions of coaching effectiveness; and 3) the decentralized extension of the ACE program (i.e., booster sessions). The assessment of the ACE intervention compared outcomes of the treatment cohort (TXcohort) (i.e., freshmen and sophomores who attended five or more sessions) to outcomes among the two comparison cohorts referred to as AWcohort (i.e., freshmen and sophomores who attended four or less sessions) and GScohort (i.e., freshmen and sophomores in good academic standing). As a reminder, year 1 of the QEP focused on freshmen on Academic Warning then expanded years 2-5 to include freshmen and sophomores on Academic Warning.

Goal 1: Student Success Outcomes: *Demonstrate Progress Toward Graduation Outcomes*

Part of the QEP assessment related to student success outcomes sought to determine: 1) if the TXcohort retained their gains from the treatment term through the subsequent term and 2) if the student success skills addressed in ACE coaching sessions had a positive effect on retention and progress towards graduation. Table 1 displays student success outcomes at the end of the term of coaching (EOT). The academic achievement of the TXcohort compared to the AWcohort was quite demonstrable. In all assessed measures at the end of each coaching term, the TXcohort had better

performance outcomes than the AWcohort. Specifically, a significantly greater proportion of the TXcohort returned to Good Standing at the end of term than the AWcohort. Similarly, for all the term academic performance outcomes, the TXcohort earned a statistically significantly greater number of hours and earned higher term GPAs as compared to the AWcohort. Further, the data showed that students in the TXcohort were retained at statistically significantly greater proportions than those in the AWcohort. Also, it is noteworthy to mention that there were more students in the TXcohort than AWcohorts all fall terms aside from Fall 2016 and for spring terms, the number of students in the TXcohort increased each term. To show the impact on student success outcomes for those in the TXcohort compared to the AWcohort, Figure 1[2] shows the aggregated data for student success outcomes at the end of term of coaching. (Figure 1 does not include the Spring 2020 cohort due to COVID-19.) As discussed above, over the course of the QEP cycle, for the assessed student success measures, the TXcohort had statistically significantly better outcomes than the AWcohort. The metrics for the TXcohort showed that earned hours and GPA were statistically similar to the GScohort and students in the TXcohort were retained to the next term at comparable rates to the GScohort. Another part of the QEP assessment related to student success outcomes sought to determine if the student success skills addressed in the ACE coaching sessions had a positive effect on retention and progress towards graduation. Figure 2[3] provides the aggregated longitudinal data for percentage retained over a 4-year period. The chi-square tests revealed that a statistically significantly greater proportion of the TXcohort were retained as compared to the proportion of students who were retained in the AWcohorts. However, the TXcohort did not perform better than the GScohort. Despite this, all three cohorts had downward trends over time and the attrition percentage rate for the TXcohort was lower than the AWcohort; thus, having a more positive effect on retention. Additionally, Figure [4]3 provides the aggregated longitudinal data for change in GPA over a 4-year period. The TXcohort and GScohorts GPA remained relatively stable over time whereas the AWcohort was required to improve otherwise they would go on probation and then get suspended if they did not maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above. Even with underperforming AWcohort members leaving the institution due to suspension, the TXcohort outperformed the AWcohort. Too, all cohorts trended closer together and all remained above the 2.0 threshold needed to be in Good Standing at the 4-year mark, which is directly tied to graduation as students cannot graduate unless their cumulative GPA is a 2.0 or above. Last, since the QEP cycle started in Fall 2015, 4- and 5-year graduation rates were able to be assessed. These rates include cohorts that combine freshmen and sophomores and are based on the terms after coaching. Figure 4[5] provides the 4- and 5-year rates, which revealed that the Fall 2015, Spring 2016, and Fall 2016 TXcohorts graduated at a higher rate than the AWcohorts. Thus, once again demonstrating that those students who received the academic coaching intervention were likelier to be academically successful and graduate. Overall, the data show the positive effect academic coaching had on increased student success outcomes, retention, and progress toward graduation.

| | | Original Cohort | EOT Earned Hours | EOT Term GPA | EOT Academic Standing | | Retention to Next Term (Not Summer) |
|---------------|-------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| | | | | | Good | Not Good | |
| | | | | | % | % | |
| Coaching Term | Group | N | Mean | Mean | % | % | % |
| Fall 2015 | AW | 60 | 3.9 | 0.89 | 18.3 | 81.7 | 46.7 |
| | TX | 76 | 10.09 | 1.99 | 44.7 | 55.3 | 78.9 |
| | GS | 961 | 10.26 | 2.36 | 81.2 | 18.8 | 88 |
| Spring 2016 | AW | 224 | 4.75 | 0.96 | 14.7 | 85.3 | 43.8 |
| | TX | 84 | 9.17 | 1.63 | 26.2 | 73.8 | 66.7 |
| | GS | 1780 | 12.37 | 2.7 | 87.1 | 12.9 | 87.5 |
| | AW | 249 | 6.1 | 1.4 | 26.9 | 73.1 | 61.4 |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|----|------|-------|------|------|------|------|
| Fall 2016 | TX | 82 | 10.1 | 2.06 | 48.8 | 51.2 | 89 |
| | GS | 2934 | 11.83 | 2.74 | 91 | 9 | 90.7 |
| Spring 2017 | AW | 652 | 5.11 | 1 | 15.5 | 84.5 | 53.1 |
| | TX | 88 | 10.32 | 1.98 | 38.6 | 61.4 | 79.5 |
| | GS | 4125 | 12.2 | 2.78 | 91.2 | 8.8 | 89.1 |
| Fall 2017 | AW | 138 | 5.3 | 1.23 | 24.6 | 75.4 | 60.1 |
| | TX | 158 | 9.66 | 2.18 | 54.4 | 45.6 | 87.3 |
| | GS | 3063 | 11.99 | 2.75 | 91.5 | 8.5 | 92.7 |
| Spring 2018 | AW | 471 | 4.55 | 0.91 | 14.4 | 85.6 | 43.7 |
| | TX | 197 | 10.35 | 2.17 | 44.7 | 55.3 | 78.2 |
| | GS | 4359 | 12.3 | 2.78 | 91.2 | 8.8 | 87.4 |
| Fall 2018 | AW | 120 | 3.96 | 0.85 | 15.8 | 84.2 | 45 |
| | TX | 189 | 10.3 | 2.39 | 58.7 | 41.3 | 87.3 |
| | GS | 2973 | 12.08 | 2.81 | 92.6 | 7.4 | 92.1 |
| Spring 2019 | AW | 322 | 3.19 | 0.63 | 7.1 | 92.9 | 42.5 |
| | TX | 221 | 10.19 | 2.1 | 43.9 | 56.1 | 76.5 |
| | GS | 4218 | 12.27 | 2.77 | 90.8 | 9.2 | 87 |
| Fall 2019 | AW | 88 | 3.57 | 0.73 | 10.2 | 89.8 | 51.1 |
| | TX | 150 | 10.27 | 2.12 | 47.3 | 52.7 | 90.6 |
| | GS | 2820 | 11.98 | 2.79 | 91.2 | 8.8 | 85.3 |

Spring 2020 Assessment

The effect of COVID-19 was both broad and deep and impacted our students in significant fashion. Due to the unforeseeable and unprecedented challenges brought forth by the novel virus and because academic coaching transitioned to a virtual setting, we decided to run the analyses for spring 2020 separately from the previous nine terms. In response to the abrupt transition to remote learning, students had the option of leaving their term grades as posted or convert them to credit/no credit. Students who opted to do the credit/no credit grade option earned credit for passed courses, but their overall GPA did not change from the previous term. Table 2 displays the student success outcomes after the Spring 2020 term and the results showed that compared to the previous nine terms, the average term GPA for the TXcohort was lower than eight out of the nine previous terms; however, there was a drop in average GPA across the board for all cohorts. Despite this, the TXcohort averaged 10.12 earned hours with 43.5% of students returning to Good Standing and 72.8% students retained after the intervention term, which yielded similar results compared to previous terms. Additionally, attendance results showed that we did not experience a drop off in the number of students who met five or more sessions. In fact, we had the most students reach the TXcohort in program history with a 4.9% increase from the previous attendance record. Furthermore, as seen throughout the QEP cycle, the t-tests revealed that the Spring 2020 TXcohort earned a statistically significantly greater number of hours and higher term GPAs as compared to the AWcohort. Also, chi-square analysis showed that a significantly greater proportion of the Spring 2020 TXcohort returned to Good Standing at the end of term and were retained to the subsequent term at higher rates than the AWcohort. Thus, the difference in proportion of students who were retained and in Good Standing was not due to chance.

Table 2: Student Success Outcomes After the Intervention Term

| Table 2: Student Success Outcomes After the Intervention Term | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |

| | | Original Cohort | EOT Earned Hours | EOT Term GPA | EOT Academic Standing | | Retention to Next Term (Not Summer) |
|---------------|-------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|
| | | | | | Good | Not Good | |
| Coaching Term | Group | N | Mean | Mean | % | % | % |
| Spring 2020 | AW | 305 | 4.13 | 0.66 | 14.4 | 85.6 | 44.9 |
| | TX | 232 | 10.12 | 1.62 | 43.5 | 56.5 | 72.8 |
| | GS | 4197 | 12.59 | 2.51 | 97.8 | 2.2 | 89.9 |

Goal 2: Student Learning Outcomes: Assist Students in Developing Noncognitive Skills Related to Academic Success and Managing Psychosocial Issues

The five student learning outcomes (SLOs) that were identified in assisting students in developing noncognitive skills related to academic success and in dealing with psychosocial issues were: 1) academic self-efficacy, 2) resiliency/grit, 3) educational commitment, 4) time management, and 5) identify an academic pathway to degree completion. These SLOs were measured during the QEP cycle with the surveys taken by the TXcohort who completed both the pre-test and the post-test. The benchmark for each SLO was that 50% of the students in the TXcohort who completed the pre-survey would score higher/better on the post-test. Table 3 displays the results of coaching in helping students develop noncognitive skills by comparing pre- and post-tests and found that for nearly every term, students scored 50% higher/better on the time management and identify an academic pathway to degree completion SLOs. For the other SLOs, academic self-efficacy, resiliency/grit, and educational commitment, the results illustrate that the benchmark rate was not met for most of the terms. However, due to the overwhelmingly positive results related to student success outcomes for the TXcohort, these results are not thought to be indicative of shortcomings of the program as these measures of constructs did not likely encapsulate the full context. For example, educational commitment was not met per the measures of constructs, but student outcome data demonstrated that students who more fully engaged in coaching (i.e., TXcohort) were retained at significantly higher levels than students who did not receive this level of intervention (i.e., AWcohort). Additionally, students may have overestimated their capacities on these measures prior to exposure to program curriculum as academic coaches worked diligently to simultaneously build motivation while aiding students in more accurately assessing their abilities and heightened their awareness of psychosocial obstacles impeding their ability to be academically successful. As a result, students had a more realistic perspective of how noncognitive and other psychosocial factors such as work, family, mental health, and other unforeseen circumstances impacted their academic success. Thus, perspective provided by their academic coaches may have led to more informed responses on the post-test.

| Term | Students Who Accessed UMDegree | Academic Self-Efficacy | Resiliency/ Grit | Educational Commitment | Time Management |
|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Fall 2015 | 49% | n/a | 52%* | 33% | 65%* |
| Spring 2016 | 29% | 28% | 52%* | 33% | 57%* |
| Fall 2016 | 70%* | 37% | 49% | 28% | 58%* |
| Spring 2017 | 90%* | 43% | 35% | 15% | 57%* |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----|-------------|-----|-------------|
| Fall 2017 | 95%* | 25% | 39% | 20% | 45% |
| Spring 2018 | 95%* | 44% | 52%* | 28% | 61%* |
| Fall 2018 | 96%* | 35% | 41% | 20% | 58%* |
| Spring 2019 | 96%* | 48% | 50%* | 24% | 75%* |
| Fall 2019 | 92%* | 43% | 43% | 32% | 53%* |
| Spring 2020 | 91%* | 43% | 53%* | 36% | 52%* |
| *Benchmark met | | | | | |

Effectiveness and Helpfulness of Academic Coaching

The effectiveness and helpfulness of academic coaching were assessed by analyzing post-survey and coaching alliance survey data. Starting in Fall 2017, the coaching alliance survey was administered at the midpoint of each intervention term with the purpose of analyzing students' perceptions of the work with their coaches. Research suggests that an important environmental factor related to student persistence and success in college is a student's ability to make meaningful connections with members of the university community (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). Also, research has consistently established relationships between greater student involvement and positive outcomes of student success and development, including satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement and social engagement. While coaching addressed a variety of obstacles, Table 4 displays anecdotal evidence that highlights the core themes that coaches provided during sessions. Moreover, using a 5-point Likert scale, the ACE post-test survey measured student perceptions of academic coaching by asking, "How effective was your coaching in helping you attain the skills necessary for academic success?" (1, Very ineffective - 5, Very effective) and "Overall, how helpful were your coaching sessions?" (1, Very unhelpful, 5 - Very helpful). The data in Table 5 shows that during each term, most students rated the overall effectiveness of their coach as "Very Effective" and the helpfulness as "Very Helpful". The anecdotal and quantifiable data backs the assertion that when students engaged and made a connection with an academic coach, there were positive academic and personal gains.

| Persistent Themes | Student Quotes |
|--|--|
| Motivation and Achievement | <i>I hope that I'll be able to have this service for the rest of my collegiate career. It is a resource that I feel as though has helped tremendously in increasing my motivation, belief in myself, and I'm back on track to succeed!</i> |
| Support Networks, Mentor - Academic and Non-academic | <i>She is a great coach, mentor, and a fantastic person. She's really helped me get not just my academic life, but my personal life back on track as well.</i> |
| | <i>She has gone above my expectations for ACE. She has shown genuine concern for both my academic and personal struggles and goals, which she realizes are intertwined.</i> |
| Accountability and Resiliency | <i>I am thankful that I was placed on academic coaching. The program is helping me to stay on track and accountable. I know for sure it has allowed me to ask for help, when I didn't know I needed it. I've had to overcome a lot to get here and she makes me feel like I can succeed.</i> |
| | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Balancing and Prioritizing Competing Responsibilities | <i>It has had a very positive impact on me ... as an older student I work full time, have kids, and am in school. I am very grateful for the information he has given me to help me navigate all the technology used by today's college students. He's shown me I CAN do it all - just takes discipline and drive.</i> |
|---|--|

Table 5: ACE Post-Survey Coaching Helpfulness & Effectiveness

| Term | Mean Helpfulness | Mean Effectiveness |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Fall 2015 | 4.72 | 4.64 |
| Spring 2016 | 4.59 | 4.49 |
| Fall 2016 | Not asked | Not asked |
| Spring 2017 | 3.89 | 4.43 |
| Fall 2017 | 4.26 | 4.44 |
| Spring 2018 | 4.59 | 4.73 |
| Fall 2018 | 4.33 | 4.77 |
| Spring 2019 | 4.31 | 4.68 |
| Fall 2019 | 4.28 | 4.53 |
| Spring 2020 | 4.41 | 4.55 |

Booster Sessions

The original QEP called for a decentralization extension of ACE by implementing a one-time booster session opportunity for any student in their junior year who was in a previous TXcohort. A booster session entailed a one-time meeting with a faculty or staff member in the student's major to discuss how they were doing in their classes, current major process, discuss academic and career goals, and other applicable subjects pertaining to their academics. These sessions were offered Fall 2017-Spring 2020 terms. The idea behind the implementation of a booster session was to provide an opportunity to those students who wanted to continue academic coaching in the subsequent terms following the intervention term. Only one student participated during the QEP cycle; therefore, this portion of the QEP was not analyzed.

Unanticipated Outcomes

There were a few outcomes that were not anticipated, but nonetheless were positive for the institution and the greater scholarly community. The QEP garnered positive recognition on an institutional and national level for its ability to enhance student success for vulnerable populations through strategic programming. First, it was not expected that additional research would be undertaken as a result of the QEP. However, two dissertations (Warren, 2019[6] and Capstick, 2018[7]), and one journal article [8] were published. Second, on an institutional level, the successes of ACE quickly caught wind across campus. Second, in 2018, an academic coaching network was formed that consisted of faculty, advisors, and student support personnel to provide more streamlined practices to aid in increasing retention and graduation rates. The QEP director was tapped to conduct training sessions on the underlying framework of ACE and how the program's tenants could be conceptualized in other departments across campus. Further, the QEP director created a Google Drive that housed academic and psychosocial resources that academic coaches used during sessions. These resources were shared with the academic coaching network and academic advising network in order to further push the agenda of helping students holistically. Last, since the data proved that academic coaching was a successful practice in helping students overcome barriers that impeded academic success, coaches were hired in other departments across campus (e.g., College of Engineering, Multicultural Affairs) to support other subpopulations. Third, ACE exceeded institutional boundaries, which was not anticipated. In May 2019, President Rudd testified before congress about college completion and he recognized ACE as a successful initiative that has improved retention rates among vulnerable

students. A few months later in August 2019, ACE was selected as a Tennessee pacesetter program by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Most recently, *formalizing academic coaching in higher education* was accepted for presentation at the 2020 SACSCOC Annual Meeting. This presentation was given by the QEP director and the vice president of student academic success and focused on UofM's QEP, which included the emergence and rationale of ACE, the implementation and timeline of assessments used to measure student learning and student success outcomes, and the conceptualization of academic coaching. Lastly, our QEP caught the attention of regional and national peers as a model academic coaching program. Colleagues around the country sought out consultation from the QEP director in hopes to understand program development, assessment, and best practices.

SECTION 4: Reflection on What UofM Has Learned as a Result of the QEP Experience

In reflecting on what we have learned as a result of the QEP experience, it was inevitably an evolutionary change process, asking questions such as what made a difference in student learning and success? What did not have an impact? This process provided the opportunity to pinpoint what worked well and should remain intact and what did not work well and thus either needed to be changed or dropped. On a fundamental level, we learned that academic coaching was efficacious, transformative, and positively linked to student success. The impact observed from this highly engaging design was not only immediate but also astounding. It was found that pouring resources into our targeted population yielded student success if students routinely attended sessions throughout the intervention term. In fact, it was determined that only after five sessions students performed significantly better than those who attended four times or less as they earned more hours, higher term GPAs, were in Good Standing at higher rates, and were retained at higher rates through the subsequent term. We also learned that longitudinally those who regularly attended were retained and graduated at higher rates than those who did not. Additionally, we learned other factors that aided in the success of the program were the hiring of coaches with counseling backgrounds and the incentivization of attendance. The hiring of graduate assistants as academic coaches from the master's and doctoral programs in Counseling Psychology and Educational Psychology and Research proved to be a huge asset to the program. During sessions, academic coaches conducted thorough grade checks, discussed topics that were timely and relevant to students such as time management, organization, study strategies, problem solving and decision making, major and career exploration, grit and resiliency, and helped students make academic plans of action. They served as an accountability partner for students and used their training to address the most pressing academic and psychosocial factors that impeded the students' ability to be academically successful. The value of listening greatly benefited both the student and coach as students were kept abreast of their current academic status in each class while coaches provided insight into the navigation and mitigation of psychosocial barriers as they matched students' needs to resources and services on campus. Data from the coaching alliance survey and post-test showed that students' experiences with their academic coaches were very positive and as a result, most students found coaching to be very effective.

Another aspect we learned as a result of the QEP is that incentivization helped increase student attendance and success. The pilot studies determined that attending at least five coaching sessions yielded positive student success outcomes. As such, the more times students showed, the better off they performed academically. In looking at the attendance numbers from Fall 2015-Spring 2017, it was determined that we needed to strategize a way to increase attendance as we knew the intervention worked. In Fall 2017, the ACE book scholarship was introduced, and we saw immediate gains in the number of students who attended five or more sessions. This was a one-time scholarship given to eligible students to purchase educational related materials for the subsequent term given they attended five or more sessions during the intervention term. The book scholarship certainly was an identifiable factor that contributed to the spike in attendance and positively, these numbers were sustained throughout the remainder of the QEP cycle. From Fall 2017-Spring 2020, there were 342 eligible book scholarship students. Of the eligible population, 64% attended five or more sessions and accounted for approximately 12% of the overall TXcohort during the QEP cycle. In terms of student success outcomes, 68%* of those students who received the book scholarship from Fall 2017-Spring 2019 returned to Good Standing after one term and averaged a 2.4* term GPA.

*Spring 2020 term data not included due to the credit/no credit grade option.

Last, we learned the only aspect of the QEP that was entirely underutilized were booster sessions. All but one student elected not to participate throughout the QEP cycle. A rationale for low interest and participation may have been attributed to the fact that data showed students met with their advisors at higher rates and alleviated the need for a booster session. Also, students who made it to their junior year and were still enrolled may not have necessarily needed a booster session because they were back in Good Standing and doing well.

Conclusion: Next Steps

Paradigm Shift

Given COVID-19 drastically altered the higher education landscape, it would be remiss not to mention the impact and implications COVID-19 had on program implementation. The shift in program delivery midway through the Spring 2020 term presented a challenge due to the abruptness and newness of operating fully remote. However, as with most disruptive events, this one brought the opportunity to further explore academic coaching in a virtual setting. The ACE program was committed to deliver a program that met the needs of our students by understanding exactly what those needs were, and where limitations existed. Thus, when coaching pivoted online, the director and academic coaches collected anecdotal data from students that identified barriers they were experiencing as a result of COVID-19. It was found that inequities were illuminated by the crisis. Specifically, financial instability was exacerbated by the pandemic and as a result, students had to work more to make up for lost income. We also found that students did not have access to the internet and technological equipment (e.g., laptops, tablets, desktops, webcams), and anxiety was heightened because students did not know how to access resources and were worried about their mental and physical well-being. To combat these impeding barriers, changes were made to the program's operations and curriculum. Examples of best practices included the extension of hours of operation to accommodate students who worked during the day, increased the frequency of connection to weekly communication via text, phone, and email in addition to meeting bi-weekly via video conferencing in order to increase engagement and cultivate a sense of belonging, and added COVID-19 related financial and academic resources to the curriculum.

Academic Coaching as a Formalized Practice

Over the past five years, the results informed us of the potential ACE has on impacting the formalization of academic coaching across campus and as a standalone practice in higher education. The careful planning of the implementation, timeline of assessments, and the conceptualization of academic coaching as a formalized practice have been explored and refined over the QEP cycle. The QEP served as a support structure that helped students better orient themselves to psychosocial barriers while building academic and noncognitive skills related to academic success. A valuable takeaway that we gleaned as a result of the QEP was the frequency of sessions and amount attended were directly linked to positive student success outcomes. Further, the hiring of academic coaches from counseling backgrounds proved to be vital to our success as these individuals were equipped with expertise in intrusive advising, skilled intuition, and helped students develop noncognitive skills and manage psychosocial issues that contributed to their academic performance. From a conceptual standpoint, we learned that the triage of relationship building between the student and academic coach, academic and noncognitive skill building and development through curriculum, and resource connection to support academic success created an educational reform that showed significant, measurable effects on student performance and retention. As we move forward, the success of ACE compels increasing the number of students who partake in academic coaching since we learned that the coaching framework and tenants can be successfully implemented across subpopulations on campus. This will be further explored as students from all backgrounds will be presented with new challenges and obstacles as we continually adjust to living in a changed society.

Evidence

- [1] [QEP Interim Report_9.28](#)
- [2] [Figure 1](#)
- [3] [Figure 2](#)

- [4] [Figure 3](#)
 - [5] [Figure 4](#)
 - [6] [Academic_Coaching_in_Higher_Ed](#)
 - [7] [Exploring_the_Effectiveness_of](#)
 - [8] [Capstick2019_Article_ExploringTheEffectivenessOfAca](#)
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