

# CLEAR CONNECTIONS PROJECT

## Promising Practices

### Eastern Illinois University Student Success Center

#### DESCRIPTION

**THE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER, PART OF EASTERN** Illinois University's Center for Academic Support and Assessment offers a broad array of intensive services to students who need to improve their academic standing.

The Center has both an in-person and a virtual component. In person, students can learn key academic skills through the Strategies for Academic Success course. A corps of graduate student assistants and interns allows the Center to provide intensive, regular follow-up and academic planning with students who are on academic warning or are returning to the university after an academic dismissal. Students can also take part in extensive on-line resources, such as study and academic skills guides and podcasts that allow students to learn academic and time management skills in shorter increments, day or night. The Center also coordinates with a variety of on- and off-campus support services, such as counseling, minority affairs, disability services, career services, academic advising, and health center services to ensure students get the help they need to stay on track to graduate.

**Institution Name**  
Eastern Illinois University

**Location**  
Charleston, Illinois

**Staff Size**  
1,708 full-time  
223 part-time

**Faculty Size**  
617 full-time  
140 part-time

**Program Name**  
The Student Success Center

**Program Goal**  
Help new and returning students improve their academic skills or address personal issues to improve student's academic standing.

**Program Started**  
2007

**Number Served Each Year**  
2,500-3,000

**Annual Program Budget**  
\$166,000

**Staff**  
2 full-time staff  
6 graduate student assistants  
4 graduate student interns

**Program Lead**  
Cindy Boyer, Director

#### STUDENT BODY (2010)

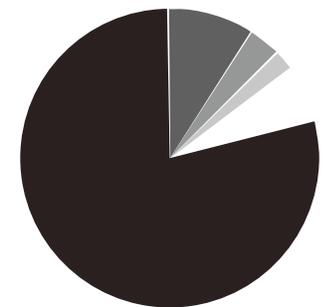
**Full-time**  
9,649 (83%)

**Part-time**  
1,981 (17%)

**Gender**  
Female: 6,780 (58.3%)  
Male: 4,850 (41.7%)

**Average Age (undergrad)**  
21.5

#### Race/Ethnicity:



- 8,926 (76.7%) Caucasian
- 1,360 (11.7%) African American
- 351 (3%) Hispanic/Latino
- 122 (1%) Asian
- Other

*I wouldn't be graduating in May if it wasn't for the Student Success Center..*

*My study skills and time management were full of bad habits from high school, and the Center Director helped me fix those bad habits.*

— STUDENT SUCCESS PARTICIPANT

## Results

### INCREASE IN GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING

*since the creation of student success center*

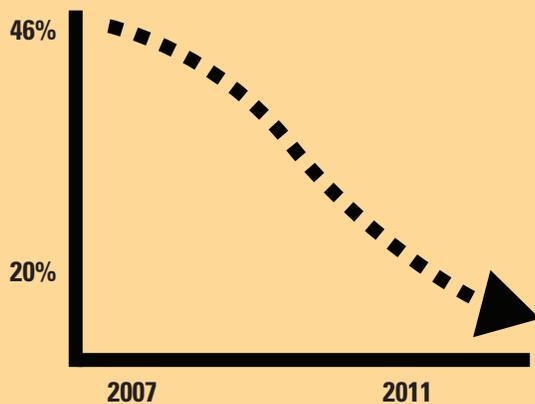
Between 2007 and 2011, the percentage of academic warning students who had attained good academic standing rose from 34% to 86%.



### DROP IN MINORITY ATTRITION

*since the creation of student success center*

Minority student attrition dropped from 46% to 20% in the same period.



## PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND COMPONENTS

### CENTER STAFF SPECIFICALLY WORKS WITH STUDENTS

who need additional academic skills to meet the school's admissions standards, stay in school, or return to campus.

The Center has had great success with conditional acceptance programs for students who need additional academic skills to meet admissions criteria, particularly for students of color. By the end of their freshman year in 2011, 71 percent of students who were enrolled through Building Outreach and Opportunity for Students in Transition (BOOST) were in good academic standing and had earned an average of 23.3 credit hours,

despite lower high school grades and test scores than other Eastern Illinois University students.

At the core of the Center's programming is a mandatory, one credit hour course, Strategies for Academic Success (EIU 2919), for students who are on academic warning for the first time due to a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or lower. The class meets for 50 minutes once a week. Most participants are second semester freshmen. The Student Success Center provided 25 sections of EIU 2919 in 2011, with 478 of the 587 students identified as needing the course enrolled.

Workshops, podcasts, and classroom presentations on a variety of topics such as time management, how to take exams, doing well on midterms, managing stress, and raising your GPA are another major component of the program. In 2011, staff conducted 32 half-hour workshops and presentations to over 972 students. Center podcasts were viewed over 5,000 times the same year. Staff also has provided professional development for a number of other university staff, student peer, and faculty teams.

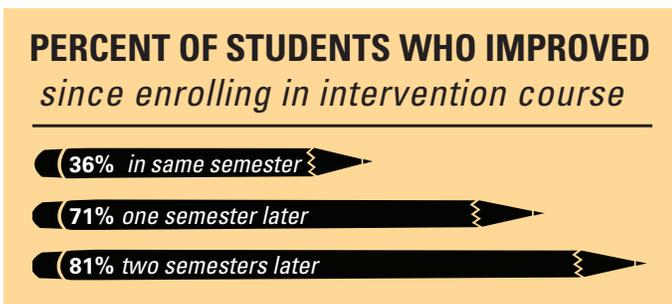
*Students may initially say they need help with test taking, or another academic skill, but when you talk more, you learn that their roommate moved out, they lost financial aid, they broke-up with their boyfriend. If the Center doesn't have what they need, we make referrals to get them headed in the right direction. We don't just pass students on to the next office. We make sure they get the help they need.*

– CINDY BOYER, CENTER DIRECTOR

The Center has purposely designed workshops to take no longer than 30 minutes so that students can fit them more easily into their busy schedules, as well as to ensure that students aren't overwhelmed with more information than they can process and remember. Podcasts are even shorter to make it easier for students to learn new skills or reinforce previous skills whenever the need arises or they have a few spare minutes. The virtual center also allows students to see tutoring schedules for each of the academic departments in one place.

Faculty refer students, and students may self-refer as well. Students can attend consultations to pinpoint specific areas where they need help. Staff then works with students to develop a personalized academic plan. Students are referred to a variety of resources around campus and in the community, depending on their needs. Students may receive help with time management, specific academic skills, financial aid, tutoring, or health issues. A writing center is also available on campus to help students at any point in their writing projects.

Students who continue to earn a GPA below 2.0 for two semesters despite other interventions may be temporarily put on academic dismissal. After a mandatory semester off, students are assigned to a staff person for individualized meetings each week. Students who return are assessed on a variety of academic skills and must complete an academic plan with their Student Success Center advisor. Students who fail to follow their academic plan by midterm of the semester they return have an academic hold placed on their record. Not all students return, but those who do are required to get a 2.1 GPA or higher for the first semester they return. Most returning students are highly motivated, and some attain GPAs at or near 4.0 on their return. The Center works with around 50 students each semester to help them become reinstated academically.



## PLANNING, FUNDING, AND STAFFING

**PLANNING FOR THE CENTER BEGAN IN 2005 WITH** a \$35,000 federal Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant. A planning committee of 20 faculty, administrators, and students reviewed institutional strengths and weaknesses using existing strategic planning documents and the University's accreditation self-study. Once these were charted against the Title III priorities, a clear need for a comprehensive student success center addressing student academic needs surfaced. After a development plan was submitted to the campus and board, the University secured a five-year \$1.85 million Title III Institutional Development Grant in 2007. The grant allowed for the construction of a 5,000 square foot facility, hiring staff, and creation of an endowment to ensure on-going funds, although additional funds were provided by the university to construct the facility and maintain operation of the Center.

Funding is maximized by hiring graduate student assistants and interns to offer a high level of individualized service. Each year around half of the graduate students are in their second year at the Center, while the other half are new. Graduate students receive a week of training prior to the beginning of the academic year. In order to expand the capacity of the Center, graduate students are hired from a variety of fields, including psychology, counseling, business training and management, and college student affairs.

## IMPACT

**DESPITE THE SMALL STAFF SIZE, THE CENTER** serves a large number of students each year. In 2011, staff had 1,926 appointments with students. The same year, 631 students received individualized assessments with staff, with the majority coming from the academic success course and referrals. The staff also maximizes their impact by presenting to student gatherings and establishing a strong web presence.

Since the creation of the Center in 2007, student success has increased dramatically. The percentage of students on academic warning who have transitioned to good academic standing increased from 34 percent to 86 percent. During the same period (2007-2011), minority student attrition dropped from 46 percent in 2007 to 20 percent in 2011, most likely due to the combined effort of the Minority Affairs Office and Student Success Center. The results for reinstated students are more complicated. These students have extremely low cumulative GPAs upon reinstatement, which can make it difficult to retain good standing in a semester. In 2011, the number of reinstated students completing their academic plan was just 50 of 105, lower than previous years. However, it is worth noting that in 2011, 33 percent of all reinstated students attained good standing, while 25 percent were on academic probation.



**Women Employed**

*Women Employed's mission is to improve women's economic status and remove barriers to economic equity. We promote fair workplace practices, increase access to training and education, and provide women with innovative tools and information to move into careers paying family-supporting wages.*

**Learn more at [womenemployed.org](http://womenemployed.org).**

## **Challenges**

- Training new graduate students and staff each year because graduate students are only available for 2 years.
- Creating a space that students wanted to come to was a challenge. Despite fun outreach events, it wasn't until students started hearing success stories from other students that the Center became popular.
- Providing service to a large number of students, the Center could always use additional staff.

## **Success Factors**

### **HIGH QUALITY STUDENT SERVICE**

- The Center has dedicated staff who consistently focus on providing a high level of service.
- New staff members are consistently taught to make sure student issues are resolved to the best of their ability. If staff members aren't sure of the right answer or need to refer students elsewhere, they go out of their way to help students find the right answers to their questions and may even walk students over to another department to ensure they get the help they need.
- Graduate students are close in age to the participants, but have already successfully completed college and can offer students relevant advice based on the current higher education environment.

### **STUDENT-SUCCESS FOCUSED CAMPUS CULTURE**

- The staff had to help students see the Center as a positive place instead of a remedial place. They changed the name from "Learning Assistance" and built the Center near the largest freshman hall to make sure students could find it easily.
- The Center has received great moral and financial support from the administration. The culture of Eastern Illinois University is focused on individualized attention and student support.

### **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH FACULTY AND STAFF**

- The Center coordinates closely with a number of other student services. Staff spent a significant amount of time when the Center was first being planned, meeting with staff from a variety of student service offices to develop strong relationships.