

Success Collaborative Proposal

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Introduction

Throughout the year, our investigation of the Success Collaborative has taken us myriad places within the administration, the advising department, and the student body. We have gathered data and feedback from diverse sources, considered the issue from all facets, and examined it through many lenses. The following compilation of findings and our subsequent assertions include not only the views of this focus group, but the recommendations of the advisors with whom we spoke, and the best interests of each kind of student on the Bloomington campus.

Success Collaborative

- Meaning, software, use
- benefits, drawbacks
- advisor input/ interaction
- student input/ interaction

Major Issues:

Personnel Problems:

As we collected feedback and data, our experiences interacting directly with advisors and software varied significantly. Several students felt that the advisors were well-equipped to manipulate the software effectively, but overall we found that the majority of advisors had either never interacted with the software or were ill-equipped to correctly integrate it into their advising strategies.

In the context of academic advising as a deeply personal matter that must be approached on a case-by-case basis as per the student's goals and personality, we have compiled a list of suggested vocabulary and phrases to use in an advising appointment when sharing the software's data with students. Rather than dissuading a student from a goal or career path immediately, the feedback we gained from our advising appointments revealed that a successful strategy would be to begin asking students questions about their motives and ideas about the chosen career to reveal both weaknesses and other prospects. Rhetoric we encourage in advising appointments should align with progress and alternatives rather than direct discouragement. This way, a student will not focus on his or her perceived failure but rather the areas in which he or she excels and where those strengths may take them.

Furthermore, advisors should be equipped with a consistent platform for feedback, an environment in which to air grievances and troubleshoot weaknesses in the communication between software and student. Several advisors expressed the desire to influence the way in which the Success Collaborative system is integrated into appointments, and it is essential that they have the opportunity to commune with administrators to ensure its utility is maximized.

Software Problems:

Our primary concern stems from the operations and functionality of the software. Several advisors expressed dismay that the software would not be effective within majors outside the departments on which it has been tested thus far, particularly in the humanities. There also seem to be large gaps in understanding when it comes to specifics: for example, the advisors with whom we spoke could not explain the significance of Areas 1, 2 and 3 or the ways in which the “major-matcher” gathered its data for a freshman student for whom very little academic information is available for assessment. To resolve this issue, we recommend each area display the list of specific courses it draws data from to determine the score.

The “major- matcher” failed to calculate some students’ risk score properly. Credits received through Advanced Placement testing were either falsely counted as a low grade, or were not calculated at all. We also noticed that classes taken on other campuses were not displaying correctly. Advisors recommended that classes taken on other campuses be weighted lower than classes taken on the Bloomington campus. The software also provided invalid data if a course was dropped or retaken. While we are aware that most of these technological problems have been brought to the attention of administrators, we believe it is essential to resolve these problems before using the software in all advising appointments.

Conclusion:

Suggestions/ Recommendations:

After meeting with advisors and compiling our own opinions we have a few suggestions for the use of the software. The first suggestion is presenting advisors with a ‘purpose’ for using the software when meeting with students, instead of giving them an exact script to use in discussion. This is because each individual advisor has his or her own preferred technique on the best judge of how to communicate with these students. Along with this recommendation is our suggestion to have an open and effective platform for advisors to give feedback on the software. This way there will be a constant way to improve how the software is being used on campus and a direct path of communication between advisors and software administrators.

To address the complaint from advisors about using the software and the clear learning curve involved, we are recommending an additional or monthly workshop(s) for advisors to learn more about this technology and to deal with problems they’ve been facing. This workshop would also allow conversation among advisors and sharing of methods and techniques.

Beyond these recommendations we have some “big-picture” ideas. The first is to allow transparency with students. We feel strongly that this software would be very valuable if accessed by students themselves. This would give a way for students to track their own academic progress and be proactive in choosing appropriate majors and courses. We are aware that there are most likely technology issues and other unforeseen problems that will have to be addressed in order for this to happen.

This software gauges a student's aptitude based on past academic performance. Since it is only available to current college students, people entering college are making major academic decisions without their aptitude being gaged. We recommend that IU offers an aptitude test for incoming freshman (online or during orientation) where students high school performance, GPA, standardized test scores, and interests, are all taken into account to point them in the right collegiate direction. This test could also be offered to transfer students.

Contrary to the appearance likely presented in the laundry list of criticism above, we support wholeheartedly the visions that initiated the Success Collaborative. The ability to quantify a student's projected future on a particular career path would be invaluable, if only it were more accurate. Should our recommendations be taken into account, the Success Collaborative could be a valuable contribution to the Indiana University Bloomington comprehensive educational experience. With these criticisms in mind, we hope to see the program develop in the future so we too may benefit from its information.