Proposal for Vision 2020 Grant AY2

Project Title  Disability Support Services Summer Workshop and Student Mentoring
Team  Jim Hasse, Anne Drake, Dennis Rodriguez, Virginia Heidemann

Abstract
Workshop presentations will focus on critical themes for incoming freshmen and transfer students, and will introduce students to the peer mentoring program run by the Disability Support Services (DSS) office. While building strong college success skills is important for any incoming student, the additional challenges facing students with a disability make establishing a strong initial foundation particularly important. Existing data also clearly indicates a strong relationship between the academic success of entering students and their engagement with the DSS office. The summer workshops will support student engagement with DSS and other University resources, as well as better prepare students to begin the fall semester.

Goals
- Increase student awareness of college expectations.
- Increase student engagement with the services provided by the office of Disability Support Services early in the semester with follow up throughout the semester.
- Encourage new students and transfer students to engage with peer mentors.
- Increase student engagement with campus resources and opportunities for personal and academic growth
- Increase persistence and retention for degree completion.

Assessment
Assessment of the project objectives included the following:

- Survey of student workshop participants upon completion of the workshop
- Survey administered to all fall 2014 first time students at the end of the fall semester. This survey will also be administered at the end of the spring 2015 semester.
- Comparison of DSS office engagement with first semester GPA. This will also be done at the end of the second semester.

Results
Because student engagement is such a key focus of DSS activities, workshop and/or mentoring participants were identified as being either engaged or not engaged with the DSS office. Student engagement is broadly defined in terms of the extent to which a student utilizes services and accommodations and/or maintains contact with the office. A student is not engaged if he/she has some initial involvement or contact, but then has no further contact with the office. Because the nature of this engagement can vary depending upon the individual, we do not attempt to quantify it
beyond the basic distinction of “engaged” or “not engaged”. However, we have found this to be a useful way of evaluating office effectiveness, particularly with incoming students. This is assessed each semester for the entire incoming cohort. We have consistently observed that a high GPA is associated with office engagement, but those students with low GPAs seldom follow-up after some initial contact. The challenge has been to increase the percentage of students who do continue to engage with the office. As indicated by the goals, our Vision 2020 grant activities are focused on building this engagement.

**Participation**

A total of 11 students participated in the workshops and an additional 9 who had not attended a workshop began the mentoring program. Unfortunately, three participants withdrew entirely from classes shortly after the start of the semester for disability-related reasons.

**Workshop Evaluation**

The overall reaction to the workshop by presenters and participants was quite positive. The faculty involvement by Dr. Rodriguez and Dr. Grens was particularly valuable. The rather low student workshop participation was somewhat disappointing. This was, however, about one third of the total number of students who had contacted DSS at the time. Because the workshops took place in late June and late July, they simply may have been offered a little too far in advance of the start of the fall semester. Almost half of the total number of incoming DSS students for the semester had not yet contacted the office by even the late July workshop.

Results of the participant survey indicate that the students found the workshop to be useful and that the nature and amount of information presented was good. Specific comments as to additional information included helping the commuter student get more involved with the campus, a listing of available DSS services and accommodations, and a tour of classroom buildings. Other suggestions included limiting the workshop to one day and offering it closer to the start of classes. It was also suggested that student participation might be increased by using social media and publicizing the workshop more at orientations.

**Office Engagement and Academic Success**

Because the three students who withdrew entirely from the fall semester were not included in the data, these results are based upon 17 students. Of these, 10 continued to be engaged with the office and 7 did not. The mean first semester GPA was calculated for (1) the participants identified as being engaged, (2) participants not engaged, (3) non-participating entering students who were engaged with the office, and (4) non-participating entering students who did not engage with the office. These mean GPAs are indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean GPA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant-Engaged (n=10)</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participant-Engaged (n=19)</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant-Not Engaged (n=7)</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participant- Not Engaged (n=24)</td>
<td>1.57</td>
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</table>
*First Semester Survey of First Time Entering Students*

A survey was administered to first time entering students at the beginning of the spring 2015 semester to assess office engagement and student perception of their ability to recognize and manage the impact of their disability during their first semester. Surveys are completed anonymously so it is not possible to identify results specifically for workshop and/or mentoring participants. However, the results do contribute to our understanding of student development in terms of managing the impact of a disability.

Surveys are still being collected, but based upon the 35% response rate thus far, the following results were reported.

- Eighty-five percent (85%) of the students felt that their disability had a moderate to major impact on their academic performance.
- Forty-six percent (46%) of the students reported a moderately high to high level of knowledge of how to manage the impact of their disability at the start of the semester. This number rose to 85% for the end of the semester.
- Fifty-four percent (54%) of the students reported that they were comfortable or very comfortable advocating for themselves at the start of the semester. This number again rose to 85% by the end of semester.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of the respondents reported that they utilized DSS services (engaged) and all rated services or accommodations as being helpful or very helpful.

**Interpretation**

It can be difficult to get students to participate in activities or events that, while potentially quite beneficial, are not required or that involve doing something “extra”, like the workshop. Many students with a disability are particularly reluctant to participate in something that identifies them as having a disability. This seems to be particularly true for incoming freshmen trying to avoid any type of stigma associated with having a “disability”.

It is unfortunate that 7 of the student initially involved with the workshop and/or mentoring failed to follow through or maintain office engagement. However, the fall 2014 cohort in general was somewhat atypical in that 30% ended the semester with a GPA under 2.0. This percentage was 14% for the fall 2013 cohort. Of the 18 students comprising this 30% group, only one student actually engaged with the office.

Despite the relatively low participation rate for the workshops and or mentoring, the results strongly support the association between student engagement and academic success. This is true whether a student participated in the workshop or mentoring, or not. However, the highest observed average GPA was with the group of students who did participate and who continued to be engaged with the office. The challenge remains, though, to increase the number of students who we can engage. Year 2 activities will continue to address this issue.

Relatively early in the fall semester and after having a few of the students fail to follow through with the mentoring, we decided to change the nature of the mentoring somewhat. In addition to individual mentoring relationships, the two mentors were asked to begin weekly email contacts with the entire fall 2014 cohort. This was also expanded to include the fall 2013 students as well. All students were
sent an email explaining the role of the mentor and the nature of the email contacts. Students were told that while no response or interaction was required of them, they could respond to the mentor with questions or issues. The content of the mentor emails included general information for students, study tips and suggestions, reminders, campus activities and events, etc. Students were told they could opt out of receiving the emails, with only a couple choosing to do so.

We are in the process of collecting student feedback as to the perceived value of this type of mentoring, but our anecdotal experience indicates that it may be an effective and efficient way to engage a large number of students. One mentor, for example, reported that four students who had no specific prior contact with her sent an email at the end of the semester thanking her for the contacts throughout the semester.

Proposed Year 2 Activities

Based upon what was learned from the Year 1 data and our experience with the project, the general focus and approach will be continued for year 2. However, the following modifications are proposed to increase program effectiveness.

• The summer orientation workshop will be repeated as it is viewed as being a key way to help prepare entering students, as well as getting them engaged with DSS and the Mentors. However, it will be streamline to make if more effective and efficient. This will include:
  
  o Reduce the workshop from two 2½ hour sessions on separate days to a one-day 3-hr. session. Although a broad range of content is included in the workshop it is still believed that we can address the core content areas in the three-hour session. This will eliminate the problem of someone being able to make one day, but not both. It may also make the workshop more attractive to students in that it is a one-time commitment.
  
  o We are considering offering a one-hour meeting/discussion session for parents at the same time their child is participating in the workshop. Parents are very frequently involved in our initial discussions with entering students and this may be a good opportunity to address some of the issues and questions parents have as their child transitions from high school to college.
  
  o The workshops last year were conducted during the last week of June and the last week of July. This year, we will conduct the workshop once in Early August. In retrospect, the June workshop, in particular was conducted too far in advance of the fall semester. By offering it in early August, the relevance and importance to the start of the semester may be more apparent. It will also allow for a greater number of people to attend considering that we have a considerable number of students who do not make an initial contact with the office until August. A one-day workshop conducted relatively near the start of the fall semester should increase the attendance and the perceived relevance of the information for those attending.

• The Peer Mentoring will remain an important component of the program, but with emphasis on the on-line interaction. The Mentors will continue to be available for individual, one-to-one mentoring for students who desire it, but the primary objective will be to regularly engage a much larger number of students with the email (and possibly social media) contacts.
• The summer workshop participants were given digital recorders. The value of the recorder as note taking tool, particularly for the student whose disability impacts their note taking ability, was reinforced. The recorders were well-received and will again be given to workshop participants.

**Budget**

**Budget for AY1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships for 2 Peer Mentors per semester</td>
<td>4 @ $750.00 each</td>
<td>$3,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality at Workshops*</td>
<td>4 days @ $ 150.00 each</td>
<td>$ 600.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>*coffee, juice, and muffins for approximately 20 people each workshop series</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital recorders for workshop participants</td>
<td>35 @ $40.00 each</td>
<td>$1,400.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenditures for AY1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$5,000.00</strong></td>
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**Budget for AY2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships for Peer Mentors</td>
<td>4 @ $750.00 each</td>
<td>$3,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality at Workshops</td>
<td>1 day @ $ 150.00 each</td>
<td>$ 150.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital recorders for workshop participants</td>
<td>20 @ $40.00 each</td>
<td>$ 800.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenditures for AY2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$3,950.00</strong></td>
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**Project Budget Fiscal Sustainability**

This project has the potential to be fiscally sustainable in the future with increased university support. Funds for the scholarships would need to be directed by university scholarship dollar initiatives or converted to hourly wages. Costs for copies and workshop materials would be absorbed by DSS.
## Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March-August 2015</td>
<td>Publicize and recruit students for workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-June 2015</td>
<td>Revise workshop agenda and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2015</td>
<td>Purchase digital recorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2015</td>
<td>Select and train Peer Mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td>Workshop participant evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept.-Dec. 2015</td>
<td>Peer Mentor contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>Compilation and analysis of grade and retention data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>First semester survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Second semester survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Compilation and analysis of 2nd semester grade data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Team Contact Information

**Jim Hasse, Director Disability Support Services**  
hassej@iusb.edu  
AI 113  
520-4832  

**Anne Drake**  
Disability Specialist, Disability Support Services  
anmdrake@iusb.edu  
AI 112  
520-4823  

**Dennis Rodriguez**  
Associate Professor and Chair, Dept. of Psychology  
pdrodrig@iusb.edu  
DW 2131  
520-4396  

**Virginia Heidemann**  
Director, Academic Centers for Excellence  
vmheidem@iusb.edu  
AI 117C  
520-4823
Project Director: Jim Hasse          Disability Support Services  574-520-4832  hassej@iusb.edu
Name:           Submitting Dept.  Phone #:         E-mail
Dennis Rodriguez  Dept. of Psychology   574-520-4396  pdrodrig@iusb.edu
Name:           Submitting Dept.  Phone #:         E-mail

Project Title: DSS Summer Workshop and Mentoring

Amount of this request: $ 3,950

Type of Proposal:
☐ Faculty Research Grant
☐ Curriculum Development
☐ Seed Grant
☐ Research Project Initiation Grant
☐ Regional Research Grant
☐ Other Vision 2020 Grant

Special Needs:
☐ Human Subjects
☐ Animals
☐ Biosafety:
☐ Pathogenic agent
☐ Human tissue or fluids
☐ Recombinant DNA

Brief layman's description of project: A transition program for new and transfer student to IU South Bend who are eligible for services from the office of Disability Support Services.

APPROVALS:
Project Director: [Signature]  Date: 11/30/15
Chairperson: [Signature]  Date: 11/30/2015
(If applicable)

Dean: