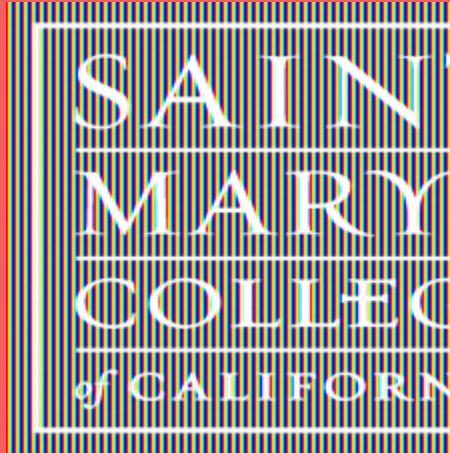


**Using Qualitative
Student Feedback
to Guide
First-Year
Advising Program:
Means to Improve
Student Success
and Retention**



Dr. Makiko Imamura, Ph.D.
Director of Assessment &
Educational Effectiveness,
Professor of
Communication

Dr. Aeleah Soine, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Provost of
Student Academics,
Professor of History

Why study the First Year Advising Cohort (FYAC)?

FYAC is the official structure for first-year academic advising, student success, and retention at Saint Mary's College since 2011. It offers common benchmarks + opportunities for interventions.

- **Cohorts:** 15 students + one faculty member around common academic interests/profiles
 - High Potential: first-generation and low-income
 - Honors: STEM, Psychology, Economics/Business, and the Liberal Arts
 - Prospective majors: Math/Engineering, Natural Sciences, Psychology, Economics/Business, Kinesiology, Social Sciences, History/Politics, Teacher Education, Performing Arts, English
 - Integral Liberal Arts program
 - Interdisciplinary themes: Museum Studies, Health Sciences, Social Justice Activism
 - Undecided/Exploration
- **Learning goals:** introduce students to the Lasallian mission of the College, explore majors and careers, plan for academic progress and success, get to know campus resources, and create (virtual) community.

FYAC Curriculum during the Pandemic Year

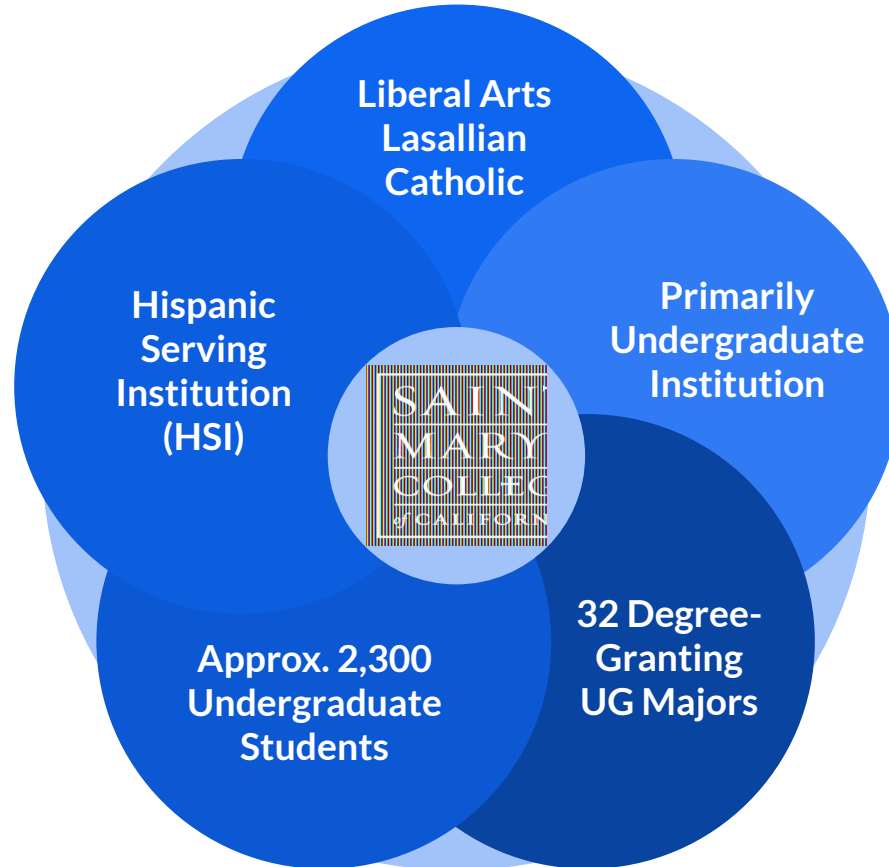
- Emphasis on virtual community-building
 - One-on-ones between peers in cohorts
 - Overlapped scheduling
 - Difficult Dialogues workshop to support Collegiate Seminar (all-first-year course)
 - Optional on-campus picnic in spring
- Common Moodle learning site
 - Asynchronous modules, discussion forums
 - Self-Navigating references to campus resources and guides to systems/processes (library, health relationships, Anti-Racist terms/language, introduction to the mission).
 - “How to” Zoom workshops (registration, major exploration, career/professional development)

Framework:

How can we better understand and bolster student success and retention through assessment of first-year student feedback and self-reflection?

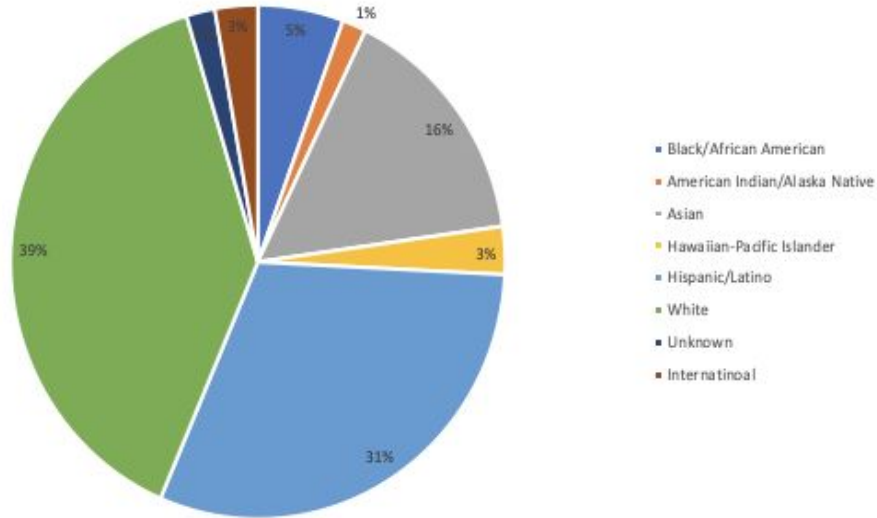
- Explorance Blue® Student Feedback Form (Dec)
 - Signature Self-Reflection prompt (April)
 - First-Year Advising Cohort (FYAC) benchmarks:
 - Midterm alerts
 - Major declaration
 - Satisfactory Academic Progress (> 2.0 GPA)
 - Sophomore Registration
-

Institutional Characteristics

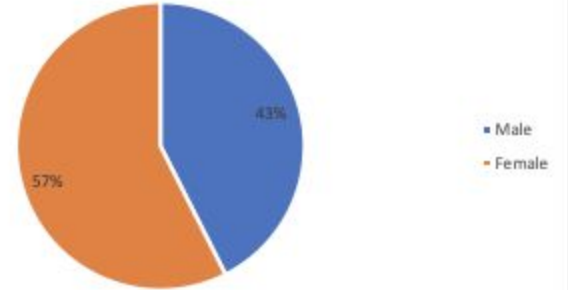


Student Profile

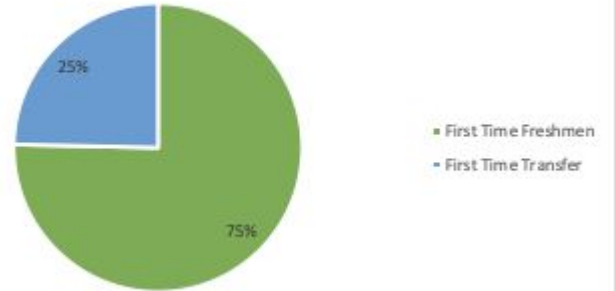
Race/Ethnicity - Fall 2020



Gender - Fall 2020



Class of 2024 Cohort



Question 1: What do students identify as the most valuable activities and resources for their academic success during the first year?

- **Method** -

**Data
Collection**

Fall 2020 Student Feedback Open-Ended Questions
Spring 2021 Reflection Assignment

Grounded Theory Approach: Open and Axial Coding

Analysis

RQ 1 Sample- Fall 2020 Student Feedback Form

Group Theme	# of Sections	Enrollment Size across Sections	Response Rate across Sections Valid N (%)	Gender Composition with Valid N	N of Entries/Contents Analyzed			
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Business/Economics	5	65	38 (58%)	M = 22; F = 16	95	67	35	32
Liberal Arts	10	131	63 (48%)	M = 15; F = 48	161	109	66	56
Sciences	7	98	48 (49%)	M = 13; F = 35	99	89	51	48
Mix/Undecided	3	38	16 (42%)	M = 5; F = 11	48	28	15	4
High Potential	3	40	19 (48%)	M = 3; F = 16	53	35	17	16
Honors	7	97	45 (46%)	M = 13; F = 32	100	56	46	42
Total	35	469	229 (49%; range = 21-93%)	M = 71 (31%) F = 158 (69%)	556	384	230	198

RQ 1 Results - Fall 2020 Student Feedback Form

Overarching Themes for 3 most valuable things learned (across groups; N = 556 entries)

[41%] Academic & Professional Planning:

- Course & Career Planning and Resources: $n = 182$ (32.73%)
- Major Exploration: $n = 26$ (4.68%)
- Learning about Academic and Internship Opportunities: $n = 18$ (3.24%)

[37%] Campus Orientation & Community-building Resources:

- Community & Relationship Building, Exploring Activities: $n = 89$ (16.01%)
- Learning about Campus Resources: $n = 76$ (13.67%)
- Navigating Website and Learning Tools: $n = 23$ (4.14%)
- Learning about College culture and Mission: $n = 18$ (3.24%)

[18%] Personal Strategies for Success and Wellness:

- Study Skills and Time Management: $n = 48$ (8.63%)
- Adjustment, Mental Health, and Stress Management: $n = 36$ (6.83%)
- Professional Communication Skills: $n = 8$ (1.44%)
- Internal Growth: $n = 7$ (1.26%)

[4%] Other: $n = 17$ (3.06%)/None: $n = 6$ (1.08%)

RQ 1 Results - Fall 2020 Student Feedback Form

Helpful Activities and Assignments (across groups; $N = 384$ entries)

[46%] Campus Partner Activities:

- Career Development Activities: $n = 69$ (17.97%)
- Academic and Campus Resources and Opportunities Activities: $n = 62$ (16.53%)
- Study Skills and Time Management: $n = 27$ (7.20%)
- Guest Speakers: $n = 15$ (4%)

[36%] Cohort-based Activities:

- Academic Planning Activities: $n = 72$ (19.20%)
- Class Discussion & Activities, Reflection, and Reading: $n = 64$ (17.07%)

[17%] Individualized Advising and Learning:

- Modules and Asynchronous Learning: $n = 30$ (8%)
- Professor and Mentor Help: $n = 24$ (6.40%)
- Teacher Interview: $n = 8$ (2.13%)

[3%] Other: $n = 9$ (2.40%)/None: $n = 4$ (1.07%)

RQ 1 Results - Fall 2020 Student Feedback Form

Overarching Themes for Challenges (across groups; N = 230 entries)

(% based on total response rate for #1; % by #2-#10 based on total entries per group - n in #1)

[45%] None: $n = 104$ (45.41%)

[32%] Pandemic-related Challenges:

- Motivation and Focus: $n = 30$ (23.81%)
- Online Learning and Technology Issues: $n = 24$ (19.05%)
- Navigating Resources, Moodle, and Websites: $n = 17$ (13.49%)
- Pandemic Stress: $n = 2$ (1.59%)

[22%] Curriculum-related Challenges:

- Assignment Description and Expectations: $n = 12$ (9.52%)
- FYAC Curriculum and Its Necessity: $n = 11$ (8.72%)
- Academic and Career Development: $n = 10$ (7.94%)
- Communication Issue with Professor or with the Class: $n = 10$ (7.94%)
- Class Schedule and Credit Cap: $n = 7$ (5.56%)

[1%] Other: $n = 3$ (2.38%)

RQ 1

Interpretation-

Fall 2020 Student Feedback Form

(unprompted open-ended response
fields)

1. Student perceptions of FYAC align with its learning goals:
 - Valued activities that engaged campus partners and their cohort community, even virtually
-The Library (virtual orientation)!
 - 4-Year Academic Plans with Advisor
 - Being in class with their cohort
2. Relative value of activities varied by cohort type in meaningful ways:
 - Disciplinary FYACs = academic and career planning resources, struggled with motivation/focus.
 - Honors (and Science) FYACs = academic and campus resources and activities.
 - Mixed/Undecided/HP FYACs = community-building.
3. Challenges: despite Covid, most students did not find the FYAC experience challenging, but those who did identify challenges were mostly pandemic related or exacerbated.

RQ 1 Results - Fall 2020 Student Feedback Form

Overarching Themes for Strategies Used and Should Have Used (across groups; N = 198 entries)

(% based on total response rate for #1; % for #2-#11 based on [total entries per group - n in #1])

1. **None:** $n = 54$ (23.6%)

Strategies Used

2. **Talked to Professors:** $n = 35$ (25%)
3. **Used Better Planning and Time Manag:** $n = 13$ (9.29%)
4. **Removed Distractions to Stay Focus:** $n = 9$ (6.43%)
5. **Attended Class and Paid Attention:** $n = 8$ (5.71%)
6. **Connected with Other Students:** $n = 8$ (5.71%)
7. **Used Reminders and Frequent Email Checking:** $n = 7$ (5%)
8. **Utilized Campus Resources:** $n = 5$ (3.57%)
9. **Asked Questions:** $n = 3$ (2.14%)
10. **Utilized Course Resources:** $n = 3$ (2.14%)
11. **Other:** $n = 12$ (8.57%)

Strategies Should Have Used

2. **Talk to the Professors:** $n = 11$ (7.86%)
3. **Desire for Different Curriculum and/or Advisor:** $n = 10$ (7.14%)
4. **Attend Class and Participate:** $n = 7$ (5%)
5. **Remove Distractions to Stay Focus:** $n = 6$ (4.29%)
6. **Connect with Other Students:** $n = 4$ (2.86%)
7. **Other:** $n = 5$ (3.57%)

RQ1 Results - Spring Reflection Essay

Group Theme	# of Sections	Enrollment Size across Sections	Response Rate across Sections Valid N (%)	N of Entries/Contents Analyzed				
				Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Business/Economics	5	65	10 (15.38%)	11	12	12	7	10
Liberal Arts	10	131	32 (24.43%)	55	44	52	22	38
Sciences	7	98	38 (38.78%)	54	58	72	36	43
Mix/Undecided	3	38	15 (39.47%)	25	25	28	15	19
High Potential	3	40	12 (30%)	17	21	20	6	15
Honors	7	97	51 (52.58%)	75	82	95	44	68
Total	35	469	229 (49%; range = 21-93%)	237	242	279	130	193

RQ1 Results - Spring Reflection Essay

Most Proud Achievements (across groups; $N = 237$ entries) - grouped

1. **Academic Achievements (e.g., good grade, passing courses):** $n = 85$ entries (35.86%)
2. **Time Management & Study Habits:** $n = 30$ entries (12.66%)
3. **Adjusting to College:** $n = 26$ entries (10.97%)
4. **Surviving the Pandemic Year:** $n = 20$ entries (8.44%)
5. **Club and Sports Activities:** $n = 20$ entries (8.44%)
6. **Made Friends:** $n = 12$ entries (5.06%)
7. **Good Mental Health & Focus:** $n = 12$ entries (5.06%)
8. **Academic and Career Planning:** $n = 8$ entries (3.08%)
9. **Overcoming Obstacles:** $n = 8$ entries (3.08%)

RQ1 Results - Spring Reflection Essay

Prominent Overarching Themes for Challenges and Obstacles (across groups; $N = 242$ entries)

1. **Interpersonal Connection & Isolation:** $n = 68$ (28.10%)
2. **Online Class & Zoom Fatigue:** $n = 58$ (23.97%)
3. **Time Management:** $n = 23$ (9.50%)
4. **Motivation & Focus:** $n = 20$ (8.26%)
5. **Course Work:** $n = 16$ (6.61%)
6. **Mental and Physical Health:** $n = 13$ (5.37%)
7. **Adjusting to College:** $n = 13$ (5.37%)
8. **Closed Campus & Shelter-in-Place:** $n = 12$ (4.96%)

Interpretation: challenges and obstacles were overwhelmingly influenced by the pandemic creating an unusual baseline year to study but clear challenges for 2021-22.

RQ1 Results – Spring Reflection Essay

Best Piece of Advice (across groups; $N = 193$ entries)

[46%] Social/Community-building:

1. Stay Engaged (e.g., talk in class, talk to Profs., ask for help): $n = 56$ (29.02%)
2. Meet New People & Make Friends: $n = 32$ (16.58%)

[30%] Academic Habits:

3. Have Good Work Ethic & Don't Procrastinate: $n = 49$ (25.39%)
4. Use Campus Resources: $n = 8$ (4.15%)

[21%] Self-Care:

5. Take Care of Yourself: $n = 22$ (11.40%)
6. Be Kind to Yourself, Be Patient, Be Flexible: $n = 10$ (5.18%)
7. Do Your Best, Don't Stress: $n = 8$ (4.15%)

[3%] Appreciation: Don't Take It for Granted: $n = 5$ (2.59%)

RQ1 Results – Spring Reflection Essay

Resources, Support, and Experiences for Success (across groups; $N = 279$ entries)

[46%] Faculty Advisors and Instructors:

1. FYAC Advisor and Resources: $n = 66$ (23.66%)
2. Professors & Office Hours: $n = 61$ (21.86%)

[22%] Campus Partners:

3. Success Coaches: $n = 28$ (10.04%)
4. CAPS & Health Center: $n = 17$ (6.09%)
5. Library & CWAC: $n = 15$ (5.38%)

[19%] Peers and Student Life:

6. Clubs, Activities, Campus Community: $n = 28$ (10.04%)
7. Classmates & Peers: $n = 24$ (8.60%)

RQ1 Interpretation- Spring Reflection Essay

Most Challenging: interpersonal connection & isolation, zoom fatigue & online learning

- High Potential students: motivation and focus

Most Proud of: academic achievement (grades, passing classes...)

- High Potential students: *Good Mental Health & Focus*

Most Helpful Resources, Support, and Experiences for Success:

- Faculty Advisors and Instructors
- Campus Resources
- Peers + Student Life

Resolutions for Sophomores:

- Stay engaged, meet people
- Work hard, don't procrastinate, use campus resources
- Take care of yourself

Question 2: What is the impact of prospective major cohorts on student perceptions of academic success, exploratory freedom, and the timing of major declaration?

Question 3: What variation or patterns in academic success benchmarks emerge across types of FYAC cohorts?

- Method -

Data Collection

GPA as of JT 2021

of credits completed as of JT 2021

of Alerts Issued in Fall and Spring Semesters

Declaration of Major

Descriptive statistics
Tests of Mean Difference
Qualitative Coding

Analysis

RQ2 & RQ3 Results - GPA & Credit Completion

Group Theme	# of Sections	N	GPA	Credits Earned by the End of Jan Term 2021 Standard = 5.00			
				M	SD	N below 5.0	% below 5.0
Business/ Economics	5	61	$M = 3.20^b, SD = .62$	5.66 ^b	1.57	6	9.84%
Liberal Arts	10	128	$M = 3.31^b, SD = .72$	6.16 ^b	2.80	20	15.63%
Sciences	7	92	$M = 3.10^b, SD = .68$	5.84 ^b	2.08	18	19.57%
Mix/ Undecided	3	38	$M = 3.26^a, SD = .52$	5.73 ^b	1.54	3	7.89%
High Potential	3	39	$M = 3.10^b, SD = .67$	6.27 ^b	2.61	7	17.95%
Honors	7	95	$M = 3.57^a, SD = .64$	9.00 ^a	3.71	4	4.21%
Total/ Difference	35	453	$F(5, 447) = 5.89, p < .001$	$F(5, 447) = 19.76, p < .001$		58	12.80%

RQ2 & RQ3 Results - Fall & Spring Alerts

Group Theme	N	Fall Alerts				Spring Alerts			
		M, SD	Mode	N of Students	% of Students	M, SD	Mode	N of Students	% of Students
Business/Economics	61	M = .37, SD = .74	1	17	27.87%	M = .40 ^{ab} , SD = .72	1	21	34.43%
Liberal Arts	128	M = .30, SD = .75	1	26	20.31%	M = .22 ^a , SD = .55	1	23	17.97%
Sciences	92	M = .48, SD = .87	1	30	32.61%	M = .51 ^b , SD = .89	1	31	33.70%
Mix/Undecided	38	M = .46, SD = .91	1	10	26.32%	M = .31 ^{ab} , SD = .83	1	7	18.42%
High Potential	39	M = .46, SD = .84	1	12	30.77%	M = .54 ^{ab} , SD = 1.02	1	13	33.33%
Honors	95	M = .25, SD = .72	1	16	16.84%	M = .25 ^{ab} , SD = .72	1	15	15.79%
Total/Difference	453	No Sig.		111	24.50%	F(5, 470) = 2.59, p < .05		110	24.28%

RQ2 & RQ3 Results - Fall to Spring Alerts Change

		Change Statistics		Academic Progress Patterns: Qualitative Coding					
Group Theme	<i>N</i>	% Difference	Paired <i>t</i> -test	<i>N</i>	Withdrew	Probation	Not Registered	Registered but No Major	Success
Business/ Economics	17	6.56%	$t(16) = 2.50, p < .05$	37	2	1	7	21	31
Liberal Arts	26	-2.34%	$t(25) = 4.29, p < .001$	49	5	1	3	16	12
Sciences	30	1.09%	$t(29) = 4.60, p < .001$	62	4	5	2	7	31
Mix/ Undecided	10	-7.89%	$t(9) = 5.25, p < .001$	23	1	0	0	6	8
High Potential	12	2.56%	$t(11) = 1.05, p = .32$	15	1	1	1	1	17
Honors	16	-1.05%	$t(15) = .94, p = .37$	21	4	1	2	3	13
Total	111		Time 1: Fall Alerts Time 2: Spring Alerts	207	17 (8.21%)	9 (4.35%)	15 (7.24%)	54 (26.09%)	112 (54.11%)

RQ2 & RQ3 Results - Take Away Points

- Midterm Alerts sent to students, advisors, and coaches are generally related to improved outcomes: Of 207 alerts, 166 students (81%) successfully continued into soph year + 9 students (4.3%) do so with support on academic probation (85%+ total).
- When we tracked how students who received alerts in the fall semester did in the spring semester with a paired *t*-test, we found that there was a *significant improvement in students in SEBA, SOLA, SOS, and Mixed groups*.
- Disciplinary FYACs are not better predictors of timely major declaration or lower rates of midterm reports, academic probation, or low credit accumulation.
 - There was no difference between fall and spring alerts in HP and Honors groups.
 - Of 19 probation cases, only 2 were in non-disciplinary FYACs (both HP).
 - Students in science and HP FYACs, or with history of alerts, tend to declare majors more frequently in the first year. Mixed, SOLA, and SEBA FYACs have higher numbers of undeclared students.

Interpretation: disciplinary FYACs support positive academic and professional development when student needs align with general disciplinary trajectories, but evidence of positive correlation is lacking for students who miss benchmarks or delay major declaration. Disciplinary FYACs may also rely more on group advising rather than individualized planning and discussion.

RQ2 & RQ3 Results - Major Declaration

Group Theme	<i>N</i>	Yes <i>N</i> (%)	No <i>N</i> (%)
Business/ Economics	61	49 (80.33%)	16 (26.23%)
Liberal Arts	128	91 (71.09%)	45 (35.16%)
Sciences	92	82 (89.13%)	17 (18.48%)
Mix/ Undecided	38	29 (76.32%)	10 (26.32%)
High Potential	39	35 (89.74%)	6 (15.38%)
Honors	95	79 (83.16%)	18 (18.95%)
<i>Total</i>	453	365 (80.57%)	112 (24.72%)

Interpretation:

- Business/Economics FYACs do not show stronger evidence of timely major declaration. Though, the Sciences do.
- Mixed, Liberal Arts do seem to support longer major contemplation. HP and Honors, however, do not.

Discussion - FYAC Curricular Implications & Next Steps

1. FYAC remains an effective first-year student experience for academic orientation, planning, and success, + community-building.
2. Support cohort-based FYAC activities to bolster community-building and checkpoint completion. Continue overlapping schedules.
3. How might the program better balance the goals of academic and career/professional development with community-building in FYACs across the College?
 - Peer Mentor program
 - More major/minor program exposure
 - College-wide consistency in career/professional development programming
 - Increase foundations of cohort bonding beyond major alignment

Discussion – Advising Implications & Next Steps

1. When and what kind of early intervention strategies might support retention efforts based upon the timing of student alerts and signs of disengagement?
 - Attendance check in week 4, but keep midterm alerts.
 - Exit/follow-up interviews with students not retained for more qualitative indications.
 - Proactive financial aid support and planning.
2. Consider pre-semester introductions between students and advisor to proactively remove barriers to success and retention.
 - Track milestones across the first year, and continue ticketed follow up of unresolved cases.
3. Conduct exit interviews with students who have withdrawn from the College.