

To Faculty Senate

The Academic Advising & Support Office has developed a new probation program initiative, outlined below. We are seeking your endorsement for this new program and a recommendation to the provost to approve its immediate implementation. Features of the new, proactive model include: 1) Communicating more frequently and directly with students on probation; 2) Placing a “Probation” hold on each student’s account (which would prevent course registration) until the student completes Probation program requirements; 3) Requiring one mandatory meeting between each student on probation and an AASO adviser; 4) Encouraging additional, follow-up meetings as suggested by the AASO adviser and/or requested by the student.

Academic Advising & Support Office Probation Program Proposal

Proposal & Rationale

Building off the recent programming and staff changes, which brought the Bridges program and new personnel to the Academic Advising & Support Office (AASO) during the 2015-2016 academic year and in an effort to reaffirm our role in the college’s student retention efforts, the AASO staff proposes to pilot a proactive advising and support model for all students on academic probation during the 2016-2017 academic year.

The impetus for this proposal arose from a week of professional development at this year’s National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) regional conference and a subsequent evaluation of related programs here at SUNY Potsdam. Our attention was first drawn to probation interventions after attending a presentation by the Academic Services Center within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Connecticut (UConn). Coincidentally, their policies regarding academic probation and dismissal mirror those of SUNY Potsdam. And, much like SUNY Potsdam, UConn had previously used their probation system merely as a label to warn students of their floundering academic standing. As a result of this passive intervention, UConn’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was losing roughly 40% of its probationary students to academic dismissal after one semester. This realization led UConn’s Academic Services Center to embark on a five-year exploration of proactive interventions for their probationary students, which resulted in stemming the loss at just over 25%, currently.

Inspired by this story of success, we began to investigate the effectiveness of our own probation system at SUNY Potsdam. An analysis of academic standards for each full term (fall and spring) over the last fifteen years shows that SUNY Potsdam dismisses an average of 49% of its probationary students each semester. Given the sizeable proportion of students that are dismissed following probation, the AASO would like to initiate a broader, more proactive program to be modeled after the successful interventions implemented at UConn, with outreach to every student on academic probation before they ever face dismissal.

We believe that successful implementation of this proactive probation model at SUNY Potsdam will yield results comparable to those experienced at UCONN (outlined above). UCONN was able to increase their retention of probationary students by 15%. At SUNY Potsdam, a similar result would increase our retention of probationary students from approximately 50% up to 65%, keeping an additional 30 students per semester on our campus and moving them toward greater academic success.

Program Features

- Communicate directly with all students on probation to inform them of their academic standing and the requirements of the probation program.
- Strongly encourage all students on probation to limit their coursework to 14 or fewer credit hours.
- Place a “Probation” hold on each student’s account, which would prevent course registration, following the Add/Drop period. This hold would serve as motivation for the student to complete the requirements of the probation program prior to registration for the next semester.
- Require a mandatory, individual meeting between each student and an AASO adviser. This meeting would serve to provide students with additional information and to develop plans for academic recovery. Students would also be referred to additional tools and resources from across campus.
- Allow for additional, follow-up meetings as suggested by the AASO adviser and/or requested by the student. This format would serve to triage the pool of students on probation and allow highly motivated students to self-select for additional resources.

Communication & Implementation Strategy

- Prior to Probation Semester
 - Academic Standards email informing all students of the need to check their academic status in BearPAWs
 - Follow-up email from AASO reminding all probationary students of their academic status and the requirements of probation
- During Probation Semester
 - End of Week 2 - Email from AASO adviser to assigned probationary students who have not yet scheduled their mandatory meeting
 - End of Week 6 (Early Alerts) - Reminder email from assigned AASO adviser to probationary students who have not completed mandatory meeting
 - End of Week 9 – Final reminder email from assigned AASO adviser to probationary students who have not completed mandatory meeting with information about avoiding dismissal and the impact of summer/winterim classes.
- Mandatory Meeting
 - Students must call Patty Gilmer (administrative assistant) at least two days in advance to schedule appointment
 - Student completes probation worksheet when they arrive
 - Student and AASO adviser review the following:

- Probation and dismissal policies and procedures
- GPA requirements/calculations
- Academic difficulties and corresponding resources
- SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goal setting
- Referrals are made and follow-up appointments are scheduled
- Student and AASO adviser each sign and retain copy of probation worksheet

Should a student face academic dismissal at the conclusion of the Probation Semester, they will still receive direct notification of their academic standing in writing and via email, with instructions on how to appeal their dismissal. However, students who appeal an academic dismissal must now state their involvement in the probation program and how they progressed in their SMART goals. The AASO will provide copies of the probation worksheets to Academic Standards Committee for appeal review. Students who successfully appeal their dismissal will, again, be placed on academic probation and participate in the mandatory program for another semester.

Program Needs

The AASO currently operates with three full-time professional staff, one half-time temporary professional (specifically hired to assist with the growing Bridges population), a quarter-time graduate student assistant, and a shared administrative assistant. Successful implementation of these new programs will require very little in the way of funding or new personnel. We have already received confirmation that our request to the Center for Graduate Studies for an increased allocation for our graduate assistant position has been approved, which will now allow for half-time availability for that position. In addition, we have confirmed the availability of another Student Success Center staff member who would be willing to take on a portion of the probation program caseload. A sample caseload structure is found below:

Director, AASO (full-time professional)

- Probationary Students – 35% of total (~70 students)
- Bridges Students – 15% of total (~20 students)
- Transfer Advising – 45% of total
- Coordinate Summer Orientation Advising
- Oversee Group Tutoring

Academic Adviser (full-time professional)

- Probationary Students – 35% of total (~70 students)
- Bridges Students – 15% of total (~20 students)
- Transfer Advising – 45% of total
- Readmit Advising – 100% of total

Bridges Programming Coordinator (full-time professional)

- Probationary Students – 10% of total (~20 current and former Bridges students)

- Bridges Students – 50% of total (~70 students)
- Transfer Advising – 5% of total
- Coordinate Bridges Programming

Bridges Adviser (half-time professional)

- Bridges Students – 20% of total (~40 students)
- Transfer Advising – 5% of total

Probation Assistant (shared SSC professional)

- Probationary Students – 20% of total (~40 students)

Graduate Assistant (half-time graduate student)

- Coordinate Group Tutoring program
- Research and develop new and/or complimentary tutoring models
- Provide academic skills support

Administrative Assistant (shared support staff)

- Assist with scheduling, communication, and reporting for all programs