Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report
Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Report represents the work that the institution has undertaken to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

(signature)   3/18/2024

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor   **Date**

Aondover Tarhule, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Illinois State University

Name of Institution

Normal, IL

City and State

The institution uses the template below to complete its Quality Initiative Report. The institution may include a report it has prepared for other purposes if it addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the narrative in the template. This template may be used both for reports on initiatives that have been completed and for initiatives that will continue and for which this report serves as a milestone of accomplishments thus far. The complete report should be no more than 6,000 words.

The report must be submitted by June 1 of Year 9.

Submit the report as a PDF file at hlcommision.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiatives" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. The file name of the report should follow this format: QIReport[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Date:

Contact Person for Report:

Contact Person's Email Address:

Report Categories

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a one-page executive summary that describes the Quality Initiative, summarizes what was accomplished and explains any changes made to the initiative over the time period.

Illinois State University proposed developing and operationalizing a comprehensive approach to student success as its Quality Initiative (QI). The goals and the assessment of those goals in the Quality Initiative align three purposes including:

- improve retention and graduation rates to meet goals outlined in Illinois State University's strategic plan,
- develop integrated and cohesive student success efforts regardless of division, and
- determine appropriate and necessary resources for implementation.

Given the purposes of the quality initiative, six goals were used to guide the work:

- **Goal#1** - Develop a campus-wide definition of student success (SS) that extends beyond the traditional metrics of retention and graduation.

- **Goal#2** - Develop a campus-wide student success framework that employs collaborative, coordinated, and integrated processes and involvement.

- **Goal #3** - Expand data informed decision-making related to student success.

- **Goal #4** - Establish a clear connection between faculty success and student success.

- **Goal #5** - Analyze university practices for their impact on student success with an emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Identify and eliminate inequitable institutional barriers, practices, and policies to student success and develop paths towards multidimensional inclusiveness.

- **Goal #6** - Secure a financial structure dedicated to student success and the identified initiatives.

Most significant accomplishments [and relationship to goals]:

- The Student Success Community of Practice (SSCoP) was established to serve as the guide for student success across campus, share best practices, collaborate across units, and drive university level student success planning. [Goals 2 & 5]

- A university-wide Think Tank was held in May 2023 that laid the foundation for a student success strategic plan. [Goal 5]

- 20 staff members completed a 2-semester long training opportunity through the AIR's Data Literacy Institute. The focus was using data to address student success. [Goal 3]

- The Program review self-study was changed to encourage reflection through a student success lens. [Goals 3, 4 & 5]

- The Student Success dashboard was completed featuring 41 informational items for academic advisors and student success staff to use when engaging with students. [Goals 1 & 3]

- Advising caseloads were reviewed and 5 advisors were hired to reduce caseloads to about 325 students each. [Goals 3 & 6]

- The AVP for Student Success line was repurposed to be the Director of Advising Advocacy, Innovation, and Technology. The main function of this staff member is to work on time to degree issues and best practices in advising. [Goal 5]

- The Provost Innovation and Enhancement (PIE) grants were established to fund (approximately $200,000 annually; $375,000 in FY24) student success, enrollment management, and curriculum redesign initiatives. [Goal 6]

- A draft commitment and vision of student success was developed. It has been vetted with the campus community but is not yet finalized. A graphic was created to demonstrate the interconnections between faculty, staff, and student success. [Goals 1 & 2]
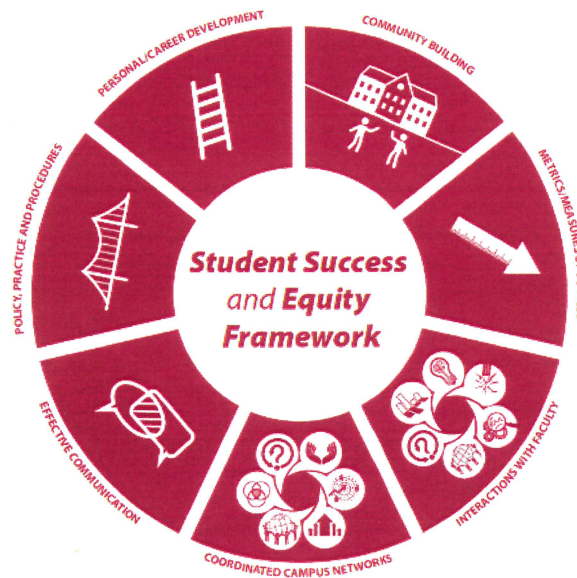
Scope and Impact of the Initiative

2. Explain in more detail what was accomplished in the Quality Initiative in relation to its purposes and goals. (If applicable, explain the initiative's hypotheses and findings.)

Illinois State University had been experiencing declining retention and graduation rates for several years. Since retention directly impacts graduation rates, it was clear work in this area was needed. This led to selecting student success as our quality initiative. In January 2020 we began a search for an Assistant Vice President for Student Success (AVPSS). Due to COVID, we hired a two-year interim AVPSS to provide leadership to the campus in this area. As with any multi-year project, there were successes, failures, and changes to the original intent. Below is a timeline of efforts and the goal(s) each most directly achieves.

- Spring 2021

- A draft definition of student success was developed as part of an Academic Affairs strategic planning work group. *[Goal #1]*

- The AVPSS was responsible for convening the student success staff across campus on a regular basis to keep them updated on the QI progress and student success efforts across campus. This group met monthly. *[Goal #2]*

- Fall Semester 2021:

  - Feedback on the definition of SS and metrics/measures of student success was garnered from Student Affairs Leadership Council, Provost Senior Staff, Provost's Undergraduate Student Advisory Council, strategic plan coordinating team, and select faculty in School of Music. *[Goal #1; Goal #2]*

  - Based on feedback from many stakeholders, a decision made to change title to reflect the interrelationship between student success, faculty/staff success, and equity. The new title is "Framework for Student Success and Equity". *[Goal #1; Goal #2; Goal #4; Goal #5]*

  - An Academic Affairs Professional development session was held with Deans, Chairs/Directors, Associate/Assistant chairs and deans, and other faculty leaders to discuss the QI, the draft Framework for Student Success and Equity, and metrics/measures of student success. *[Goal #1; Goal #2]*

  - The State of Illinois issued $2 million in COVID grant funding (GEER: Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund) to Illinois State University for student success with a focus on underrepresented students. Funds were used for such things as purchasing e-textbooks and access codes for use through the library, support of identity-based registered student organizations, purchase of loaner laptops for Pell eligible students, paid internships for students in need, micro-grants for students with unexpected financial needs, and the First-Generation Celebration, among others. *[Goal #6]*

- Spring Semester 2022:

  - Due to the Omicron upsurge of COVID-19, smaller focus groups were conducted to gather input on the draft Framework for Student Success rather than open forums. Funding for a consultant to conduct focus groups was possible through a grant from APLU for the Intermediaries for Scale/Institutional Transformation Assessment for Student Success and Equity. *[Goal #1; Goal #2; Goal #4]*

  - In January, in preparation for annual reports, data were sent to schools/department on some of the metrics they told us were indicators of student success for their units. The Annual Report format was adjusted slightly to specifically target student success. *[Goal #3]*

  - A graphic designer created a visual for the Framework. *[Goal #2]*

  - Based on feedback from many of the groups listed above, we changed the terminology from "Framework" of Student Success to "Commitment and Vision" for Student Success and Equity. *[Goal #1; Goal #2]*

    - *Student Success at Illinois State is preparing students for success in their current and future academic, personal, civic, and professional lives and instilling ISU's core values of being a Redbird. We are committed to an equitable, inclusive, accessible, and socially just learning community for all students and honor the cultural capital that*

students bring. Student success, although unique to every individual, is a holistic process that consists of transformative experiences which facilitate personal and professional growth both in and outside the classroom.

- o We revised the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) mandated program review self-study outline to encourage reflection through student success lens. *[Goal #3; Goal #4; Goal#5]*

- o The Office of Planning, Research and Policy Analysis (PRPA) revised both the content and delivery of the Academic Program Profiles provided to units annually. The new data dashboards were designed to better support units by providing broader access to student success data. *[Goal #3]*

- o A student success dashboard was created, and advisors were trained to use it to enhance intrusive advising efforts. The 41 variables available on the dashboard include such things as membership in registered student groups, what registration blocks exist for the student, persistence prediction, advising appointments made/missed, last learning management system login, and campus recreation center and career center activity, among others. *[Goal #1; Goal #3]*

- Summer 2022

  - o A presentation in New Administrators Orientation focused on the Commitment and Vision of Student Success and Equity and how to develop student success goals using their data. *[Goal #1; Goal #2; Goal #3]*

  - o A review of advising caseloads was completed. The data showed there were advisors with too heavy of an advising load, but not heavy enough for a full-time advisor to be hired. As a result, 5 SPAN (**S**trategic **P**artnerships in **A**dvising **N**eeds @ Illinois State) advising positions were created. The 5 advisors had a 25% caseload in University College (unit focused on the first-year experience) and a 75% case load in the academic department. *[Goal #3; Goal #6]*

- Fall 2022

  - o An additional $730,000 in GEER grant money was allocated by IBHE to use for student success with a focus on mental health and underrepresented students. The grant funded such things as access codes and textbooks through Milner library saving students over $2 million each semester; supporting identity based registered student organizations; programming for SOAR Scholars, Hope Chicago students, and other community-based organizations; intensive PTSD training for staff in Student Counseling Service; and training for culturally responsive teaching for our first-year seminar. *[Goal #6]*

  - o A new position was created in the Director of Advising Advocacy, Innovation, and Technology. The main purpose of this position is to review time to degree issues that impact students and find solutions. This person will also work directly with advisors to enhance training and work efficiencies. *[Goal #5]*

  - o With the departure of the AVPSS, the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education took over the responsibility of convening the student success staff from across campus. Work was done to determine if the group should still exist, what their purpose was, who should lead the group, and what they wanted to accomplish. The group re-focused its

purpose and became the Student Success Community of Practice (SSCoP). Monthly meetings are held to share best practices, initiatives, and ideas for collaboration. The SSCoP is seen as the student success leaders on campus. *[Goal #2, Goal #5]*

- o To meet the resource needs in student success, enrollment management, and curriculum redesign, the Provost initiated Provost Innovation and Enhancement (PIE) grants, allocating a minimum of $200,000 annually for initiatives in these areas. Funded projects include enhanced tutoring, math course redesign, innovative classrooms, a financial literacy course, etc. Applicants were urged to collaborate with student success staff when applying for PIE grants to align with the student success vision. *[Goal #5]*

- o A cohort of 20 individuals from across the institution, including faculty, advisors, administrators, and other staff directly involved with student success engaged in a 2-semester long Data Literacy Institute (DLI) where participants learned to collect, analyze, interpret, communicate, and use data related to solve problems. This program was taught by the Association of Institutional Research (AIR) instructors. A team-based approach was used to apply what was learned through a group activity designed to meet a current institutional need. *[Goal #3]*. The three DLI projects included:

  - Team #1: **Impact assessment of student support services** including such things as evaluating resources dedicated to student success initiatives, program participation outcomes, return on resource investment.
  - Team #2: **Equitable retention and graduation outcomes** including such things as time to degree, student debt, course repeats, gateway course success.
  - Team #3: **Student engagement impacts** including such things as NSSE survey data, Bird Tracks, and early grade alert.

- o The Office of the Provost further revised departmental annual reporting to encourage units to reflect on their accomplishments and productivity through the lenses of Student Success and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. *[Goal #3]*.

- Spring 2023

  - o As part of the Intermediaries for Scale/Institutional Transformation Assessment project through an APLU grant, 20 advisors engaged in the Advising Success Network where they went through training modules focused on equity and student success. White papers summarized outcomes including review of policies with an equity lens, structure of advising, and improvements to the student experience. This experience has sparked discussions about the need for an advising strategic plan, which has not been done in 15+ years. *[Goal #4; Goal #5]*
  - o May 17, 2023: The Student Success Think Tank was held. This day long retreat brought together 70 student success thought leaders from across campus to tackle topics such as barriers to student success, barriers to faculty/staff success as they relate to students, current status of graduation and retention rates, and strategies to develop to improve student success. The results included 600+ pieces of data that will be transformed into a student success work plan. *[Goal #5]*

- Summer 2023:
  - o CollabLab was held. This half day retreat was attended by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs senior leadership staff and focused on student success and wellbeing. The primary

outcome was the identification of areas in which collaboration could occur between the two divisions. *[Goal #2; Goal #5]*

- o Over the past several years, tutoring has become more decentralized, including tutor training. Departments offering tutoring both within and outside of the Julia N. Visor Academic Center discussed centralizing training, improving services, and creating a unified information site for students. Ongoing work is being done to further improve tutoring. *[Goal #5]*

- o A draft dashboard was developed that shows course DFW rates by variables such as gender, race, Pell eligibility, and first gen status. The dashboard will be used mostly by Deans and Chairs/School Directors *[Goal #3]*

- o A grant proposal was submitted to APLU to fund the start up for a DLI at ISU, building upon the program recently completed by faculty and staff in Fall 2022. It is hoped that having more people who are highly skilled at data use and analysis will improve data informed decision making. *[Goal #3]*

- Fall 2023

  - o Analysis of the Think Tank data (collected Spring 2023) and development of a campus wide strategic plan for student success began. The strategic plan has 10 themes including: curriculum, data and technology, career focus, resources, policies and process, finances, faculty/staff issues, programming, collaboration and communication, and student interaction and expectations. [Goal #5]

  - o With the hiring of the Director of Advising Advocacy, Innovation, and Technology several projects have begun focusing on time to degree, especially focusing on equity gaps. Sample projects include an analysis of the petitions submitted for graduation exceptions, improving the functionality of Campus Solutions from the student perspective, and building a monthly data report on departmental curriculum and other barriers to student completion. [Goal #5]

3. Evaluate the impact of the initiative, including any changes in processes, policies, technology, curricula, programs, student learning and success that are now in place in consequence of the initiative.

The impact of the Quality Initiative has been significant. From the timeline presented, efforts have been focused on better using data to make decisions, increased funding for student success efforts, and providing a structure for collaboration that reaches beyond academic Affairs. The most significant impacts are:

- The Think Tank has the potential to have the most significant impact on student success. It allowed us to generate a student success plan. Some of the ideas will be easy to implement while others will be monumental tasks. These ideas emerged from 10 themes such as courses and curriculum, collaboration opportunities, data and technology needs, and student-centered policies and processes. Much discussion is still needed to determine priorities and timelines for the next five years. Once that is complete, we need to form work groups to accomplish these tasks.

- More staff are being trained to better use data, especially student success-related data. We are seeing a shift in our culture that requires we highly value data informed decision making and efforts such as the DLI, data dashboards, and student success dashboards have moved us closer to the

President's vision for how best to use data. Furthermore, we are also working to provide greater access to data and knowledge of how to use it. With any evaluation of impact, reflection on growth is needed. A weakness of ISU is the limited access to disaggregated data. It is difficult to get a clear picture of issues unless we can see data disaggregated. Work is being done in this area.

- Many conversations have been had with units across campus about what started as a definition of student success and later became a commitment to and vision for student success. These conversations helped units learn how others see student success and how we can collaborate to eliminate duplication of services. The SSCoP will use this vision as planning for student success moves forward. Moving forward, work is still needed to refine the vision and infuse it across campus.

- Professional development opportunities have grown for faculty and staff that integrate equity and student success with good pedagogy or service delivery. More faculty are interested in the value of student success and do not view it as a reduction in rigor. We see this through interest in events like the Think Tank; annual Culturally Responsive Campus Community Conference; college student success centers established; and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committees being formed across campus.

- Improvements in academic advising continue to occur. Reducing caseloads (seeking to average 325 per advisor), providing data and professional development focused on student well-being, and supporting our intrusive advising model have produced positive results. The university retention rate is once again above 80%. However, equity gaps still exist and remain a priority focus.

- Like most other universities, student mental health is a challenge at ISU. Over the past two years Student Affairs restructured several of their units and rebranded them as [Redbird Well](). This unit has all the mental health resources in one place so faculty staff, and students can get to the information they need quickly. Redbird Well is also helping faculty understand that there are many resources for students in addition to Student Counseling Services. Redbird Well will continue to grow over the next several semesters. This is a model that should be incorporated with other student focused resources. Rather than group resources by unit providing them, they should be grouped by how students search for them.

4. Explain any tools, data or other information that resulted from the work of the initiative.

The three main data tools/professional development that resulted from the QI ate the Data Literacy Institute, Student Success Dashboard, and the Academic Profiles.

1. The DLI, delivered by AIR, met 18 times, and completed a final project. Now that the project is complete, the participants are helping create a DLI program that ISU could deliver on its own using the seed funding and materials AIR developed for this purpose. It is hoped that more faculty and staff will take advantage of the professional development opportunity to become more data driven in their own decision making and better interpret and analyze the data for student success purposes.

2. The student success dashboard pulls data from several different sources that would not ordinarily be available to advisors and other student wellbeing focused staff. The dashboard provides a snapshot of individual student activity. It also builds on existing predictive analytics tools to guide advisors in outreach efforts, indicates students who could benefit from

enrollment in Success 101 workshops and/or IDS 128: Thriving in College, Career, and Beyond, and who should be connected to a Peer Success Coach. In addition to academic advisors, case workers within Student Affairs use these data when they have a student referred to them. It helps build a more complete picture of the activities of the student.

3. The Office of Planning, Research and Policy Analysis (PRPA) annually provides academic departments with data regarding their programs. Recently these annual static reports have been transitioned into PowerBI dashboards which have provided units greater access to a wider range of metrics, many of which are related to the success of students in their programs. Data available through these dashboards include reports of program enrollment, retention reports (expanded to include data beyond retention in the first year), time-to-degree, graduation rate, class sizes, and internal transfer data. These data are commonly used by departments to inform their annual reporting and 8-year program reviews.

5. Describe the biggest challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing the initiative.

There were several challenges during the QI process including selecting metrics to measure student success, the growth of student success staff within colleges, and the role of the Assistant Vice President for Student Success position.

Traditionally student success at ISU has been measured by using retention and graduation rates. This is particularly true within Academic Affairs. During the work of the QI, efforts were made to broaden that scope. The HLC document titled *Defining Student Success Data: Recommendations for Changing the Conversation* was shared and repeatedly referenced to change the retention/graduation narrative. As Student Affairs and Academic Affairs build their collaborative efforts, there is increased discussion of these broader metrics, which should result in a shift over time. However, while being a data driven institution is good, it pushes us to measure success with very quantifiable metrics – retention and graduation in particular. In May 2021 students were asked how they defined student success and they responded with "reaching my individual goals", "effectively managing my time", and "happiness", none of which we measure with data. This mixed methods study was published by ISU researchers in the College Student Journal in 2023 (Arellanes, Jordan; Noël-Elkins, Amelia; Friberg, Jennifer).

As previously mentioned, in March of 2020 an Interim Assistant Vice President for Student Success (AVPSS) was hired from within the University after an external search was halted due to COVID. This was a brand-new position and one that was created to manage student success from a high level within Academic Affairs. In the beginning the position focused on helping our students through the transition to online, working with colleges to provide the necessary resources, and managing the grant money that was coming from the state to support students in a time of crisis (e.g. GEER grant). The AVPSS also was responsible for bringing together staff who worked with student success to learn from each other. The scope of this position evolved over time due to colleges adding their own student success staff. The focus shifted from central control at the Provost staff level to collaboration among student success staff within the colleges. When the position was vacated in fall 2022 it was not refilled as originally designed. It was restructured to be the Director of Advising Advocacy, Innovation, and Technology. This position still focuses on student success, but at a different level. It allows for an in-depth examination of student success and understanding the student experience, curriculum, and the barriers within the student information system. This change was not what we anticipated when we began the QI, but it will prove to

be beneficial. Furthermore, the change in the AVPSS line, also led to the reconfiguring of the student success college staff into the Student Success Community of Practice. This group is managed by the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education but has organic leadership from within the group. This group was responsible for the Think Tank and the outcomes that event will eventually produce.

Commitment to and Engagement in the Quality Initiative

6. Describe the individuals and groups involved at stages throughout the initiative and their perceptions of its worth and impact.

The QI was initially planned with the AVPSS as the lead, with significant administrative support from the Associate Provost, Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education, and the Assistant Vice President for Academic Planning. The AVPSS worked diligently with groups such as the Data Literacy Institute, campus wide stakeholders, the SSCoP, student groups, Student Affairs, and the Office of Technology Solutions, among others. Since this was a university wide QI, it was important to involve all 4 divisions in implementing student success strategies.

The most significant impacts felt by these groups includes:

- ISU is becoming more data driven, especially within student success.

- Student success efforts are growing within the colleges and they are working together, learning from each other, and sharing resources.

- Enhanced collaborations between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

- The QI has laid the foundations for moving forward with student success.

7. Describe the most important points learned by those involved in the initiative.

Many things were accomplished and we are just beginning to see some of the impacts. A couple of things stand out as lessons learned. They include:

- A vision and commitment for student success are needed so that all units are working towards the same end goal. ISU is exceptionally decentralized in many aspects and student success is no exception. However, the work of the Student Success Community of Practice has been impactful and should continue to grow.

- We need to measure student success far beyond simply retention and graduation rates. This will be challenging to do but is necessary. As ISU becomes even more data driven, so will the challenge to look beyond retention and graduation rates.

- Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have worked on student success issues in silos. The work in this area over the past couple of years has reiterated the need for the two units to work together and eliminate duplication of services. We all want students to be successful and have started to work together in more intentional and collaborative ways.

- There are many technological, process, and policy barriers to student success that faculty and staff never realized existed. This realization led to hiring the Director of Advising Advocacy, Innovation, and Technology. Over the next year, we need to further clarify what this role will do and then set additional priorities.

Resource Provision

The human resources needed to support the initiative are significant. Several AVP level staff were involved and guided the QI. Many stakeholders provided feedback, and many faculty and staff engaged in professional development to better help their students inside and outside the classroom.

Financially, more resources were dedicated to student success. However, a centralized permanent budget was not established. Instead, PIE grants were created. This has allowed us to pilot different ideas to see what works. The $3 million in GEER grant money also helped, but this funding ended September 30, 2023. Discussions will be needed to understand the impact of the loss and how to continue to support the most impactful programs.

Technological resources have come in the form of data dashboards. The Offices of Planning, Research and Policy Analysis; Enterprise Data Analytics; and University Assessment Services have been leveraging PowerBI dashboards to provided broader access to and availability of student success related data. Examples include the Academic Program Profile dashboards, Student Engagement Survey dashboards (BSSE and NSSE), and the Student Success dashboards used by program advisors.

Plans for the Future (or Future Milestones of a Continuing Initiative)

- Think Tank implementation: the SSCoP is currently analyzing the Think Tank data. They are coding data, establishing overarching goals, and identifying specific strategies to achieve those goals. With these strategies we will develop a timeline and priority list. The SSCoP is leading this effort, but they will ask for faculty and staff to join work groups to implement strategies. The themes from the Think Tank include: Course and curriculum, faculty/staff issues, collaboration and communication of resources, resources, financial issues, career-focus, data and technology needs, policies and process (student-centered), programming, and student interaction and expectations.

- DFW dashboard: The DFW dashboard provides the DFW rates of courses by variables such as Pell eligibility, race, gender, and other demographics. It is hoped that these data will show courses in which a disproportionately high number of students in certain categories are receiving a D, F or withdrawing. Work is still being done with ISU's General Counsel to approve access to this dashboard to select individuals. It is hoped that the data will result in course design for student success.

Illinois State University is willing to share all practices and artifacts. The most desired are most likely the Student Success dashboard, how we are scaling the Data Literacy Institute, the Student Success Community of Practice, and the Think Tank process and results.

Audience: Institutions
Form
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