

UNIVERSITY INNOVATION ALLIANCE

Proactive Advising: A Playbook for Higher Education Innovators



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SUCCESS
AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

College advising is a critical factor in advancing student success.¹ While some students may be able to navigate their path to graduation with limited guidance from the institution, many more will require help understanding university processes and degree requirements. This is especially true of students from low-income backgrounds and students who are the first in their families to attend college (first-generation students). These students may be unfamiliar with the college experience and have limited informal resources – such as family and friends who have attended college – to draw upon. They will depend on academic advisors, faculty members, and other knowledgeable university personnel to help direct them toward their graduation goal.

Universities have sought to leverage academic advising to help more students successfully navigate the path to graduation.² One recent effort has focused on shifting advising from its traditionally reactive role – in which advisors respond to problems as they arise – to a more proactive role, with advisors using longitudinal data to intervene early when students may be having trouble.³ This proactive approach can help students avoid excess credit hours, remain enrolled at the institution, and successfully navigate other obstacles to graduation. By keeping students on track toward graduation, the institution also benefits from increased revenue and the potential long-term engagement of an alum.

About the project

In 2016, the University Innovation Alliance (UIA) undertook the Monitoring Advising Analytics to Promote Success (MAAPS) project, which was designed to scale proactive, predictive analytics-enabled advising for first-generation and Pell-eligible students through a four-year randomized control trial (RCT) study of 10,000 students across 11 campuses. The grant was funded by the federal First in the World program and led by Principal Investigator Dr. Tim Renick of Georgia State University. Our objective was to study how guided, proactive advising relying on degree maps and systematic use of predictive data would affect GPA, retention, and graduation rates for low-income and first-generation students.

The MAAPS project scaled a proactive advising approach originally adopted at Georgia State University in 2012. Georgia State's **GPS Advising** program tracks 800 different risk factors that indicate a student may be going off course. Since its inception, early warning indicators have prompted more than 1.2 million one-on-one meetings between students and advisors. Georgia State's four-year graduation rates have improved by seven percentage points, and students are graduating more quickly, saving more than \$15 million in tuition costs annually.

The UIA scaled these methods across 11 founding member campuses (Arizona State, Georgia State, Iowa State, Michigan State, Ohio State, Oregon State, Purdue, University of California Riverside, University of Central Florida, University of Kansas, University of Texas at Austin). While students in both the control group and the treatment group received the standard business-as-usual advisement practiced on their campuses, the treatment group also received wrap-around supports including:

- Intensive, proactive advisement to help students navigate key academic choices and to follow individualized academic maps;
- Early and real-time alerts prompted in part by a system of analytics-based tracking when students go off track; and
- Timely, targeted advising interventions to get students back on the appropriate academic path.

“What we wanted to do is not only understand the impacts on outcomes such as GPA retention and graduation rates. We also wanted to understand the ingredients that contribute to those outcomes and what can be learned from the implementation of a large-scale project like this.”

— Dr. Tim Renick, Georgia State University

¹Nutt, C. L. (2003). **Academic advising and student retention and persistence**. NACADA.

²Bailey, A., Vaduganathan, N., Henry, T., Laverdiere, R., & Jacobson, M. (2019). **Turning more tassels: How colleges and universities are improving student and institutional performance with better advising**. BCG & NASPA.

³Varney, J. (2012, September). **Proactive (Intrusive) Advising!** Academic Advising Today, 35(3).

All students in the MAAPS treatment group were assigned to dedicated MAAPS advisors, who were hired and trained to deliver the MAAPS advising intervention at their campus. The intervention concluded in 2020, and evaluators are continuing to collect data about grades, retention rates, graduation rates and other success outcomes, with final results available in 2023.

About this playbook

In addition to generating data on student outcomes, the MAAPS project also yielded lessons about adopting a specific model of advising developed at one institution in 10 different contexts. The project prompted participating campuses to think more deeply and critically about organizational structure, data, and culture. The purpose of this playbook is to share what we learned and provide recommendations and considerations for universities thinking of adopting proactive advising.

We found that addressing these five components helped participating UIA campuses make the most of proactive advising:

1. Assessing the university's organizational structure and advising culture.
2. Understanding and using degree plans and academic maps effectively.
3. Leveraging strong, data-driven tools to help advisors guide students.
4. Ensuring dedicated advisor capacity and training to deliver targeted support.
5. Securing ongoing leadership support and investment.

In this playbook, we will discuss these findings and share considerations for how to navigate adoption of proactive advising in your context.



“The project helped us move toward a system in which advisors receive common training, are held to common expectations, and are united by a common university-wide mission.”

— Dr. Ryan Goodwin, University of Central Florida

The way your institution is currently organized to deliver academic advising will affect how you move forward with proactive advising. One of two broad structures for academic advising exists on most campuses: centralized or decentralized.

- In a **centralized advising structure**, academic advising operates in a coordinated fashion across the university from a central point, crossing departmental boundaries and administrative units.
- In a **decentralized advising structure**, academic advising units are housed within each college or department. Advisors in one department or college may be highly knowledgeable about the programs and degrees offered within their unit but may lack deep knowledge of degree paths outside their area(s). In the decentralized model, training and day-to-day operations typically are not highly coordinated across administrative units, such as colleges.

Determining whether proactive advisors will be primary, supplemental, or coordinated advisors

Georgia State was unique among MAAPS institutions in delivering advising from a centralized advisement unit. As with Georgia State's existing GPS Advising platform, MAAPS advisors were housed in a centralized office and served as their students' primary advisors. They didn't have to coordinate with other advisors in academic units or other advising centers across campus to access their students or their students' data.

MAAPS involved a significant learning curve for institutions with decentralized advising structures. At these institutions, MAAPS advisers were considered “supplemental” advisors (working to support students' primary advisors, rather than serving as primary advisors to MAAPS students) or “coordinated” advisors (working in partnership with other campus units to provide services).

Decentralized campuses found that MAAPS advisors sometimes lacked the authority to provide services and help students navigate policy changes, such as declaring a new major. Where MAAPS advisors were considered supplemental or coordinated, institutions had to ensure that advising units could collaborate and align how they supported students, though communication and coordination were challenging.

Supplemental advisors at decentralized campuses worked to build relationships and embed themselves as much as possible within other advising units across campus. In addition to proactive engagement with students, project

advisors needed to reach out proactively to advising staff across campus and ensure their efforts were aligned. To do so, they attended recurring departmental advising meetings and cultivated individual relationships with colleagues.

Advisors shared that it was important to convey to colleagues throughout the institution that their efforts were intended to support and enhance existing services, so that other advisors didn't feel defensive and threatened. Institutions also learned that it was important for students whose campuses used the supplemental project model to understand the distinction between their primary advisors and the MAAPS advisors, so they knew where to go for different types of support.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Students at Ohio State appreciated that MAAPS specialists initiated contact at key points in the semester to check-in, share important reminders, and invite students to visit their office for a consultation. Ohio State found that frequent proactive outreach led to a more personable and accessible advising experience than requiring students to initiate contacts.

Finding the advising gaps

A benefit of convening disparate campus advising services was that it prompted some institutions to uncover disparities and differences in advising across campus and to identify opportunities to improve students' experience with advising.

Arizona State University

Arizona State identified a significant gap in supporting students after their transition from the first year to their second year; this led to redesigning supports for undeclared students and students in transition.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Iowa State found that students who actively engaged with their MAAPS advisor in person had significantly higher retention rates.

Starting with a smaller cohort

One way to address the challenges associated with a decentralized advising structure is to identify an underserved population – such as first-generation or low-income students – and focus proactive support on that group. These students can have a dedicated advisor who follows them consistently throughout their academic careers. This approach provides targeted support to students most likely to benefit and works around organizational structures by creating a small space in which services are centralized around the student.



Advisors at Arizona State and the University of Central Florida indicated that students gravitated toward MAAPS advisors because they offered a consistent face and relationship throughout their time on campus. Having access to a “dedicated person” that didn’t change if they changed majors or shifted schools was helpful. With lower caseloads, MAAPS advisors also had extra time to build relationships with students and dig deeper into thorny issues.



Likewise, the University of Kansas found that MAAPS students benefited from a single point of contact, which made transitions and major changes less confusing for students.

Campuses may also consider deploying one or two proactive advisors at each advising center across campus, providing targeted support to specific populations.

Clarifying advisors’ contributions to student success

In addition to factoring in whether academic advising is currently centralized or decentralized, institutions should recognize that adopting a proactive advising approach may require a cultural shift around expectations for advisors.

While focusing on a specific graduation goal may require a shift in advising culture, student satisfaction and graduation success are not mutually exclusive. In fact, overall, MAAPS students reported higher satisfaction with their advising experiences and a stronger relationship with their advisors.



The University of Texas at Austin had to adjust its culture by clarifying that the success metric for advising wasn’t purely about whether students loved their advising appointment or whether students explored who they were – both of which are incorporated into standard advisor training. Advisors had to shift to thinking about four-year graduation rates as a goal and understand their vital role in meeting that goal.

Bottom line: The existing advising structure and culture at your institution will inform the most effective way to deliver proactive advising support.

- 1 If your structure is already centralized, you can incorporate proactive advising practices into your existing advisement model and expedite impact. If advising is delivered via decentralized supports across campus, proactive outreach will require more coordination and bridge-building, but it can still have a tremendous impact with intentional legwork. If you are operating in a decentralized advising environment:
 - ⌚ Consider focusing on a specific population of students, such as low-income or first-generation students, who are most likely to benefit from frequent, early intervention.
 - ⌚ Clarify how this support will work in tandem with existing support, and ensure all roles are clear to participating staff and students.
- 2 Data-driven, proactive student outreach requires a culture shift based on an assumption that advising is a strategic tool to increase graduation rates – not just to help students explore their interests.
 - ✓ Stakeholders need to understand their collective goal and everyone’s role moving toward it. Identify that goal and ensure you can connect advising (and its assessment) to the student outcomes you are trying to achieve.
 - 📊 In the MAAPS project, the goal was improving four-year graduation rates. For many campuses, this was a culture shift because the top advising metric had been student satisfaction with advising appointments, which is how many advising units are accustomed to assessing themselves.

“Implementing proactive advising with four-year degree plans and comprehensive data collection allowed us to improve the quality and consistency of advising across campus.”

— Dr. Cassandre Alvarado, The University of Texas at Austin

To help students reach the finish line, it’s important to show them the path they’ll take to get there. Students often stumble forward through the course registration process, not fully confident whether certain courses will advance them toward their degree. When students change majors, the problem can be even more acute. Which credits already earned will count toward the new major? How long will it take to earn the remaining credits required for the degree? These problems are especially burdensome for first-generation and low-income students, who may have limited access to external sources of advice and can ill afford to waste time or money on unnecessary credit hours.

Using degree maps to guide students, reveal hidden hurdles, and empower advisors

Advisors should aim to bring as much detail and clarity to the degree path as possible. While personal growth and exploration is an essential part of the college experience, students must also know specifically which classes to take to reach their primary goal of earning a degree in four years.

The proactive advising model the UIA adopted involved the use of four-year degree maps for participating students. See [this example](#) of a degree plan from UT-Austin. It is time-consuming to map every degree program, but doing so not only empowers students, it allows advisors to track whether students are registered for appropriate courses and proactively alert them to a misstep before the start of each semester. Mapping all degree programs also unearthed other challenges students were facing as they pursued their degrees and helped institutions ensure they could provide the support students would need to make efficient progress.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Michigan State identified a need to clarify four-year academic plans for programs where the curriculum made it challenging for students to graduate in four years.



Developing four-year degree maps prompted UT-Austin to uncover extensive “hidden curricula” – unwritten rules and undocumented policies or cultural norms students must navigate to complete a degree. The university also discovered a number of “toxic course combinations” that they now advise students to avoid. Building on the basic degree maps required for the MAAPS project, UT-Austin has developed its own university-wide degree maps that are consistently formatted across all colleges. University leaders also worked with state legislators to implement a new requirement that all four-year institutions create degree maps to clarify pathways for students and ensure time-to-degree expectations are realistic.

Degree maps also help advisors better understand the multitude of degree programs the university offers, empowering them to be both generalists and specialists.



At Georgia State, degree maps were particularly helpful when students changed majors or when advisors needed a tool to supplement their existing knowledge of a degree’s course requirements. Even with degree maps, large institutions with hundreds of majors cannot realistically expect every advisor to understand the detailed requirements of every program. To address this issue, Georgia State ensured that advisors were still trained with deeper specialization in certain majors and tasked to build relationships with academic departments to facilitate resolution of more complex issues.

Updating individual student's degree maps

Students progress through degree maps will evolve over time. Institutional policy changes may require maps to be adjusted, but at a very minimum each student's course selection and outcomes in those courses will require the individual student's map to be updated every semester. More significant changes are required when a student adds a minor, changes major, or makes other significant changes to their program of study.

In the MAAPS study, some advisors waited until the end of the semester to make changes to a student's map; other advisors updated maps every time a student made an individual change. As they accumulated more experience, campuses adapted these practices based on what worked best for advisors' styles and individual campus policies. Most of these map changes were more administrative and process-oriented for advisors, rather than visible to students.

Bottom line: Degree maps allow advisors to help students make a long-term plan and understand how immediate decisions affect future options and outcomes. Degree maps also serve as a reference point to guide advising conversations, with students and advisors both clear on the student's destination.

- 1 Developing degree maps takes time and significant departmental resources and coordination. Plan adequate time to work with departments across campus to develop maps – and anticipate that you'll find some landmines. Some degrees may not be possible to achieve within a four-year time frame given the way the department has designed prerequisites or scheduled its classes. Use the degree-mapping exercise not only to inform advising efforts, but also to identify necessary program and policy changes.
- 2 Once degree maps are in place, consider how frequently your institution will expect advisors to update them. Develop a template and tools that are as user-friendly and efficient as possible so advisors can maximize time with students.



“Our advisors had access to data, but sometimes it could be too much data. The challenge is to figure out what data to use for what purpose and when.”

— Alex Aljets, Oregon State University

Quality data, used consistently, systematically, and rigorously, is the backbone of a strong proactive advising program. Analyzing historical data about student performance makes it possible to predict when a current student may be going off track – for instance, by not registering for a certain class by a particular semester, registering for a wrong or unnecessary course, or not achieving an adequate grade in a foundational class to prepare the student for higher-level work in the major. Ideally, a university will have a data analytics platform in place already, or build one in anticipation of supporting a proactive advising program.

Assessing existing data platform capabilities

The UIA’s proactive advising implementation was designed to build upon a foundation of predictive analytics at participating campuses, yet UIA members had varying levels and types of data platforms in place. Institutions with established predictive analytics platforms (either designed in-house or in partnership with a vendor, such as EAB) could use data algorithms to set advisor alerts and inform their proactive outreach calendars.



At Georgia State, advisors received a weekly report on their student caseload that informed their advising priorities. Advisors used the EAB Navigate platform to document interactions with students. Using a common platform allowed other advisors across campus to see advising notes. EAB also provided a dashboard and key information on individual students to help advisors prioritize support.



Arizona State advisors received a weekly report with risk indicators prompting a holistic review of the student to determine if advising intervention was warranted. Additionally, the MAAPS project inspired the design of a proactive advising communication campaign and calendar based on known opportunities for potential risk or celebration within the academic calendar.

For other campuses at earlier phases of predictive analytics adoption, proactive advising was less about using longitudinal and predictive data and more about managing calendars of key deadlines and developing relationships with students.



Purdue did not have predictive analytics “triggers” in place, so their approach focused more on dedicated support and availability to students, including through the use of degree audits, which students found useful.



Oregon State identified challenges with incomplete early alert data from their predictive analytics system, but their data dashboards included reports with information on past grades, student accounts, and holds. The university developed an academic timeline and proactive outreach calendar that helped advisors see roadblocks coming ahead of time and intervene early, with advisors relying on a student cohort model to track progress. Oregon State advisors also analyzed the announcements they posted to students in the learning management system to identify response patterns and topics most likely to earn click-throughs – posts on Mondays and Tuesdays were most effective.



Improving data system functionality

Even where data systems are already in place, MAAPS can prompt advancements in data collection and analysis to improve advisors' interactions with students.



UT Austin's "advisor toolkit" is a longstanding, homegrown, mainframe system developed 20 years ago – an early precursor to an EAB-type platform. It allows advisors to take notes on student interactions; however, data can't be extracted from the notes. MAAPS advisors had access to REDCap, a software that allowed them to extract data and run reports regarding the number and nature of advising meetings. Seeing the benefit of systematically tracking and extracting data from advising notes pushed institutional leaders to create a similar feature in their own legacy system.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Iowa State identified gaps in the data elements that were accessible in its EAB platform. As a result, the university added information related to holds and low-income status to the system, allowing for proactive outreach based on these variables.

Utilizing data specialists

The MAAPS project supported a data analyst at each campus who helped advisors get the most out of the data available to them. Purdue's advisors found the data analyst role critical in providing access to specific, timely data via a consistent liaison to their office. Similarly, Oregon State found that having a data analyst working closely with advisors was key in helping advisors access and translate data to inform proactive outreach.

Bottom line: Data use is essential to implementing an effective proactive advising model. Institutions that don't yet have a system in place for leveraging historical student data to inform current advising practices should consider developing such a system.

- 1 Whether working with an existing or new data system, seek input from advisors about how the system can be most effective, allowing data to be efficiently accessed, understood, and shared among multiple users. A data specialist may help advisors make the best use of available data.
- 2 The process of developing and using a data system to support predictive analytics may reveal where data are spotty and what functional limitations need to be addressed.
- 3 Consider how data alerts can be communicated most effectively to students. Predictive analytics can only be effective if data alerts lead to students reevaluating and changing behaviors, typically as a result of timely student-advisor interactions.



“Learning more about the financial challenges facing low-income and first-generation students helped our advisors better understand why certain students require additional support.”

— Christina King, Purdue University

Helping advisors broaden their perspectives

For most campuses, proactive advising is different from their “business as usual” advising and delivering this kind of support requires a shift in how advisors understand their roles. Advisors must initiate regular contacts with students, rather than responding primarily to student-initiated contacts. They may also have to take a more comprehensive approach to advising, becoming fluent in degree paths from every college and department, as well as the unwritten rules and processes students encounter as they pursue a degree. Advisors may also need to get comfortable talking to students about non-academic issues, including financial aid.



Georgia State learned through its GPS Advising system that advisors should become greater generalists. While they might start with expertise in specific majors, they should expand their knowledge to encompass a range of disciplines, at least within a single meta-major area such as STEM or business. To facilitate this level of knowledge, the university created an orientation period for new advisors to spend several weeks learning from and about the departments well before they started interacting with students in their new role. They also developed relationships with academic units to allow for referrals when advisors didn't have the depth of knowledge necessary to support a student.



UT-Austin's MAAPS advisors were hired from other advising units on campus. To ensure they understood the university from the student perspective, part of their training involved using existing public information from course catalogs, schedules, and the web to train themselves on the formal processes to earn degrees in various disciplines, and then meeting with seasoned advisors to learn the “hidden curriculum,” consisting of the unwritten rules and undocumented policies or cultural norms necessary to get through a degree plan. Seeing the discrepancy between official requirements and informal requirements was a valuable exercise for advisors.



Purdue University reported that advisors are sometimes intimidated by financial aid questions and may not be trained in the financial complexities students encounter. This can lead them to shy away from addressing these issues. Because of the project's focus on low-income students, MAAPS helped advisors realize the importance of knowing how to help students connect to resources and navigate financial barriers to success.

Connecting advising to student success and university goals

Advisors are central to the success of proactive advising, and their views and input should be carefully considered throughout the process. It may be necessary to explain why the university is adopting – or piloting – a new approach to advising, and how advisors' work fits into broader university goals.



At UT-Austin, some advisors were initially reluctant to get on board with the MAAPS project. It was important to clarify that advisors weren't underperforming, but that learning from this study could enhance their contribution to student success. Training focused on philosophy, reinforcing the new reality that advising should be oriented toward student outcomes and not measured exclusively by student satisfaction or creative exploration.



Providing resources and support for advisors to succeed

Advisors who are overwhelmed with high student-advisor ratios will find it difficult to engage students often and comprehensively, so it is essential that the university dedicate enough resources to allow each advisor a manageable roster of students.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

At Purdue, the provost's office determines each year whether additional advisors should be hired in response to enrollment trends. Purdue has determined that a student-advisor ratio of 225:1 allows advisors to provide high-quality support to students. The MAAPS project was designed to maintain a 150:1 student-advisor ratio within the study control group. Each institution should make its own determination of the most effective student-advisor ratio.

Depending on the type of data and technology used in the advising process, advisors may also require specific technological skills and data literacy, which could necessitate extensive and ongoing training. Advisors come from different generations and vary in their comfort with technology – and of course technology frequently changes – so initial training and ongoing support are key.

Bottom line: When a university shifts to (or incorporates) a proactive advising framework, it will be necessary to train advisors – whether newly hired or already on campus – in the new way of thinking about and conducting academic advising.

- 1 Advisors who are accustomed to prioritizing student satisfaction will have to reevaluate what it means to be responsive to their students, emphasizing proactive outreach and making timely graduation the north star for every advising interaction.
- 2 Advisors will need to be comfortable working across departmental boundaries and fluent in the formal and informal requirements for a wide range of degree programs. The university should establish points of contact for advisors who may need assistance with specific issues related to each department or major.
- 3 It will be essential to devote sufficient resources to academic advising so that advisors don't become overwhelmed by high student-advisor ratios. Many advisors will also need initial and continuous training on how to use data effectively and work with specific software and technologies designed to facilitate the proactive advising process.

COMPONENT 5: SECURING ONGOING LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT

“We had to build the culture through communication, through having a champion, through having conversations about buy-in and talking about appropriate adaptations for our context so that it could be successful.”

— Dr. Allison Calhoun-Brown, Georgia State University

Securing buy-in and maintaining investments

Support and investment from university leaders is critical to the success of any transformative initiative. When leaders communicate and demonstrate that an initiative will be a university priority, cooperation across the institution improves and turf battles are reduced. In the case of proactive advising, leadership support for cross-institutional cooperation may be especially important at universities that have traditionally relied on a decentralized advising structure. Knowing that university leaders see academic advising as an essential part of improving student success rates can also help to secure buy-in from advisors and others who will be affected by the change.



Purdue found that senior leadership support was influential in convincing advisors to embrace the new advising model and helped convey why a different approach to advising was important to the university's mission.



Georgia State developed a multi-year plan for centralizing advising that was championed by a senior administrator who solicited buy-in from human resources, legal affairs, and the chief financial officer and gained the public support of the president.



Leaders at UT-Austin committed to maximizing their involvement in the MAAPS project and exploring what they could learn from it. This made it possible to address barriers to student success they discovered as they implemented the new advising model.



At Arizona State, senior university leaders reached out to unit leaders to present the MAAPS project as an opportunity to solve issues previously raised by the advising community.

Investment of university resources is just as critical. Establishing a proactive advising framework will require investments in data systems, technology, and advising personnel. Based on Georgia State's experience, the return on investment to the university will be substantial, but initiating and maintaining key investments will require clear support from university leaders.

Bottom line: Given the complex nature of transforming fundamental campus processes, senior university leaders will need to demonstrate and communicate that proactive advising is a priority.

- 1 Organizational and cultural dynamics will be unique to each university, but in all cases the support of senior leadership will help to overcome barriers that impede the cross-institutional collaboration that is vital to effectively implementing a proactive advising model.
- 2 Senior leaders should clearly articulate the importance of four-year graduation rates as a student success metric and explain how academic advising is pivotal to helping more students graduate on time.
- 3 Senior leaders will also be well positioned to provide the financial and personnel resources needed to avoid overwhelming advisors and make proactive advising a success.

CONCLUSION

While the design of the MAAPS study focused on assessing the statistical significance of proactive advising interventions for low-income and first-generation students, participating institutions ultimately found great practical significance from implementing proactive advising.

MAAPS demonstrated the value of organizing advising in accessible, coordinated ways. By establishing four-year graduation as a clear goal and developing detailed degree maps for hundreds of majors, universities uncovered a great deal of information about contextual experiences and factors shaping why students were struggling to reach the finish line.

By taking a close look at advising practices and striving to reach students early, before roadblocks pushed them off track, advisors and administrators were able to have more substantive conversations about the student experience. They learned more about how official requirements for earning a degree differ from the “hidden curricula” that many students confront as they navigate their journey to degree completion. They gained a better understanding of how best to communicate with students to generate responses to advising prompts and yield productive conversations. They saw the benefit to low-income and first-generation students of holistic, easily accessible advising, in which a single point of contact can answer questions or address concerns across a range of areas, including academic and financial concerns. By closely tracking advisor-student interactions, participating universities were able to develop a feedback loop from advisors to improve how institutions were serving targeted students.

MAAPS also provided institutions with a space in which to experiment with organizational and cultural change around advising. As a result, institutional learning from this initiative has prompted long-term changes in how advising is understood

and delivered. For instance, MAAPS helped the University of California Riverside enhance its focus on disaggregated graduation, retention, and credit accumulation rates for Black students and improve targeted advising to meet their needs. The University of Central Florida leveraged MAAPS to embrace new technologies and take a critical eye to the design and delivery of advising on campus. This was a factor in the university’s advising redesign that increased centralization (without fully centralizing advising) and enhanced professional development for advisors.

While the success of any proactive advising initiative will vary based on institutional factors, the lesson from Georgia State is that proactive advising has the potential to spur significant improvements in graduation rates and significant financial benefits for both students and universities. Not every institution will implement a proactive advising program exactly the same way Georgia State did – nor should they. Outside the parameters of a randomized control trial, variety in implementation from institution to institution can yield important revelations about improving student success that may not appear if every university implemented a program with identical standards and practices.

Accordingly, we have not sought to provide a recipe for implementing proactive advising on every campus. Rather, we have presented five important factors gleaned from the MAAPS project that universities should consider when designing, planning for, and implementing their own proactive advising framework.

We believe proactive advising can make a profound difference in the lives of students, especially those from low-income backgrounds and first-generation students. We look forward to continuing the dialogue around proactive advising and welcome inquiries about our work and experiences.

“This particular project fits well into the mission and philosophy of the UIA. It is putting the mirror on ourselves as postsecondary institutions, saying there’s a problem that we are creating. It’s looking at a hopeful intervention that directly addresses the needs and the goals of the UIA to increase college graduates overall and specifically to increase college graduates among low-income students.”

— Dr. Tim Renick, Georgia State University

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Centralized advising – An institutional approach to advising that includes a single academic advisement center supporting all students, regardless of major or class year. Professional advisors are trained to advise across all disciplines, though may specialize in portfolios of certain majors. A university may have a mostly centralized advising model that incorporates elements of decentralized advising.

Decentralized advising – An institutional approach to advising that includes advisement centers specific to individual colleges, departments, programs, or other units. Professional and/or faculty advisors may provide discipline-specific support to students. A university may have a mostly decentralized advising model that incorporates elements of centralized advising.

Degree map – A template specific to each academic degree at the institution that identifies courses and course sequences necessary to graduate with a degree in four years. Advisors populate the degree map, update it each term, and use it to support proactive advisement to help students stay on track to graduate.

Early alerts – Indicators pushed to advisors, via recurring reports or real-time notifications, that are designed to prompt meaningful interventions to help students stay on track. These alerts are identified based on patterns in the institution's data on student academic success over time, or in some cases submitted directly by faculty members.

MAAPS – Monitoring Advising Analytics to Promote Success (MAAPS) was a four-year multi-institutional project led by Georgia State University on behalf of the University Innovation Alliance (UIA) with GSU's Dr. Tim Renick as principal investigator. It was dedicated to validating the effectiveness of

technology-enhanced proactive advisement in increasing retention, progression, and graduation rates for low-income and first-generation undergraduate students enrolled at the 11 large public universities that were founding members of the UIA: Arizona State University, Georgia State University, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, Oregon State University, Purdue University, University of California Riverside, University of Central Florida, University of Kansas, and University of Texas at Austin. MAAPS was funded by a First in the World grant from the U.S. Department of Education. It addressed documented obstacles to persistence for low-income and first-generation college students and promoted timely course completion through an intervention consisting of three main components: proactive advisement, early alerts pertaining to student performance, and targeted advising interventions.

Predictive analytics – A detailed data tracking system using longitudinal enrollment and academic progress data that allows the institution to identify patterns that can inform proactive outreach to help students avoid common roadblocks, stay on track, and complete their degrees.

Proactive advising – In the context of the UIA's MAAPS study, proactive advising is guided advisement based on personalized degree maps, data-based student progress reviews, targeted advising interventions, and advisement data tracking.

Toxic course combination – A combination of two or more courses that institutional data indicate students are less likely to pass when taken simultaneously. Degree maps, early alerts, and proactive advisement can help students avoid attempting these courses in the same term.

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