

2024 Student Choice Awards for Holistic Advising

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Abstract

This case study collection highlights the nine institutions awarded the 2024 Student Choice Award for Holistic Advising. Selected by NASPA's Advising Success Network (ASN), these colleges and universities share an exemplary commitment to providing students with holistic advising. Each awarded institution demonstrated intentional efforts to create personalized, inclusive, and effective support structures that positively impact the student experience and strengthen outcomes. The award selection process included NASPA staff and student review of each institution's submitted materials. The student review panel included nine students representing multiple institutions who evaluated the applications and shared their perspectives, ensuring that student voice remained central to the award selection process.

This case study collection provides an overview of each institution's efforts to redesign an advising policy or process for student success. Across the nine institutions, several common themes emerged. A central finding was the importance of collaborating with students to co-create their academic and professional goals, ensuring that advising remains both personalized and student-centered. Many institutions emphasized the value of clearly defining the ideal student journey and intentionally aligning support systems to guide learners through each stage. These themes reflect a unified focus on strengthening advising practice in ways that more effectively support and empower students. Collectively, these insights may be beneficial to institutions seeking to build inclusive, responsive, and sustainable advising models.



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Student Affairs Administrators
in Higher Education

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- Jessica Peters, director of advising, transfer, and special programs, Red Rocks Community College
- Kristina Phillips, executive director of academic success, Jackson State University
- Jennifer Scott-Gilmore, vice president of student services, Hinds Community College
- Kristen Swaney, assistant vice provost for undergraduate education, director of academic advising, University at Albany
- Amie Tryon, vice president of academic affairs, Salish Kootenai College
- Leticia Wilson, director of advising initiatives, Del Mar College
- John Yao, associate director of student success for academic advisement, Ramapo College of New Jersey



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Background



Formed in 2018, the Advising Success Network (ASN) is a dynamic network of national organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for all students, including Black, Latinx/a/o, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and poverty-affected students. ASN is coordinated by NASPA, and includes Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and Young Invincibles.

In 2023, ASN launched the ASN Holistic Advising Award, a national competitive program to identify and support five institutions of higher education that had undergone holistic advising redesign activities aligned to best practices. NASPA staff and a panel of practitioners reviewed applications to select winners who were provided with \$35,000 each to further collaborative and student-centered advising approaches. During the inaugural award process, NASPA prioritized responses that demonstrated a commitment to direct student engagement. NASPA convened a panel of student reviewers to submit feedback on a subset of application questions related to student engagement. In 2024 and following years, NASPA redesigned and renamed the award to the Student Choice Awards for Holistic Advising to maintain a focus on student engagement and feedback.

This case study collection highlights the nine winners of the Advising Success Network 2024 Student Choice Awards for Holistic Advising. NASPA convened nine student panelists to participate in the selection committee. Students were nominated by leaders at institutions that engaged in an Advising Success Network cohort for holistic advising redesign:

- ▶ Albany State University
- ▶ Lawson State Community College
- ▶ Morgan State University
- ▶ Pierce College Fort Steilacoom
- ▶ Trenholm State Community College

The student committee met several times between April and September 2024 to develop

and refine the application questions and scoring rubric, review and score applications, and make determinations about the selected winners and award distributions. Award winners received between \$1,000 and \$10,000 to support continued student engagement efforts, with the amounts determined by the student reviewers. The nine awarded institutions received the following amounts:

- ▶ Del Mar College: \$8,000
- ▶ Hinds Community College: \$4,000
- ▶ Jackson State University: \$4,000
- ▶ Miami Dade College: \$5,000
- ▶ Patrick & Henry Community College: \$5,000
- ▶ Ramapo College of New Jersey: \$6,000
- ▶ Red Rocks Community College: \$5,000
- ▶ Salish Kootenai College: \$8,000
- ▶ University at Albany: \$4,000

Each case study begins with an institutional profile that provides background information on the college or university featured, including its mission, size, and student population. The profile is followed by a summary of the initiative or program being highlighted—detailing its purpose, implementation process, and key outcomes. The case study then explores implications for practice, offering insight into how other institutions might adapt or replicate similar efforts within their own contexts. To further illustrate the impact, each case includes a quote from a campus leader or stakeholder involved in the program, providing a personal perspective on its significance.



Institutional Case Studies





Del Mar College

LOCATION: CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS
INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC, MULTICAMPUS, 2-YEAR,
HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION
ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:500–1,000



Institutional Profile

Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, has offered accessible education and workforce programs since 1935. As of fall 2024, the college enrolls 9,720 undergraduates and is a public, Hispanic-serving institution, with 71% of students identifying as Hispanic. Approximately 36% of students receive Pell Grants, 16% attend full-time, and most are 24 or younger. The college provides online learning, with 25% of students enrolled exclusively online and 52% taking at least one online course. Del Mar operates three campuses—Heritage, Windward, and Oso Creek—along with a Center for Economic Development. The graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 13%.

Student Journey Map

Del Mar College has made ASN's Student Journey Map a key tool in reshaping how the college supports its students. This resource captures the student experience from start to finish including emotions, technology interactions, and ideal outcomes, all from the students' perspective. This map was made by three ASN student fellows in 2023 and is accessible on the ASN website for broad use. Seeing the map's potential, the college incorporated it into workshops and professional development initiatives to spark meaningful conversations among faculty, staff, and students. The goal is simple: Amplify the student voice and find ways to improve pathways for persistence and success.

Del Mar College uses the map to identify momentum points, which are key milestones that motivate students to continue on their academic

journey. To better understand these moments, the college conducted a survey through its predictive analytics tool, Civitas Learning, to gather feedback directly from the students. Responses highlighted a range of momentum points, from enrolling in school after years away to reaching personal milestones such as learning a new language. This collaboration ensured that the college's strategies align with students' real-life experiences, making the educational environment more personalized and supportive.

The journey map has also been a game changer for professional development at Del Mar College. Using insights from the map, faculty and staff workshops now break down the student experience into stages such as preregistration, orientation, and graduation planning. These sessions focus on actionable strategies that help faculty better support students at every step. The map has not only improved advising practices but also built

stronger connections among advisors, faculty, and students, creating a more unified and student-centered approach to education.

“This award really means the world to us because we get to continue to do the work, to hear the students’ voice in every aspect of what we do.”

—*Leticia Wilson, Director of Advising Initiatives*

Creating a Culture of Advocacy

Del Mar College has restructured its approach to student support by embedding a culture of advocacy and care into its student engagement and retention framework. Recognizing the importance of language and perception in student engagement, the college implemented a series of changes to reduce stigma surrounding its programs and initiatives. In 2014, the institution operated the Retention Alert Program, housed in its Retention and Disability Services office, where advocacy specialists assisted students on academic probation and suspension. With guidance from resources developed by ASN, Del Mar College undertook a rebranding effort to create a more welcoming and supportive environment. The Retention Alert Program was renamed Care Connection, and the Retention and Disability Services office was renamed the Center for Access and Advocacy to reflect a more inclusive and inviting tone.

Similarly, the college rebranded its on-campus food pantry as Valdar’s Market to provide a more dignified experience for students seeking assistance. Another change involved its website, initially named the Basic Needs Assessment, which was renamed the Viking Care Page to ensure the language used was supportive and not unintentionally read as punitive. This updated platform provides holistic resources to help students meet their basic needs.

These nomenclature changes mirror Del Mar College’s broader cultural transformation. By prioritizing inclusivity and reducing barriers, the college demonstrates its commitment to creating a supportive environment where students feel valued and empowered.

Professional Development

Del Mar College is committed to developing its faculty and staff to ensure consistent practices and student satisfaction. The college has implemented a professional development framework that includes a variety of initiatives such as the

Critical Conversation Series. This series addresses key topics such as pathway and career focus, inclusivity, and student empowerment. Series discussions enable faculty and staff to explore strategies for meeting the needs of the Del Mar student population while instilling the culture of care they intend to create.

Alongside workshops, the college offers an advising certification course that broadens the participants’ understanding of academic advising and enhances their ability to support student success. This 12-week program is open to all staff, even those without advising roles, and covers topics like advising technology tools. Through this course, staff gain hands-on experience in mock advising sessions to cultivate their skills and ensure a high level of quality of support for students.

Del Mar College tailors its professional development efforts to meet the specific needs of each department. By customizing resources and training, the college ensures its faculty and staff are equipped to address the evolving challenges of higher education. These focused efforts enable faculty and staff to better support students by providing them with the tools and resources they need to succeed. Del Mar’s ongoing investment in professional development underscores its commitment to a well-prepared and adaptable team.

Implications for Practice

Other institutions can adopt a similar approach by tailoring professional development to meet the needs of their faculty and staff. Del Mar College’s intentional investment in training and resources has strengthened its advising practices, improved faculty–student engagement, and developed a culture of care. By incorporating strategies such as the Critical Conversation Series and the advising certification course, institutions can enhance student support and retention efforts. These initiatives demonstrate how a structured, proactive approach to professional development can lead to a more student-centered and effective learning environment.

Reference

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Hinds Community College



LOCATION: RAYMOND, MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC, MULTICAMPUS, 2-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:350

Institutional Profile

Hinds Community College in Mississippi has over 100 years of tradition as the state's largest community college and a historically Black institution. The college serves 9,332 undergraduates across six campuses, including Jackson, Rankin, Raymond, Utica, Vicksburg, and the Nursing Allied Health Center, with 53% identifying as Black or African American. About 55% of students receive Pell Grants, 55% attend full-time, and most are 24 or younger. Hinds CC offers online courses, with 25% of students enrolled exclusively online and 29% taking at least one online class. The 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 32%, and the first-to-second-year retention rate is 55%.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Hinds CC sees the importance of data-driven decision-making in holistic advising. The college consistently uses data tracking, analysis, and implementation to support student success and drive institutional improvement. Hinds CC tracks key student services such as tutoring, advising, and at-risk alerts along with student feedback on the quality of these services. When data revealed that Hinds CC's dropout rate was higher than the state average, the college discovered that many students were withdrawing without any required touchpoints, guidance, or support from the

advising office. In response, Hinds CC developed a system to help students better understand the impact of their withdrawal decisions and ensure they receive the support they need.

Several innovations were implemented to enhance both data collection and informed decision-making. When it became clear that many students were not fully engaged in the advising process, the college implemented a solution: interactive advising using touchscreen monitors. These monitors allow students and even their parents to actively participate in the advising process by viewing and interacting with academic

information in real time. This approach has created a more transparent, engaging, and student-centered advising experience.

Data-driven decision-making is a cornerstone of Hinds CC's holistic advising approach, ensuring that every initiative is informed by meaningful insights and tailored to student needs. By actively monitoring success metrics, gathering feedback through surveys and focus groups, and leveraging

“When we spoke directly with students, many expressed frustrations with the current limit of only 8 hours for grade replacement. From their perspective, if they are taking the initiative to improve their academic performance, they believe they should have the opportunity to replace more than 8 hours.”

—Jolyn Stone, Academic Advisor

technology, the college has created a culture of continuous improvement. These practices highlight the importance of aligning advising strategies with data to generate transparency, inclusivity, and measurable success. As other institutions consider enhancing their advising efforts, Hinds CC's approach serves as a valuable model for leveraging data to transform student support and ensure positive outcomes for all learners.

Student Engagement

At Hinds CC, student involvement plays a critical role in shaping institutional policies and ensuring that initiatives align with their needs. One example is the revision of the grade replacement policy. In order to improve student grade point average, the policy stated a student may repeat, for grade replacement, a course already taken at Hinds CC. The official grade will be the grade earned in the repeated class and will count toward their cumulative grade point average. This policy initially capped students at replacing only 8 credit hours. Student leaders raised concerns about the financial and academic impact of this restriction. Their advocacy sparked discussions with the vice president of academic instruction, who worked with advising staff to evaluate the students' concerns and consider possible revision. Ultimately, the college revised the policy, allowing for unlimited grade replacement. This success not only addressed a pressing student need but also empowered students by demonstrating the tangible impact of their voices in institutional decision-making.

Beyond the policy revisions, Hinds CC actively includes students in shaping campus strategies through focus groups, student satisfaction surveys, and campus conversation hosted by the Office of the President. These platforms create opportunities for students to provide feedback on various topics from advising practices to campus resources. By involving students directly, the institution ensures that initiatives, which likely include changes to advising processes or the implementation of new technology, are tailored to their lived experiences. This collaborative approach not only enhances the relevance of policies but also creates a sense of ownership and engagement in the student body.

The focus on student involvement shows Hinds CC's commitment to equity and shared leadership. By giving students a seat at the table, the college builds trust and accountability, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and representative. These practices serve as a model for other institutions looking to center student voices in their policy-making processes. At Hinds CC, students are not just recipients of institutional support, they are active participants in shaping a college environment that meets their needs and promotes their success.

Implications for Practice

Hinds CC's approach to student involvement in policy-making demonstrates the value of creating structured opportunities for students to voice their concerns and contribute to institutional decisions. Other institutions can adopt similar practices by implementing student town halls, focus groups, and feedback opportunities to ensure policies reflect student needs. By incorporating student perspectives, Hinds CC was able to revise its grade replacement policy, ultimately removing barriers to academic success. This model highlights how institutions can generate a culture of shared responsibility, empowering students while improving policies that directly affect retention and completion.

Reference

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Jackson State University



LOCATION: JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC, 4-YEAR, HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITY

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:200

Institutional Profile

Founded in 1877, Jackson State University (JSU) in Jackson, Mississippi, is a public, historically Black university committed to providing access to higher education. As of fall 2024, JSU enrolls 4,769 undergraduates, with 93% identifying as Black or African American. About 69% of students receive Pell Grants, 90% attend full-time, and most are 24 or younger. The university offers online courses, with 27% of students enrolled exclusively online and 65% taking at least one online class. The first-to-second-year retention rate is 68% for full-time students and 28% for part-time students, and the 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 38%.

Student-Led Advising and Engagement

The ROAR (Re-envisioning Orientation, Advising and Retention) internship program was developed after a student leader recognized gaps in student support during and after summer orientation.

The student (who later became the Student Government Association president) pitched the idea to the associate provost, leading to the program's creation. Originally focused on summer orientation, ROAR has expanded to ensure ongoing student support throughout the academic year, helping first-year students navigate university resources, academic planning, and campus life.

To apply through a competitive selection process, students submit an application, résumé, and video discussing their first-year experience and motivation for joining the program. Once selected, the student interns participate in a structured training program, including an onboarding retreat, design-thinking workshops, and advising role-play scenarios. Their responsibilities range from leading orientation sessions and assisting with peer mentorship to improving student communication strategies in partnership with academic advisors. The program is funded through Title III, ensuring that students receive compensation for their work, making it both a leadership opportunity and a valuable professional experience.

The impact of ROAR has been extremely beneficial, with interns playing a crucial role in enhancing retention efforts and improving first-year student engagement. Their firsthand experiences allow them to provide peer-driven insights that shape advising policies, student outreach, and communication strategies. Many interns have also expressed interest in pursuing careers in higher education, highlighting the program's role in cultivating the next generation of student affairs professionals. As ROAR continues to evolve, JSU remains committed to empowering students as leaders in their own educational journey.

Student-Driven Data and Communication

At JSU, students are at the forefront of shaping advising communication and engagement strategies. Recognizing that traditional emails and university messaging were often overlooked or unclear, student leaders and advisors worked together to revamp how information was communicated. Through student-led surveys and feedback sessions, the team identified three key challenges: higher education language (jargon), lack of clarity in advising emails, and the need for multiplatform communication. As a result, JSU implemented intentional messaging strategies, ensuring that students received concise, relevant, and actionable information through email, social media, and direct text messaging.

Student leaders such as ROAR interns played a pivotal role in data collection and assessment, conducting surveys after major campus events, orientation sessions, and advising meetings. Their work extended beyond gathering responses; they actively analyzed the data and refined strategies based on student feedback. With guidance from JSU's associate vice president for institutional research, interns learned survey methods, response interpretation, and best practices for data-driven decision-making. One key improvement included the revamp of JSU's orientation survey, designed to better assess students' preparedness before their advising sessions.

The impact of these efforts is already evident in the increased student engagement with advising services and institutional communication. Students report greater confidence in navigating university resources, and advisors have improved their outreach strategies based on real-time feedback. Looking ahead, JSU plans to broaden student internship opportunities across multiple offices, allowing ROAR interns to gain hands-on experience in areas such as student affairs and enrollment management. Through this initiative, the university is not only improving advising but also potentially cultivating future higher education professionals.

Leadership Support

Strong institutional leadership has been a driving force behind advising innovation and student engagement initiatives at JSU. With the support of the associate vice president for student success, faculty and student leaders have been empowered to explore new ideas that enhance retention and academic success. This culture of innovation has empowered the expansion of advising programs, such as the ROAR internship program. Leadership's commitment to fostering collaboration between academic affairs, student success, and institutional research has ensured that advising remains a top priority in supporting student persistence and degree completion.

JSU is deepening its commitment to first-generation student success. While the university previously provided a coordinator and programming for first-generation students, it is now part of a new effort that expands tailored support to help students navigate higher education. By integrating advising, mentorship, and data-driven strategies, JSU aims to create an environment where first-generation students feel supported, informed, and empowered throughout their academic journey. The university is also working to streamline the transition from centralized advising in the first 2 years to faculty-led advising in students' final years, ensuring a seamless experience for all students.

This expansion will not only enhance the professional development of student interns but also strengthen cross-campus collaboration to improve student retention and engagement. By prioritizing data-driven decision-making, holistic advising, and leadership-backed innovation, JSU is creating a sustainable model of student success that will continue to evolve and serve future generations.

Implications for Practice

JSU's student-driven approach to advising and engagement offers a model for institutions looking to enhance retention through peer mentorship and holistic support. Other institutions can adopt student-led internship programs like ROAR, empowering students to take an active role in advising, orientation, and communication efforts. By leveraging student feedback and institutional data, JSU has refined its communication strategies, ensuring students receive clear, specific, and accessible information about academic resources. Additionally, strong leadership support has been critical in generating innovation; other institutions should consider creating spaces where students, faculty, and staff can collaborate to improve student success initiatives.

"It's really great to be in an environment where we can be innovative."

—Kristina Phillips, Executive Director of Academic Success

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Jackson State University*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/175856>



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Miami Dade College

LOCATION: MIAMI, FLORIDA

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC, MULTICAMPUS, 2-YEAR,
HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:640



Institutional Profile

Miami Dade College, founded in 1959 in Miami, Florida, is a public, Hispanic-serving institution committed to providing high-quality, accessible education. The college enrolls 39,139 undergraduates, 72% of whom identify as Hispanic, and 68% are considered low-income. About 52% of students receive Pell Grants, 47% attend full-time, and most are 24 or younger. Miami Dade offers online learning, with 34% of students fully online and another 34% taking at least one online course. The college has eight campuses, including Hialeah, Homestead, Kendall, Medical, North, Padrón, West, and Wolfson, plus two education centers, the Gibson Education Center and Meek Entrepreneurial Education Center. The 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 45%.

Advising Model Redesign

Redesigning its advising model has been one of Miami Dade's most significant initiatives, aiming to provide more personalized support by reducing advisor caseloads. Previously, each advisor was

responsible for more than 1,800 students, making it nearly impossible to offer individualized advising. Understanding the need for change, the institution invested in a multiyear process to restructure its advising framework. By increasing

the number of advisors and streamlining job descriptions, Miami Dade reduced caseloads from 2000:1 to 640:1, allowing for deeper student–advisor engagement.

As a key component of the redesign of advising roles, Miami Dade moved away from rigid job descriptions that required a master’s degree and extensive experience by opening positions to recent bachelor’s degree graduates. The adjustment broadened their hiring pool, adding new perspectives that build on the expertise of their experienced advising team. Additionally, hiring alumni as well as candidates within the local community ensured that the advisors reflected the identities and lived experiences of the students they served. This representation generated a sense of belonging and trust that has further enhanced the effectiveness of the advising process.

The impact of these changes has resulted in more students having access to dedicated advisors who can provide tailored support. The shift toward a lower student-to-advisor ratio has allowed advisors to be more proactive in guiding students through their academic journeys. By prioritizing accessibility, inclusivity, and efficiency, Miami Dade has created a model that not only benefits students but also serves as a best practice for institutions seeking to improve their advising services.

Technological Advancements

Recognizing that some students need more support beyond traditional academic advising, Miami Dade employs success coaches who offer additional assistance for those with higher needs. Unlike student success advisors who serve the broader student body, success coaches specifically support students who have been identified as “at risk” for course failure or other factors that might affect retention and completion. The role of success coaches is centered on immediate intervention, ensuring that students receive the guidance and resources they need before challenges become overwhelming.

A key feature of this program is the use of automation-driven outreach. Success coaches use text messaging campaigns to check in with students, offer support, and connect them to campus services. For instance, during the critical first weeks of English and math courses, students receive personalized texts with the option to request tutoring or other academic resources. Through automation, Miami Dade ensures that students receive timely support, even outside of traditional office hours.

The success coaching model has been instrumental in developing student persistence.

By maintaining an open line of communication, success coaches build trust and ensure that students always have someone to turn to for help.

Implications for Practice

Miami Dade’s holistic advising model demonstrates the importance of integrating academic support with wraparound services to address nonacademic barriers like financial insecurity and food access. Other institutions can enhance student success by developing structured programs such as food pantries, emergency aid programs, and proactive advising to support underserved populations.

“We want college graduates who are energized and motivated to revitalize our advising model.”

—Paola Castaneda-Documet,
Executive Director, Student Success

Additionally, Miami Dade’s use of predictive analytics and automation-driven early alert systems highlights the power of data in shifting from reactive to proactive student support. Other institutions could benefit from leveraging similar technologies to identify students facing challenges early and provide tailored programs.

Finally, MDC’S advising redesign, which reduced caseloads and implemented an advising syllabus with structured milestones, offers a model for improving student–advisor relationships. Institutions seeking to enhance retention and the student experience should consider restructuring advisor roles and adopting proactive strategies to create a more equitable academic environment.

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Miami Dade College*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/135717>



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Patrick & Henry Community College

LOCATION: MARTINSVILLE, VIRGINIA

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC 2-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:225



Institutional Profile

Patrick & Henry Community College, founded in 1962 in Martinsville, Virginia, is a public, predominantly White institution focused on student success through innovation and comprehensive support. The college serves 1,932 undergraduates, with 24% identifying as Black or African American and 12% as Hispanic. About 61% of students receive Pell Grants, 53% attend full-time, and most are 24 or younger. Online learning is offered, with 24% of students enrolled fully online and 47% taking at least one online course. Patrick & Henry operates four campuses, including the Main Campus, Patrick County Site, Thomas P. Dalton IDEA Center, and the Manufacturing, Engineering, and Technology Complex. The 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 45%, and first-to-second-year retention is 68% for full-time students and 40% for part-time students.

Student Success Division Reorganization

After identifying the need for organizational restructuring, Patrick & Henry Community College merged various student support services

into a single division to improve collaboration. The physical locations of these services were also moved to bring support closer to students. For example, the food pantry was moved from a lesser-known spot behind another building to a more

visible and accessible location. This move not only made it easier for students to navigate but also helped address some of the insecurities they may have when using the pantry.

The classroom is the main destination for all students who attend this commuter college. Patrick & Henry relocated 40 offices to help supervisors be more accessible to their teams and to situate faculty offices closer to their classrooms. Institutional leaders strategically placed support resources around the classrooms to help students. This transition, however, was not without some challenges. Many staff members had occupied the same offices for years and needed time to adjust to their new spaces. Recognizing these concerns, the institution emphasized the importance of managing the transition thoughtfully to gain staff buy-in.

Mental Health and Trauma-Informed Care

Realizing the impact of the pandemic on both students and staff, the college prioritized trauma-informed practices to foster a more supportive campus environment. Leadership observed the increase in mental health issues among students, highlighting the diverse needs within the community. This realization prompted the institution to explore trauma-informed training, focusing on understanding how past experiences shape behavior and learning. By integrating these practices, the college aimed to create a culture where students and employees feel seen, valued, and supported in their educational and professional journeys.

To bring this vision to life, the college drew inspiration from student affairs experts who emphasize trauma-informed practices, recognize how students' past experiences shape their engagement and behavior, and prioritize creating a campus environment where students feel valued, supported, and connected—ultimately promoting persistence and success. These initiatives emphasize the importance of relationship building and ensure that every student has a sense of belonging. The training sessions encouraged faculty and staff to consider how trauma affects decision-making and engagement, equipping them with strategies to better support students facing challenges. Beyond training, the college also sought deeper organizational and structural changes, ensuring that policies and services align with the goal of fostering an empathetic and inclusive environment.

A major outcome of the initiative was the establishment of a mental health liaison on campus through a partnership with Piedmont Community Services. This organization provides immediate support to students experiencing mental health

crises and serves as a bridge to external resources when needed. The presence of an on-campus mental health expert reflects the college's commitment to holistic student success, ensuring that academic achievement is not hindered by unaddressed personal struggles. Moving forward, the institution continues to evaluate and expand these efforts, reinforcing a campus culture centered on care, understanding, and student well-being.

“If you know that I’m here for you, then that’s the first step in opening up to making a stronger bond, to reengaging appropriately.”

—Christopher Wikstrom, Vice President of Instruction and Student Services

Implications for Practice

Other institutions seeking to enhance student and employee engagement can adopt trauma-informed practices by prioritizing relationship building and mental health awareness. Patrick & Henry's approach demonstrates that creating a culture of care and support can lead to greater student retention and success. By implementing trauma-informed training for faculty and staff, institutions can create environments where students feel valued and supported beyond academics. Additionally, embedding mental health professionals on campus helps ensure that students have immediate access to critical support services. These strategies can help other institutions strengthen their commitment to holistic student success and overall well-being.

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Patrick & Henry Community College*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/233019>

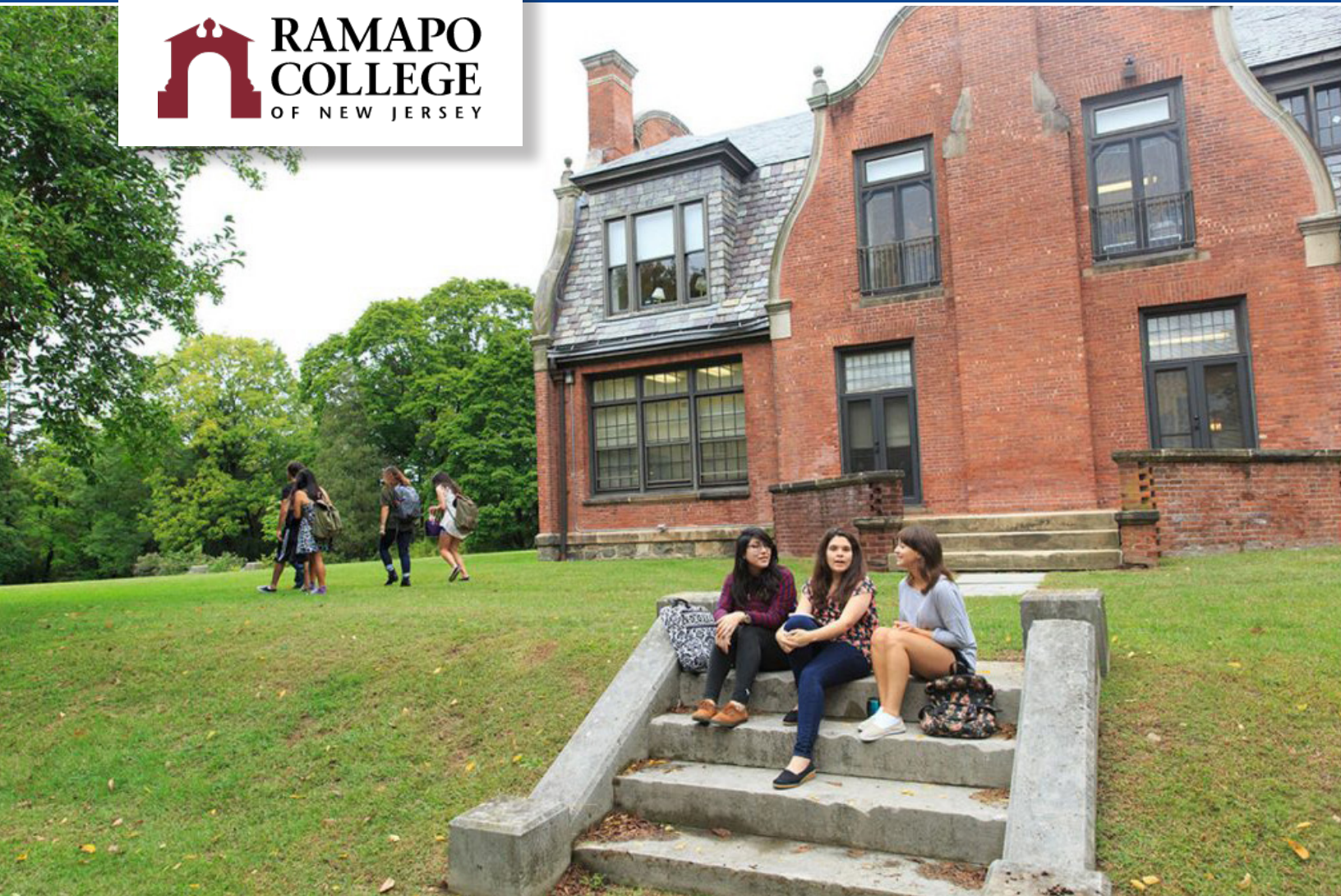


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Ramapo College of New Jersey



LOCATION: MAHWAH, NEW JERSEY

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC, 4-YEAR INSTITUTION

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:150

Institutional Profile

Founded in 1969, Ramapo College of New Jersey is a public institution located in Mahwah, New Jersey. The college enrolls 5,013 undergraduates, with approximately 24% identifying as Hispanic and an estimated 45–50% identifying as first-generation students. About 28% of students receive Pell Grants, 88% attend full-time, and the majority are 24 years old or younger. Ramapo offers limited online learning, with 2% of students enrolled exclusively online and 26% taking at least one online course. The first-to-second-year retention rate is 87% for full-time students, and the 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 72%.

Graduate Intern Support

Ramapo's advising model is strengthened by graduate-level support structures that complement professional advising. The college partners with its Master of Social Work (MSW) program to bring in graduate student interns. These MSW interns carry a caseload of approximately 60 to 75 students each, providing one-on-one advising while being supervised by professionals trained as seminar in field instructors. This collaboration supports a low advisor-to-student ratio of 150 to 1, which enables more individualized, proactive, and developmental advising conversations. These student-centered relationships allow advisors and interns to build trust with students, guide them in the development of personalized academic plans, and support psychosocial growth alongside academic success.

First-Generation Student Center

Given the high percentage of first-generation students at Ramapo, the First-Generation Student Center is a vital partner in supporting student success. Since its opening in 2022, the center has provided a welcoming and affirming space where first-generation students can connect, access resources, and develop a strong sense of belonging.

The center works closely with academic advisors to conduct coordinated outreach. By using predictive analytics and technology-enhanced communication, the advising team and the First-Generation Student Center ensure that interventions are timely and personalized. Together, these efforts promote equity in educational outcomes and provide a support system that honors the lived experiences and strengths of first-generation students.

Technological Advancements

Ramapo uses a shared model of appreciative academic advising to foster advising as a collaborative, campuswide effort. First-year students are initially supported by the Center for Student Success, while strategic partnerships with opportunity programs, athletics, disability services, and the First-Generation Student Center expand the network of care and accountability for students.

A key aspect of Ramapo's success is the integration of data-informed practices. The college uses platforms like EAB's Starfish and the EdSights AI chatbot to track student progress, conduct predictive outreach, and facilitate timely interventions. Advisors are trained to use data analytics and communication relationship management systems to monitor risk factors and stay responsive to student needs. For example, chatbot messages offer real-time insights into students' experiences, which helps tailor outreach

strategies based on what they share in their own voices. Ongoing advisor training ensures consistency in quality and up-to-date practices in policy, technology, and student support strategies.

"Whenever possible, we include student reps on technology committees and ask them for feedback on their experience... They're the ultimate end user, and we need to have their lens and their perspective."

—John Yao, Associate Director of Student Success for Academic Advisement

Implications for Practice

Ramapo offers a compelling example of how institutions can implement a holistic, student-centered approach to advising by integrating training, cross-campus partnerships, and data-informed practices. Its low advisor-to-student ratio allows for meaningful engagement, while collaboration with programs like the MSW internship and First-Generation Student Center strengthen wraparound support. Institutions seeking to better serve first-generation and underserved students can learn from Ramapo's commitment to inclusive practices, advisor development, and student voice through technology.

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Ramapo College of New Jersey*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/186201>



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Red Rocks Community College

LOCATION: LAKEWOOD, COLORADO

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC, MULTICAMPUS, 2-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:650

Institutional Profile

Red Rocks Community College (RRCC), located in Lakewood, Colorado, has supported students in achieving their educational and career goals since 1969. According to fall 2024 data, the college enrolls 7,286 undergraduates and operates as a public, emerging Hispanic-serving institution, with 63% of students identifying as White and 22% as Hispanic. Approximately 29% of students receive Pell Grants, and 26% are enrolled full-time. RRCC offers both in-person and online learning, with 20% of students enrolled exclusively online and 15% taking at least one online course. The college operates two campuses, in Lakewood and Arvada, and has an overall graduation rate of 37% for full-time, first-time undergraduates.

The Success Team Model

RRCC recognized that academic advisors' caseloads were extremely high. The college had already identified holistic advising as an approach needed at the institution. Institutional leaders recognized that students faced nonacademic challenges, such as financial struggles and social wellness, that can affect their ability to succeed academically. With high student-to-advisor ratios, academic advisors struggled to provide ongoing, individualized support. Acknowledging this gap, RRCC launched the Success Team, a group of trained coaches dedicated to addressing students' broader needs, enhancing retention and well-being.

The Success Team and advising staff work together to identify students in need of extra support, ensuring no gaps go unfilled. This model was built on the idea that students are whole individuals with complex lives that shape their educational journey. With this approach, students now receive support in areas such as emotional readiness, social integration, and overall well-being.

Technological Advancements

RRCC implemented an early alert system to identify and support students with academic struggles. RRCC uses EAB Navigate as its early alert platform, which previously relied on instructors manually submitting concerns, with notifications routed through the advising office. However, advisor feedback revealed that this approach was ineffective. Faculty members reported that the alerts came too late in the semester for effective intervention, and contacting students after a single score drop sometimes led to discouragement rather than motivation. This problem demonstrated the need for a more proactive approach that would allow both faculty and student support teams to intervene more efficiently.

To address these issues, RRCC reconfigured and expanded its use of the EAB Navigate system to include automated alerts that flag students who receive a score below 65% on multiple assignments, rather than relying solely on faculty reports. This system ensures that advisors and student success coaches are notified earlier and can reach out before students fall too far behind. The new system also reduces unnecessary alerts by focusing on patterns of academic difficulty rather than isolated low scores. This change has created a more structured and personalized intervention process where students receive the guidance they need at the right time.

Implications for Practice

Other institutions may benefit from integrating dedicated success teams within their existing academic advising structures to address both academic and nonacademic student needs. An automated early alert system, like the one used at RRCC, can facilitate timely interventions and improved retention by proactively identifying students who need direct support. By leveraging technology and promoting cross-departmental collaboration, institutions can streamline advisor workloads and create a more supportive environment that holistically empowers students to succeed.

"Our holistic advising model really recognizes that students are whole individuals. They have complex lives and diverse needs. With the Success Team, we're able to address things like emotional readiness, social integration, and the overall well-being of students."

—Jessica Peters, Director of Advising, Transfer, and Special Programs

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Red Rocks Community College*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/127909>



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**SALISH KOOTENAI
COLLEGE**



Salish Kootenai College

LOCATION: LAKEWOOD, COLORADO

INSTITUTION TYPE: PRIVATE, TRIBAL, LAND-GRANT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:9

Institutional Profile

Salish Kootenai College, a private tribal college located in Pablo, Montana, is committed to providing high-quality educational opportunities and comprehensive support for American Indian students from the local community and across the United States. The college enrolls 700 students, with 73% identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native. About 67% of students receive Pell Grants, 76% attend full-time, and 37% are 24 years old or younger. Salish Kootenai offers flexible learning options, with 19% of students enrolled exclusively online and 52% taking at least one online course. The first-to-second-year retention rate is 87% for full-time students and 75% for part-time students, and the 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 33%.

Linking Housing to Student Success

Salish Kootenai faced a housing crisis that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and an influx of people moving to Montana. Many affordable housing options were turned into summer homes and vacation rentals, leading to student homelessness and housing insecurity. In response, the institution collected housing application data and discovered that the majority of housing requests were from students in their mid-30s. This finding informed leadership's decision that studio apartments would better suit students' housing needs instead of the dormitory-style housing they had originally considered building.

Additionally, the institution used these insights to adjust its recruitment strategy, focusing more on students within commuting distance rather than out-of-state applicants who would struggle to find housing. The result was a significant 11% increase in enrollment and student persistence rates because students had more stable living situations.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Salish Kootenai has developed an innovative approach to student data collection that goes beyond traditional metrics like graduation rates and enrollment numbers. By prioritizing direct student feedback and outreach, the institution has been able to identify real barriers to student success and make data-driven policy changes that have improved retention and persistence rates. Some key strategies the college has implemented are personalized outreach, early intervention, addressing barriers to success, and leveraging technology.

By integrating real-time student-driven insights, Salish Kootenai has created a data model that enhances student support and institutional growth. The proactive engagement of students in data collection ensures that policies are continually adapted to meet their evolving needs. The collected data have influenced the replacement of an academic success course with individualized success plans.

Implications for Practice

Salish Kootenai's approach of integrating academic, personal, and student growth demonstrates that a holistic model leads to improved student outcomes. Additionally, proactively reaching out to students who may be struggling, rather than waiting for them to seek help, ensures that barriers such as housing insecurity are addressed early. By incorporating real-time feedback into policy decisions, institutions can develop more responsive, student-centered approaches that increase persistence and completion rates.

"We focused more on [not] getting more students in the door but retaining the ones we have, making sure they're successful and focused on their goals, which is different for every student."

—Amie Tryon, Vice President of Academic Affairs

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Salish Kootenai College*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/180647>



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UNIVERSITY
AT ALBANY

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



University at Albany



LOCATION: ALBANY, NEW YORK

INSTITUTION TYPE: PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

ADVISOR-TO-STUDENT RATIO: 1:250–300

Institutional Profile

The University at Albany (UAlbany) is a nationally recognized public research institution located in Albany, New York. The university enrolls 12,600 undergraduates, with 95% attending full-time and the majority under the age of 24. UAlbany serves a diverse student population, with 25% identifying as Black or African American and 20% as Hispanic, and 42% of students receive Pell Grants. The university offers flexible learning options, with 8% of students enrolled exclusively online and 53% taking at least one online course. UAlbany operates across three campuses—the Uptown Campus, Downtown Campus, and Health Sciences Campus—and maintains a first-to-second-year retention rate of 84% for full-time students. The 6-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time undergraduates is 66%. In recognition of its strong commitment to Latinx/a/o student success, UAlbany earned the Seal of Excelencia from Excelencia in Education in 2022 and was recertified in 2025, becoming the first public institution in New York to receive this distinction.

Student Engagement and Inclusion

At UAlbany, student voice is integral to refining advising policies and processes, ensuring they resonate deeply with the diverse needs and identities of the student body. Through initiatives like the Black Lawyers Matter series, a robust

microgrant and reenrollment program, the Academic Recovery Program, and peer advisors and transfer transition leaders, advisors actively listen to and incorporate student feedback. This approach has transformed advising into a more personalized, timely, and holistic experience. By

centering on individual student identities and complexities, UAlbany continually enhances its services to better support academic and personal growth, fostering an environment where every student feels valued and empowered.

UAlbany has made significant strides in developing student engagement and inclusion through initiatives led by the Indigenous Student Association (ISA). The ISA has 11 tribally enrolled Indigenous students from the Haudenosaunee and Six Nations along with allies, and they have worked closely with faculty and administrators to develop an Indigenous studies minor, refine the university's land acknowledgment, and introduce the Thanksgiving Address into official ceremonies. The Thanksgiving Address, which is a traditional greeting and prayer used to reaffirm the interconnectedness of living things, has been one of the ISA's most significant contributions. After its success at the Lavender graduation, a ceremony that honors LGBTQIA+ students and their contributions to their university, the Thanksgiving Address became a staple at academic retreats, student association events, and commencement ceremonies.

The ISA collaborated with the vice president of inclusive excellence to create a professional video, ensuring that the address is shared widely across campus and remains a lasting part of UAlbany's traditions. History professor Maeve Kane, who researches Haudenosaunee history, created an independent studies course for ISA members to read and discuss oral history, led by specific Haudenosaunee creators. With these efforts, UAlbany has started to see the impact of these students finding connection among themselves and through their engagement with the university.

Technological Advancements

At UAlbany, the integration of technology into academic advising has played a crucial role in supporting student success. Recognizing that students are digital natives, the university adopted the EAB Navigate system to enhance communication, appointment scheduling, and early alerts. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UAlbany further expanded its use of Navigate by launching a mobile app, enabling students to access advising services and academic resources remotely. To ensure its effectiveness, the university involved student workers, peer advisors, and orientation leaders in testing and providing feedback on the app's functionality.

A feature of the Navigate app is Study Buddies, which allows students to form peer study groups based on shared courses. Within the State University of New York system, UAlbany is the top user of this

feature, with more than 1,800 students opting in for nearly 6,000 classes. This initiative has helped identify struggling students and align tutoring resources. Additionally, the university has enhanced its use of technology by leveraging early alerts and progress reports to proactively support students. Advisors use real-time data to reach out to students facing academic challenges, ensuring they receive timely support before academic issues escalate.

“We know that advising is not a solo practice to support our students, so advisors act as cultural navigators, translators, coaches, and guides for our students.”

—Kristen Swaney, Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Director of Academic Advising

Implications for Practice

UAlbany's integration of holistic advising and cultural responsiveness into its student support model serves as a blueprint for institutions seeking to enhance student belonging and retention. Establishing advisors as cultural navigators facilitates more meaningful interactions, ensuring that advising functions extend beyond transactional exchanges to strengthen student–institution connections. By prioritizing proactive outreach and integrating student voices in decision-making, institutions can create a culture that improves student engagement and academic success.

Reference

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *University at Albany*. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/institution-profile/196060>



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Themes and Implications for the Field

Across the award-winning institutions featured in the case studies, common themes emerged around advancing student success and equity through more intentional advising practices. Many colleges and universities are leveraging advising as a key strategy to support historically underserved students, which highlights an opportunity for all institutions to reflect on how their advising practices can be more responsive to the needs of their unique student bodies. Defining the ideal student journey and aligning support systems were top priorities. For example, Del Mar College recognized how much language and perception shape student engagement and revised its program descriptions and communications to reduce stigma around its services. Similarly, Patrick & Henry Community College demonstrated strong cross-campus collaboration by bringing together faculty and student affairs staff to coordinate holistic advising support theoretically and physically.



Many institutions emphasized the importance of collaborating with students to cocreate their goals. Hinds Community College models this practice through the involvement of students in institutional policy change. Red Rocks Community College is also building on this work with its early alert system to better align advising for students.

Institutions are making strategic use of technology and data to enhance advising. The University at Albany uses the EAB Navigate platform to proactively connect students with resources based on early alerts. Salish Kootenai College has identified data-informed advising as a priority and is exploring new systems to strengthen this work. All awarded institutions touched on supporting faculty and advising staff by offering professional development opportunities; integrating intern, peer, and/or success coach support; or decreasing caseloads.

Taken together, these examples illustrate how institutions are leveraging their strengths and taking intentional steps to evolve their advising practices. Whether through cross-campus collaboration, student partnership, or the use of data and technology, each institution offers valuable insight into what it means to build advising systems that are equity driven and student centered. As this work evolves, these efforts serve as models and invitations for other institutions to reflect, adapt, and innovate in service of student success.

Visit the Advising Success Network website to learn more and discover additional case studies and awards. Together, these stories highlight the impact of collaborative, student-centered advising practices across higher education. ■





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