

## Proposed Student Success Area

**Goals:** To create a unified area that focuses on: (a) smooth transition of freshmen students from acceptance through their first year; (b) advising of undeclared students and those changing majors, integrated with career planning; (c) academic intervention and support for students in need; (d) assistance to departments with internship placement and advisor training; and (e) serving as a resource for faculty with advising questions.

**Vision:** To have a single, easily accessed, “high touch” place central to campus where these functions can occur with some synergy.

**Rationale:** Longwood last year lost about 22 percent of its freshman class. The year before last we a little over 25 %. The freshman classes lately have been a bit less than 1000. When 30 students leave, they take with them about \$700, 000. When 220 of them do not come back, there is a large gap to fill. As an aside, both George Mason and VCU have higher freshmen retention rates than Longwood, and James Madison’s rate is in the low 90%. The student profile at each of these institutions is not much different from ours.

Obviously, we need to find a way to keep more of our students; but we understand that there is no one magic solution. Focusing on undeclared students and intervention and support, plus closer coordination of the process from admission through the end of the first year, seems like good places to attack attrition. Integration of career planning with academic advising made sense.

Undeclared students, the ones most likely to leave Longwood, were 20% of this past entering class; and they appear to be increasing for the incoming class. Having an intentional focus on undeclared students that can integrate them better into Longwood would seem to be a worthwhile strategy. Strengthening academic intervention and support so that more students succeed academically would also seem to be productive. So does creating a space for exploring other academic avenues for students who are changing their majors—voluntarily (out of interest) or involuntarily (cannot pass Praxis or get the GPA for Business Administration)—sounds like a good idea. Thus, we are proposing to weave together a functional area that is dedicated to these ends.

**Outcome:** Greater student persistence to graduation.

**Method:** The ideas have come from mainly the student success Program and Planning Team, recommended by Connie Gores (21 members), along with some input from vice-presidents. Team members visited Elon University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and James Madison University. Dr. Geoff Orth led the group that focused on advising and support issues.

**Current offices** and people that would be part of this reorganization:

Admissions  
First Year Experience Program  
    Sarah Whitley  
Career Services  
    Mary Meade Saunders  
    Ellen Masters  
    Lynn Estes  
    Nadine Garrett  
Disability Services  
    Sally Scott  
    Michael Rentschler  
Athletic Advising  
    position currently vacant (was Natasha Long)  
Learning Center  
    Rebecca Sturgill  
    Tonya Tran

To be overseen by Ken Perkins for time being

### **Possible New Positions Needed**

Two new counselor positions for undeclared advising  
Resources for Disability Services (one counselor position currently needed)  
Resources of Learning Center (not sure yet about needs for fulltime position or  
    a part-time faculty or graduate assistants.)  
Secretarial/receptionist position (could be reassigned or part-time)

**Possible reorganization of Career Services** into a James Madison University type  
model that would become

*Academic and Career Planning Center* (focusing on undeclared majors and  
students changing majors, and supporting departments with internship  
placements)

**Possible reorganization of Learning Center** to include Disability Services and Athletic  
Advising. (the Learning Center is no stranger to reorganization.)

Other costs would include any renovation costs assuming we find a place for this  
proposed area; salary adjustments if people take on additional duties.

Here is a small sample of institutions that currently have “Student Success” areas or divisions of various configurations—but all that we can find have a central focus on transition, advising and support:

James Madison University  
University of Missouri-Columbia  
University of Connecticut  
University of Cincinnati  
University of Kansas  
UNC Charlotte  
UNC Greensboro  
Eastern Illinois University  
Boise State University  
Valdosta State University  
University of Toledo  
Syracuse University  
Kansas State University  
University of Albany  
Florida State University  
George Mason University

Below is a description of how George Mason constructed its Student Success area. It is included just to show that we are not way out in front in doing something like we are proposing. By the way, GMU’s retention of freshmen went from about 75% to almost 82%. For a school that nature and size, this was a considerable increase in the number of students that showed up for their sophomore year.

“In 2001 GMU revamped its academic advising structure by combining the offices of Student Academic Affairs (SAA) and Academic Support and Advising Services (ASAS) to form Student Academic Affairs and Advising (SAAA) in order to more adequately address the school’s retention issues. By merging the two offices, GMU was better able to target at-risk students, such as transfers and undeclared no-preference majors, as well as provide basic advisory services to all undergraduates. Another important feature of SAAA is its location in the George W. Johnson Center. Identified by Student Success in College as a key component of GMU’s culture due to its central location in the middle of campus, the Johnson Center provides an easily recognizable place for students to access academic services, such as tutoring and career counseling.” From Educational Policy Institute’s *Best Practices, Student Success*.

**Key Questions and One Answer:**

Is this proposal academically sound?

If so, can we afford it?

Is it good for Longwood?

Does it have the potential for bad unintended consequences?

Is the timing for something like this good or bad?

Does this proposal need faculty support?

The answer to this question is yes, absolutely, it needs faculty to support it.

Without faculty support, the foundation of any proposal like this is shaky at best. Faculty have to believe that the resources will be beneficial to the academic enterprise and not create excessive administrative overhead that deflects resources from the essential mission of Longwood.

Will the faculty support it?