

Student Success Team:
Spring 2008 Survey Results

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Introduction

“The overarching goal of the SST is to foster, and improve, undergraduate student success. To accomplish this goal, the SST will – through its committees and members – implement programs, research, and other activities to help students attain their educational goals and help the University achieve its goals for undergraduate education” (Retrieved February 14, 2008 from http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/governance/fa/materials/2007_10_item3.shtml). Over the past year and a half, the Student Success Team (SST) at the University of Iowa has grown substantially in numbers and engaged in a number of activities, including general meetings, action committees, a retreat, and sharing of information via these meetings and through a listserv. Therefore, in February 2008 the UI Office of the Provost designed a survey to: 1) assess the effectiveness of the SST, 2) understand what members have learned from their membership, and 3) to gather ideas and suggestions for the future of the SST. The purpose of this report is to summarize the results from this survey.

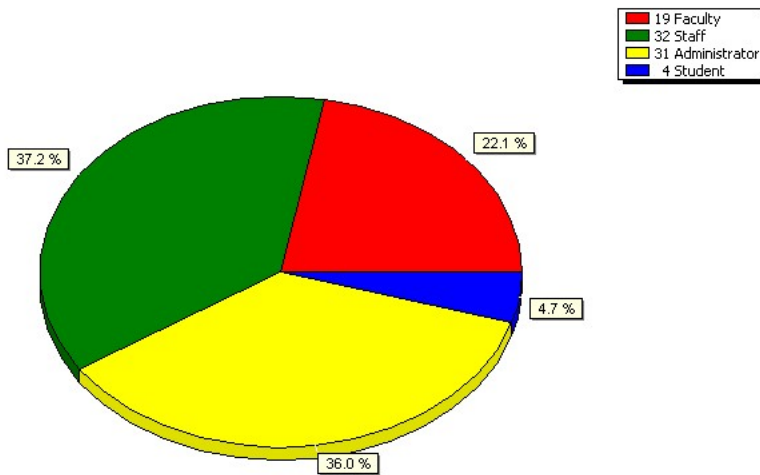
Methods

All members of the Student Success Team received an email invitation from Tom Rocklin to complete a web-based survey on their experiences with the SST. The survey consisted of twelve items, both close-ended and open-ended. The questions are provided in Appendix A. Quantitative data is reported as descriptive statistics. We analyzed the qualitative data using the constant comparative method, which allowed us to identify themes across open-ended responses.

Quantitative Results

The SST survey was administered over a ten-day period, from February 5th through the 14th. 86 of the 128-member SST completed the survey, resulting in a 67% response rate. The respondents included 19 faculty, 32 staff, 31 administrators and 4 students.

1) What is your primary role at UI?



Nine close-ended questions comprised the quantitative portion of the survey. We included both ordered and unordered response categories, using Likert scales for the former. Three of the questions included optional respondent comments. These questions sought to understand members' perceptions about their membership, SST communications and outcomes thus far.

SST Participation

When did you first attend a SST meeting?

Fall 2006:	23%
Spring 2007:	6%
Summer 2007 Retreat:	15%

September 14, 2007:	16%
November 30, 2007:	18%
Not yet attended a meeting:	19%

Participation in SST Activities:

July 2007 Retreat:	29
SST Executive Committee:	8
SST Action Committees:	46

Why did you join the SST?

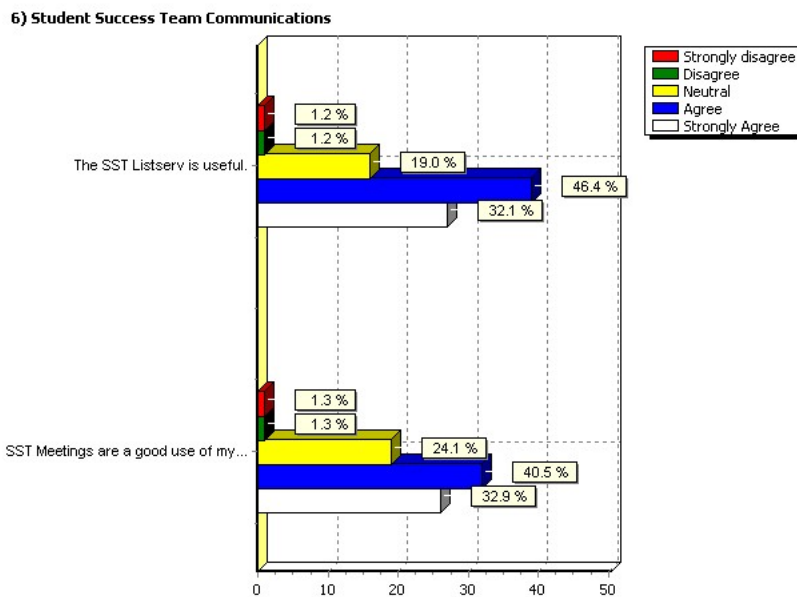
• I was invited to join	73
• I wanted to learn about undergraduate student success	36
• I am interested in facilitating undergraduate student success	64
• Student success is part of my job responsibilities	49
• I was interested in a topic covered in a general meeting	10
• I saw it as an opportunity for professional development	23
• A colleague/peer recommended it to me	16
• Other	7

Common themes among the comments regarding participation included the importance of communication among all university constituents and fostering a sense of a shared mission and investment in student success. One respondent commented, “It is important for professors and students to have open communication. Professors need to be in touch with undergraduates’ interests and issues.” Another wrote, “I believe that ultimately we are all employed because of our mission to educate the undergraduate student and should innately want to help.” Three respondents mentioned their job and its connection to the initiatives. One respondent indicated that his/her expertise lent itself to affecting change through this committee: “I believe embedding inclusive excellence into the student success initiatives is imperative. My expertise area blends well with the objectives of this initiative.”

SST Communication

The majority of respondents (69%) reported that two meetings per semester (as it is now) is the most productive number. Next, respondents shared their opinions on the student success team communications, including the listserv and meetings. We used a Likert scale with five ordered categories ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” for the following items:

The SST listserv is useful; SST meetings are a good use of my time:



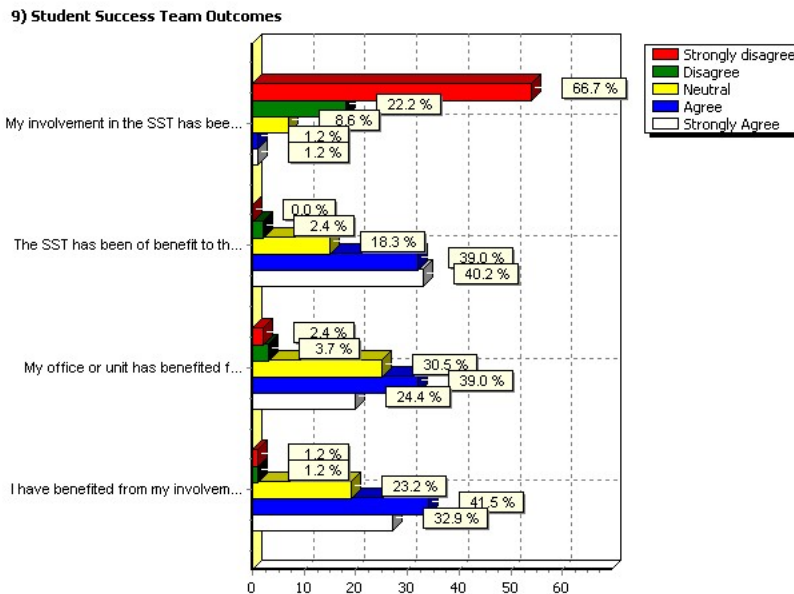
Respondent comments in these categories indicated that the improved email communication is appreciated, and the topics are relevant, but that the number of emails can be overwhelming and the text and conversation threads too long. Two respondents commented that they were overloaded with other job responsibilities but “hope to have more time for this soon.”

We used a four-item Likert scale, ranging from “never” to “always” for two questions expanding on the listserv and email topic. 62% reported that they have never posted an email to the SST listserv, but 48% “always” read the emails. There were no members who reported never having read a SST email posting.

SST Outcomes

The outcomes portion of the survey included four items on a Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”:

- My involvement in the SST has been a negative experience
- The SST has been of benefit to the university
- My office or unit has benefited from my involvement in the SST
- I have benefited from my involvement in the SST



Positive comments from members included:

- I always learn something from the SST
- This effort brings together a cross-section of campus and makes all of us aware of the importance of each unit that touches the lives of students. This should be a permanent process and part of every professionals’ job description
- It’s always great to talk to faculty who have an interest in teaching and learning; lots of great ideas
- This is a fantastic project

Suggestions for improvement included:

- A few people are unwilling to work in the SST
- Time pressures prevent much engagement
- Too early to tell. There has been a lot of talk, but no action
- We are not yet an action-oriented group
- Too new to tell

Two respondents wrote about the connection between the SST and their units. One member wrote, “My office will benefit from what we have learned once the committee has moved forward with action and implementation items related to student success.”

Qualitative Results

Three open-ended questions comprised the qualitative portion of the survey. The open-ended questions included:

1. What have you learned from your involvement in the SST?
2. What would make the SST more useful to you?
3. What suggestions do you have for future SST meeting topics, action committees, activities, etc.?

We analyzed responses to each question using the constant comparative method of data analysis to identify themes among the responses to that particular question. For the second and third questions, we provide lists of the suggestions SST members made, and then we comment on an idea threaded through those specific suggestions.

What SST Members Have Learned

We perceived three themes among the responses for the question about what members have learned from their involvement in the SST. The majority of responses fell in the first theme but other responses were worth noting in the second two themes. The three themes we created for the responses to the first question are:

- Faculty & Staff: Increasing Awareness of Each Other and Realizing the Potential of Working Together
- Challenges and Issues Facing Students

- Campus Initiatives

Faculty & Staff: Increasing Awareness of Each Other and

Realizing the Potential of Working Together

A significant number of responses to what members have learned from their membership in the SST seemed to address an increased awareness of others' interest in and perspectives on the undergraduate student experience and what "student success" means. Both faculty and staff expressed an increased awareness of the other. One respondent simply wrote, "I have learned a great deal about student culture and student success from a staff perspective at the University of Iowa." Another wrote, "I have learned that there are more faculty interested in student success than I expected" and similarly, another wrote that, "many faculty do care about undergraduate students." Still another wrote they had learned about the "breadth of the scope of people interested in student success." Another wrote, "I am very impressed with how much people care about the students here."

A significant number of respondents addressed not only a better understanding of others' perspectives but also an appreciation for how important it is that all constituents play a role in students' success at Iowa. One respondent wrote, "I have been pleasantly surprised by the overall campus interest, i.e., faculty, administrators, staff, in the topic of student success. However, I've also learned how important it is to emphasize that each one of us makes a difference in student success and to be successful this effort requires the attention of the entire campus." Another wrote, "It is also a learning experience to work with a cross-section of faculty and staff from all areas of the university. You get a better understanding of all the 'pieces' that affect and influence students." One

respondent simply shared, “I enjoy the community setting of faculty, staff and students as a united force.”

Promoting student success is a team effort in which faculty and staff must work together to maximize a learning environment for students. One respondent simply wrote, “SST has confirmed my belief that student success is everyone’s responsibility” while another wrote, “I have learned that we have an amazing group of professors, staff, and students on campus who are working together to find progressive ways forward.” With regards to creating a supportive environment, one respondent simply wrote, “how important we all can be!” Another respondent shared that, “the insights from the faculty vantage point, diversity of ideas, and energy/goodwill that this group provides has been informative and invigorating. I like the idea that we are in it together – combining our perspectives, experiences, and resources in order to develop helpful and effective programs.”

Further suggesting a prevalent theme of an increased awareness of each other and of the utility of “piecing together” different constituents’ views and perspectives to create an effective learning environment on campus, one respondent wrote, “SST presentations give everyone another piece in the puzzle to creating a picture of the current undergraduate experience and where we should head from here. You gain an understanding of the undergraduate experience from multiple perspectives. It is so exciting to bring together faculty, staff and students!”

One respondent reflected on the relationships among faculty, staff, and students when he/she wrote, “student/faculty/staff relationships are made to be far more

complicated than I suspect they need be. This begins and ends with what the University Administration expects but does not demand of faculty.”

Based on the wide range of responses like those above that highlighted respondents’ increased awareness of others and their interest in student success as well as the recognition of the team effort it takes to promote student success, we created this theme as the most pervasive for the question about what members have learned from their experience with the SST. Next, we will discuss the other two less prevalent but still significant themes we gleaned from the responses to the first open-ended question, “What have you learned from your involvement in the SST?”

Challenges and Issues Facing Students

The second theme we identified in the responses to the first open-ended question centered on respondents’ learning of the challenges and issues that UI (as an institution and campus) as well as UI students face. One respondent shared that he/she has learned, “a lot – I have learned more about the challenges facing both students and faculty/staff in helping students adjust to life at the university and once here, how to keep them here.” Another respondent simply noted the “difficulties of making ‘student success’ happen,” and similarly another wrote he/she learned “more about undergraduate adjustment to UI.” Still another respondent shared he/she has learned “what challenges current students face and how staff and faculty may contribute to students’ growth and achievement both academically and socially.”

Regarding students’ challenges, one respondent wrote about specific influences as well as noting the importance of having *evidence*: “It has confirmed WITH DATA many of my hypotheses about why undergraduate students succeed and fail, e.g., binge

drinking, not feeling or being connected to the university outside of classes, etc.”

Another respondent also addressed the importance of having *evidence* when he/she wrote about, “the importance of data gathering in our efforts... that what we think is happening may not be.”

Campus Initiatives

The final (and less significant) theme we created from the open-ended question regarding what members have learned from their experience with SST is an increased understanding of initiatives that exist across campus to promote student success. One respondent shared that he/she felt, “it’s also been good to find out that many of our initiatives dovetail with the interests and goals of the SST.” Another respondent wrote, “I have gained a broader perspective about all of the current programs and initiatives that support student success. Furthermore, the SST brings to the table areas in which the University of Iowa needs to grow and develop.” One wrote, “I have learned about initiatives going on across the campus” while another wrote he/she has learned “1) about efforts on this campus, 2) to a lesser extent, about national trends and practices.” Lastly, a respondent shared, “it is evident that many departments and individuals have projects, initiatives and programs. I can see the benefit of collaborating across units to be mindful of 1) stewardship of resources and 2) articulating a more intentional matriculation method within the UI system.”

What Members Said Would Make the SST More Useful

The second open-ended question on the survey was, “What would make the SST more useful?” Due to the small number of people who responded (40) to this question and the diversity of responses, we chose not to identify “themes,” but rather, we

consolidated the responses into a list that we feel captures respondents' most valuable suggestions for how to make the SST more useful. If we saw the suggestion more than once, a number for how many responses included that suggestion is in parentheses.

- More frequent updates from subcommittees (3)
- Remind the group of the big perspective
- More faculty input to get initiatives off the ground
- Increased faculty-staff dialogue about the challenges of promoting student success
- Implement more ideas/programs; show progress towards outcomes of the SST (i.e., let members know that there is an outcome being achieved as a result of their time and effort on the SST/committees) (8)
- Increase student participation (4)

What Members Suggested for the Future SST

The third open-ended question was, "What suggestions do you have for future SST meeting topics, action committees, activities, etc.?" Again, due to a small number of responses (39) that widely varied in content, rather than creating themes we provide a list of the range of diverse, specific suggestions the team made for future SST meetings and activities.

- Student panel
- Compare UI to other schools and learn how we can improve Iowa based on others' experiences
- Advising center talk/project on helping students select majors
- Something focused on retention of underrepresented students
- Discussion of how the mission of undergraduate education fits into the scheme of things at an R1 institution
- Continue to have speakers present briefly about what their offices are doing to enhance student success
- More long-term commitment to projects and assessment of institutional efforts to enhance student success
- Involve parents, alumni, and emeritus faculty in some way
- Broaden the discussion to what it means to get a liberal education in 21st-century America
- Continue to have chairs report on their activities and seek input from members
- Have a meeting topic on what staff can do to assist in making a student's experience in college successful

- Have a meeting topic on the data collected in surveys about what were contributing factors involved in students achieving success in college (e.g., have Ernie Pascarella present his thoughts on student success, student attitudes, etc.)
- A timeline of the various initiatives and implementation plans and how they fit together
- Something about the role of alcohol in our students' lives
- Tour of the main library and talk about how students today use the library buildings
- Some sort of recognition of first-year students who are academically successful
- Brainstorming session for alternative activities for students' free time
- Building a greater sense of community between students/faculty/staff
- Finding a way to recognize the faculty and staff on campus who go above and beyond their stated duties to help students succeed
- More information about how to increase the success of students to the University from a community college specifically
- Look at student success beyond the freshman year
- More initiatives to bring faculty into interpersonal contact with undergraduates
- How to increase student engagement/involvement on campus
- How to help self-motivated students develop leadership skills
- What staff members who are not routinely involved with students can do to become involved with student success
- Tom asked about blue sky ideas – what happened to those?
- Possibility of setting up institutional research center
- More faculty participation
- Veterans issues as part of the diversity of the student body
- Sharing about student success that impact more students (e.g., housing, facilities, library services)
- Anything about collaboration among various campus units to help facilitate student success
- Hearing about good projects that are underway here on campus can be inspiring
- How does SST help prepare students for global citizenship
- Make the leap from listening to topics of interests and creating actions for those topics
- What can/should we do about the campus drinking problem?

As noted above, we did not identify themes for the second two open-ended questions because of the wide variability of suggestions and because we felt creating major themes would dilute the specific suggestions that people made. However, one important message that we observed laced throughout the suggestions for making SST more useful and suggestions for future meetings/activities was a focus on *action* or an

indication that *change is being made* as a result of the SST's and committee's efforts.

We observed in the responses a need for members to know that the SST and committees are not only creating ideas but implementing them and demonstrating that the SST is having an impact on UI and students. Several suggestions included more reports from action committees, more report on program progress, and a clear timeline of efforts. In essence, we sensed that members want to know that the SST is *actually achieving* its mission to “implement programs, research, and other activities to help students attain their educational goals.”

Summary

Taking a step back from the specific data gathered through this survey and looking at the “big picture,” we believe respondents' feedback suggests the SST is a positive experience for most involved. Based on these results, we perceive the members of the SST are satisfied with their experience and are learning about others' perspectives on student success and initiatives on campus striving to enhance that success. In general, respondents appear to find the meetings, listserv, and other activities useful. In terms of improvement, there appears to be a general consensus that it is necessary that the SST is action-oriented and moving forward in its pursuit to implement programs on campus that facilitate student success. Members seem to want to know that the outcome of meetings, action committees, and their time takes the form of a *real* impact on UI's campus and students.

Appendix A

University of Iowa Student Success Team Survey

We are interested in your feedback about your experiences with the Student Success Team. Please take a few moments to answer these questions about the SST. We will use your feedback and thoughts to help direct improvements to the quality and efficiency of this important university team. **Submission Deadline: Thursday, February 14, 2008 at 5:00pm.**

What is your primary role at UI?

Faculty, Staff, Administrator, Student

When did you first attend a Student Success Team meeting?

Fall 2006; Spring 2007; Summer 2007 Retreat; September 14, 2007; November 30, 2007; I have joined SST but have not yet attended a meeting

Please indicate if you have participated in any of the following SST activities. Check all that apply.

- Retreat (July 2007)
- SST Executive Committee
- SST Action Committee (e.g., The Message Project)

Why did you join the SST? Check all that apply.

- I was invited to join
- I wanted to learn about undergraduate student success
- I am interested in facilitating undergraduate student success
- Student success is part of my job responsibilities
- I was interested in a topic covered in a general meeting
- I saw it as an opportunity for professional development
- A colleague/peer recommended it to me
- Other (please specify)

Additional comments:

The most productive number of SST general-topic meetings is/would be:

One per semester; Two per semester (as it is now);
Three per semester; One per month

Student Success Team Communications

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
SST Meetings are a good use of my time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The SST Listserv is useful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments:

How often, if ever, do you read e-mails sent to the SST listserv?

Never; Sometimes; Frequently; Always

Have you sent e-mails to the SST listserv?

Yes; No

Student Success Team Outcomes

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have benefited from my involvement in the SST.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My office or unit has benefited from my involvement in the SST.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The SST has been of benefit to the university.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My involvement in the SST has been a negative experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments:

What have you learned from your involvement in the SST?

What would make the SST more useful to you?

What suggestions do you have for future SST meeting topics, action committees, activities, etc.?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We value your participation and dedication to undergraduate student success at Iowa. Thank you, Tom Rocklin, Vice Provost and Dean of the University College

[This online survey is powered by WebSurveyor.](#)

