

## **Challenging Our Bears, Challenge Program for At-Risk Probation Students**

### **Institutional Description**

Missouri State University is a public, comprehensive university system with a mission in public affairs. The University's purpose is to develop fully educated persons with a focus on ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement. Missouri State University has four physical campuses, with the main campus located in Springfield, Missouri. Satellite campuses are located in West Plains and Mountain Grove, MO, and in Dalian, China.

Missouri State has seven academic colleges and one graduate college. Students may choose from over 180 undergraduate major options and over 100 graduate program options.

Over one-third of the students enrolled at Missouri State University are classified as first generation college students. Over forty percent of students at Missouri State are classified as transfer students. Missouri State takes pride in providing excellent support resources for all students and encourages programs that service specific populations of students.

### **Program Development**

***How:*** The Director of the Business Advisement Center, Sandy Culver, and Karmen Brewer, Senior Academic Advisor, brainstormed about resources and strategies to enhance advisement for students on academic probation. Once an outline was developed, the Director wrote a proposal to the Dean of the College of Business for funds and approval to implement the program.

***When:*** Implementation of the "Challenging Our Bears" program began in the Fall 2013 semester.

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**Why:** Advisors in the College of Business at Missouri State were struggling to have adequate time to advise student who had been placed on academic probation.

Discussions in staff meetings in the Business Advisement Center indicated that advisors felt that the majority of students on academic probation inevitably would be placed on academic suspension and would be required to sit out a semester or more at some point in the not-too-distant future. The advisors were frustrated that students did not seem to understand their serious academic situation. Advisors discussed the numerous contributing factors for poor academic success. While there were many similar contributing factors, they felt that each unique, individual situation must be addressed.

### ***Problems Encountered:***

- Changing the organizational culture that presumed that students on academic probation would eventually be suspended from the University.
- Gaining advisor buy-in. ○ Gaining student buy-in.
- Time shortage for printing materials and additional advisement meetings.
- Changes in personnel. ○ Cost of materials.

Many of these problems are of an ongoing nature. However, students are improving their GPA and learning new study skills and time management skills.

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### *Organizational Concerns:*

University Constraints – While advisors wanted to require students to meet with them multiple times during the semester, the University only required that the students meet with advisors for registration release. Advisors needed to be firm with students to encourage them to meet on more than one occasion.

**Budget:** The College of Business Dean agreed to pay for the materials as long as costs were not excessive (generally agreed upon less than \$1500/year) and that it could be shown that overall improvement in student's academic standing was gained. The Dean was very supportive and allowed that the Director of the Business Advisement Center would determine evaluation methods and whether the program should be continued.

### *Time Commitment:*

One of the greatest constraints was the amount of time it required for the advisors to document and compile the data from the project

## **Goals and Objectives**

There are several goals and objectives for the *Challenging Our Bears* program.

1. Provide advisors the tools needed to better assist students on probation.
2. Provide students on probation the resources they need to get back in good standing and complete their degree.

To help provide the students on probation with the resources they need, these objectives were developed.

1. Assist students in assessing the underlying areas that caused the student to be on probation.

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2. Establish a personal success plan for each individual addressing those specific needs of the student.

### **Description of the *Challenging Our Bears* program**

The program was designed to provide resources and information to students on probation early in the semester. Each student receives a “Succeed” book that offers campus and off campus resources, information on how to work with their instructors and tips on time management, note taking, and exam preparation. To individualize the information for the student, a Personalized Academic Success Plan is also included. The book also contains success strategies on how to get back in Good Standing as well as what being on probation means to the student. Copy appears in appendix.

The program entails early contact with the student to get them in to make an appointment with their advisor. The initial advisement appointment entails working through the “Succeed” book to assess the underlying issues that have caused being on probation. After discussing the areas needing additional help, the advisor and student together come up with a Personalized Plan for Academic Success. This is a guided to do list for the student to complete before their next appointment. A follow up appointment is made after mid-term grades are posted to see the student’s progress as well as to see how they completed their Plan for Academic Success. Modifications may be made to their plan at this time to provide additional assistance.

A final appointment at the end of the semester is provided to help the student evaluate their own performance, successes and failures of their plan, and what changes are needed for the next semester.

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### Procedures Used in Program Evaluation

*Quantitative Measurements:* For quantitative measures, we used changes in the student's academic status. We looked at whether the students were able to get back in good standing, remained on probation, or were suspended. We also looked to see if their GPA had improved from the previous semester. *Of note, only 40% of the students on academic probation raised their GPA in Fall 2012. In Fall 2013, after the first semester of the program, 67% of the students raised their GPA. Since then, at least 64% of the students on academic probation have raised their GPA after going through the program.*

The following pages show some of the statistics that have been tracked.

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### Challenging Our Bears Statistics

<p>After Fall 2012: Of 215 students on probation 54 were in good standing (25%) 98 were continued on probation (46%) 17 were suspended (8%) 46 were reinstated on probation (21%) 80 registered for Spring 2013 (37%) 86 were able to raise GPA (40%)</p>	<p>After Spring 2013: Of 190 students on probation 63 were in good standing (33%) 78 were continued on probation (41%) 26 were suspended (13%) 16 were reinstated on probation (8%) 112 registered for Fall 2013 (59%) 93 were able to raise GPA (49%)</p>
<p>Fall 2013: Challenge program begins 186 students on probation in program We gave out 102 Challenge Books. (56%) After semester: 66 were in good standing (35%) 125 were able to raise GPA (67%) 114 registered for Spring 2014. (61%)</p>	<p>Spring 2014: Challenge program continues 232 students on probation in program We gave out 175 Challenge Books. (75%) After semester: 85 were in good standing (37%) 172 were able to raise GPA (74%) 108 registered for Fall 2014 (47%)</p>
<p>Fall 2014: Updated Challenge Book 187 students on probation in program We gave out 68 books. (37%) After semester: 72 were in good standing (38%) 122 raised at least one GPA (65%) 101 registered for Spring 2015 (54%)</p>	<p>Spring 2015: Added Success Coach meeting for freshmen 261 students on probation in program We gave out 162 challenge books (62%) After semester: 99 were in good standing (38%) 188 were able to raise GPA (72%) 137 registered for Fall 2015 (52%)</p>
<p>Fall 2015: Continued Success Coach meeting for freshmen 124 students on probation in program We gave out 74 books (60%) After semester: 55 were in good standing (44%) 86 were able to raise GPA (69%) 74 registered for Spring 2016 (60%)</p>	<p>Spring 2016: Continued Success Coach meeting for freshmen 251 student on probation in program We gave out 93 books (37%) After semester: 105 were in good standing (42%) 168 were able to raise GPA (67%) 137 registered for Fall 2016 (55%)</p>
<p>Fall 2016: Updated Challenge Book 164 students on probation in program We gave out 47 books (29%) After semester: 67 were in good standing (41%) 105 were able to raise GPA (64%) 91 registered for Spring 2017 (55%)</p>	<p>Spring 2017: Challenge program continued 232 student on probation in program We gave out 74 books (32%) After semester: 75 were in good standing (32%) 159 were able to raise GPA (64%) 112 registered for Fall 2017 (48%)</p>

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After Semester:	# on probation	% raised GPA	% off probation	% returned	% suspended
Fall 2012	215	40%	25%	37%	8%
Spring 2013	190	49%	33%	59%	14%
Fall 2013	186	67%	33%	61%	27%
Spring 2014	232	74%	37%	47%	34%
Fall 2014	187	65%	39%	54%	37%
Spring 2015	261	72%	38%	52%	37%
Fall 2015	124	69%	44%	60%	30%
Spring 2016	251	67%	42%	55%	34%
Fall 2016	164	64%	41%	55%	31%
Spring 2017	232	64%	32%	48%	45%

Year	Total # in Study	# in Good Standing	# GPA improved
Fall 2013 – Spring 2014	418	152 (36%)	296 (71%)
Fall 2014 – Spring 2015	448	171 (38%)	310 (69%)
Fall 2015 – Spring 2016	375	160 (43%)	254 (68%)
Fall 2016 – Spring 2017	396	142 (36%)	254 (64%)

Another measure was to see if students registered for next semester. Here are the numbers:

Year	Total # in Study	# Registered	# Suspended	# who could have registered
Fall 2013 – Spring 2014	418	235 (56%)	130 (31%)	53 (13%)
Fall 2014 – Spring 2015	448	216 (48%)	166 (37%)	66 (15%)
Fall 2015 – Spring 2016	375	211 (56%)	123 (33%)	41 (11%)
Fall 2016 – Spring 2017	396	202 (51%)	155 (39%)	39 (10%)

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*Qualitative Measurements:* Advisors were asked to keep a log of their advising appointments with the students on probation. This allowed us to report reactions of the program of the students and advisors. Some of the recorded comments were as follows:

### *Positive:*

“Wish I could have had this book in my first year seminar class.”

“Thank you for taking the time to go over this with me.”

“I like learning to study using repetition with the five day exam study plan.”

“The book is great! I wish I had been on probation earlier.”

### *Negative:*

“I know what I need to do so I don’t need this.”

“Can you just tell me what to take next semester?”

Advisors also indicated these comments:

### *Positive:*

“Great improvement in midterm grades.”

“Student is working closely with instructors and using the tutoring services for Math.”

“Since works full-time, has decided to only take 6 hours.”

“Student was very open to suggestions and making changes in time management.

### *Negative:*

Student didn’t want to go over book.

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Student not receptive to any of the information.

### **Results/Outcomes – Impact on students, advisors, and College of Business**

Each academic year varies, but there were consistently over a third of the students on probation that were able to return to good standing. The number of students whose GPA improved was also steadily between 64 to 71%. Even if students were still on probation or suspended, they made some improvement.

The qualitative reaction statements were more positive than negative and provided advisors with useful feedback for approaching students on probation in the future. Student issues are not always the easiest to discuss so we can learn from our previous appointments. We also looked to see if eligible students did register for the next semester. Around half of the students who were on probation, registered for the next semester. When you look at the number who were suspended and not eligible to register, you can see that between 10 and 15% of the students who were on probation did not register. This is a population we need to target to retain.

### **Potential for adaptations by other institutions**

The *Challenging Our Bears* program can be adapted to any institution. A resource book including their on campus and off campus resources could be assembled along with other information they deemed important for their students. Advisors can proactively meet with their students on probation to help them assess their underlying issues and develop a personalized plan of action for each student.

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### **Summary**

The “Challenging Our Bears” program used an approach of targeted intrusive advising for at-risk students on academic probation. To assist these students, a “Success Book” including self-assessment and advisement tools was compiled. Advisors were trained on using the book with their at-risk students in early semester, mid-semester, and end of semester meetings. Feedback was positive and the number of students who raised their GPAs increased. There is an increased time commitment involved and some budgetary costs, but the program could be adapted to most institutions.