

The Building Blocks to First Year Student Success



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Introduction

Recently, we proposed a program for helping first year students build a strong foundation for their academic careers and beyond (NACADA, 2015). Our program involves 4 biannual informational/networking seminars dedicated to teaching first year students how to succeed in college. These topics include degree planning, degree evaluations, registration advice and high-impact opportunities. The program also includes an introduction to our Career Center, and discussion of research opportunities offered by our departmental faculty. These seminars are aimed to help equip students with skills that promote successful goal pursuit. They also provide an opportunity for many meaningful peer interactions during the student's first year of college. This presentation aims to introduce this model to NACADA, and presents preliminary findings supporting the programs efficacy.

SEMINAR #1 – TAMU Degree Evaluation

The degree evaluation is an important tool that is like a cross between a transcript and a degree plan, showing students (and advisors!) what requirements are satisfied by the courses students have already taken, and what requirements they still have left. By reading and understanding their evaluation, students will see classes they have transferred, taken, or are currently taking and where each of those courses applies. The degree evaluation will help keep the student on track for graduation.

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SEMINAR #2 – TAMU Degree Planner

As time to degree becomes increasingly important, more and more institutions are formalizing the degree-planning process. In some states, such as Texas, it is already mandatory for all first-year students to complete a 4-year degree planner – a semester-by-semester layout of the classes they are planning on taking during their collegiate experience. Degree planning is a useful tool for students, and especially important for planning a more strategic college experience. Degree planning gives first year students the “whole picture” and better prepares them for what their future in college looks like. This will make it easier for them to effectively schedule their classes, interact with advisors, ask the right questions, and graduate on time.

SEMINAR #3 – Registration Guidance and Career Information

Prior to the semester enrollment period, advisors offer valuable information to ease the registration process for students. Advisors discuss procedures, degree requirements, and review various TAMU websites. In addition, a liaison from the TAMU Career Center discusses the services offered, networking opportunities, and résumé building. It is critically important to plan ahead so that the student chooses courses or programs that fit their degree plan and supports their career goals.

SEMINAR #4 – High-Impact Practices

Undergraduate research, participation in field experiences, and studying abroad are three areas considered high-impact experiences that promote student success. Why are high-impact programs so important during the first year in college? Why should students study abroad? Involvement in these practices is a way for students to earn academic credit toward their degrees, enhance skill sets for employment and/or post-baccalaureate programs, and increase starting salaries.

Preliminary Findings

To examine the effectiveness of our program we compared relevant outcomes from a year before we implemented the seminars with the same outcomes a year after we integrated the seminars into our curriculum. Preliminary results suggest the percentage of psychology majors on probation decreased during this time. These preliminary data the necessity and benefits of our seminars.

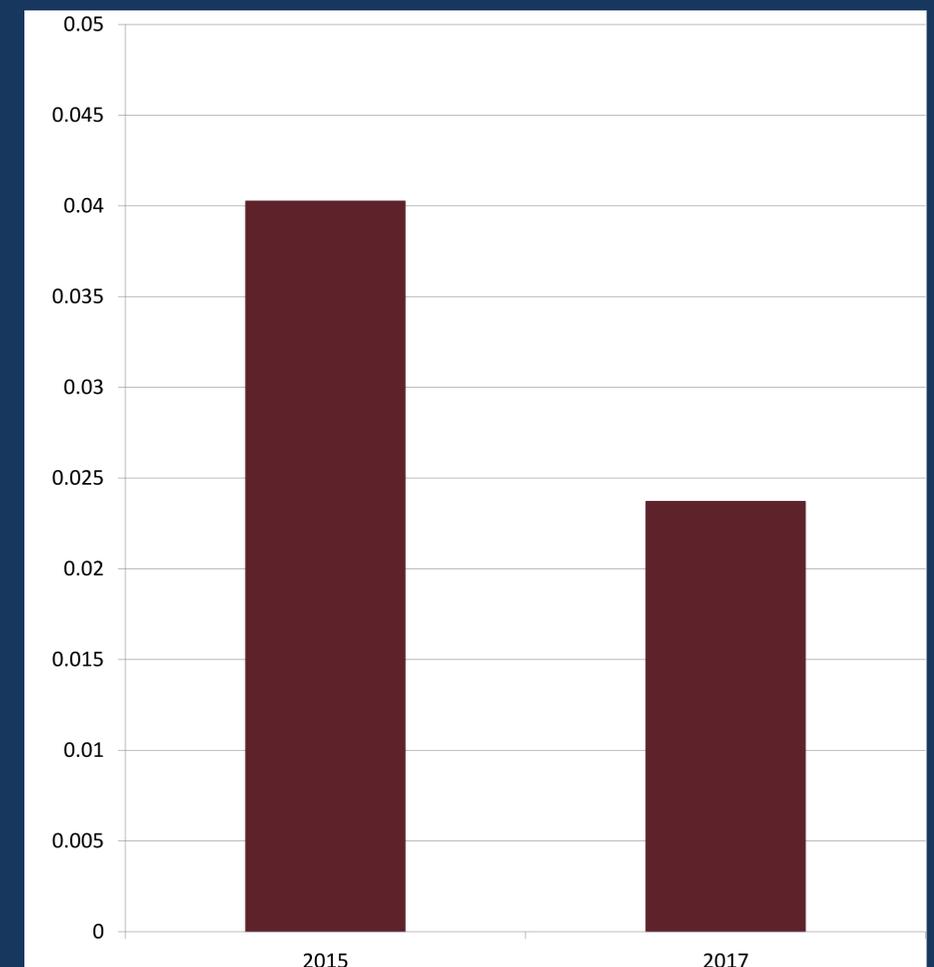


Figure 1. Percentage of Psychology Majors on Probation