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To: Mike Licari, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

From: John Murray, Dean

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RE: Student Success Plans from CAS

These plans come from 16 academic departments, and three additional programs in Philosophy, Science Education, and Social Studies Education.   As you know, CAS is the largest undergraduate college at ISU. The department with the largest undergraduate enrollment is Criminology and Criminal Justice, followed by Psychology, Communication, then Art and Design, and Music. All plans sought to accomplish the following: to improve student retention, improve persistence toward graduation, and ultimately 4 and 6 year graduation rates.

Plans were revised (from versions completed during the 2014-15 academic year), I provided feedback, then chairs revised the plans again (collaborating with their faculty colleagues). The resulting plans are stronger and more specific, pointing to actions that will lead to improvements in first year retention, persistence to graduation, and ultimately graduation rate.   Common elements among all plans include: enhancing faculty connection with students, improving mechanisms to assist students through gateway general education courses, re-examining (and in some cases overhauling) advising practices, and changing curricula which may have created barriers to graduation. Also, all plans include action steps associated with accomplishing the stated goals.

All details are captured in the individual plans. However, let me summarize a few general points:

Recruitment and Retention Efforts:

Most, if not all, plans aimed to increase their recruitment practices but the revisions were more intensely focused on improving freshman-to-sophomore retention. With respect to the latter, you will notice a number of plans focusing on improving and increasing effective communication with new majors (e.g., Communication, Science Education, Earth and Environmental Systems (EES), Political Science; Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics (LLL); Multidisciplinary Studies (MST)). Many plans mentioned strategies to explicitly link new students to departmental faculty (MST; Psychology; Criminology). Others specified actions that improve the connections between students and their major department, even in their freshman year (Music, English, LLL). Psychology explicitly identified actions to review their "majors-only" section of PSY 101 to see if it is helpful and working to improve student retention. Generally, many plans mentioned increasing and improving the link to freshman advising (in the UC) and connecting new students to the major department.

Improving Persistence and Graduation:

Although departments pointed to a variety of action steps to improve persistence and graduation, there were some common themes among the plans. All Departments will engage in the regular practice of auditing each student's academic record frequently beyond the freshman year. Some will monitor it every semester (e.g., Theater), for others that is not possible. All departments will do an explicit face-to-face audit with students at around the 60-90 hour mark. This one, single effort should improve graduation rate because students will be explicitly reminded, in a face to face situation, of where they are with respect to their degree requirements. Some departments (e.g., Math and Computer Science (MCS), Biology, Chemistry and Physics) are concerned that students are not poised for success in early major courses because of poor preparation. Therefore, MCS wanted to re-assess the efficacy of the current system of using the MAPLE TA (as a diagnostic tool for math placement). Other diagnostic interventions were mentioned by some departments so that students would be placed in the appropriate level of their introductory course (see Biology).

Other general areas of focus are as follows:

- A review, and in some cases, an overhaul of advisement procedures. In many cases, more intrusive advising (see Theater; EES, Political Science, Biology; MST, LLL, Communication, Psychology, English, History)
- Better use of assessment data to improve curriculum and remove barriers to graduation (e.g., Biology, Music, Psychology)
- Proposing new changings in course scheduling that will facilitate better student placement (Art and Design; Music)
- Offering more distance classes (e.g., Chemistry and Physics)
- Linking with the Career Center and professional world (through bringing in speakers, intentional connections with the Career Center). (all departments)
- Helping students connect with faculty and activities of the department (e.g., through research, through community building activities [Communication, Criminology, all sciences, LLL, MST).
- Rethink the role of student organizations in student engagement, persistence, and graduation. (e.g., Biology, Chemistry and Physics, Science Education)
- Development of Living/Learning Communities (Art, Psychology)

I invite you to view these plans closely, to see how faculty and chairs have been innovative in their approaches to improving the success of our students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.