

Student Success and Empowerment Initiative

2014-15 Annual Report

Submitted by Amy Aldous Bergerson, Director

20 July, 2015



Introduction

The Student Success and Empowerment Initiative (SSEI) is an integral component of the mission of Undergraduate Studies to provide students with “transformative undergraduate experiences,” and of the University of Utah’s focus on ensuring that each undergraduate has a meaningful and successful experience at the U. In this annual report, we highlight our accomplishments during the 2014-15 academic year, provide data to illustrate our impact on the University of Utah campus, tie our work to the three Undergraduate Studies “Big Goals”, and highlight our contributions to the broader University community. Additionally, this report outlines the SSEI goals for the upcoming year.

Our Mission

The mission of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative (SSEI) is to support students in making the most of their University of Utah experience. As caring, knowledgeable professionals, Student Success Advocates engage and empower undergraduate students in exploring and clarifying their interests and goals, overcoming personal and academic challenges, and connecting to campus resources and opportunities. Our holistic, individualized, mobile approach allows us to meet students right where they are.

Our Staff

The current staff of the SSEI consists of:

Amy Aldous Bergerson, Director

Jon Bernal, Student Success Advocate

Christine Contestable, Student Success Advocate

Wazir Jefferson, Student Success Advocate

Stephanie Santarosa, Student Success Advocate

Juan Rios, Administrative Assistant

Sydney Magana, Undergraduate Student Intern

2014-15 Accomplishments

During fiscal year 2014-15, our goals focused on the three big goals identified by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. The following summary describes our major accomplishments in these three areas: every entering student in a learning community; every student has at least one deeply engaged learning experience (President Pershing’s Presidential Promise); and, every student has a Plan to Finish and is supported by student success advocates, mentors, and advisors.

Every entering student in a learning community or a living and learning community: The Student Success and Empowerment Initiative has the opportunity to influence the pre-college plans of

prospective and new University of Utah students through its participation in recruitment events such as Bringing the U to You and new student orientation. Additionally, we work closely with students in LEAP and Block U, supporting their success through holistic and individual attention. The following goals guided our planning for the 2014-15 fiscal year:

GOAL: Continue to partner with the Office of Recruitment and Admissions in pre-college events.

OUTCOMES: Accomplishing this goal required the development of a rotation schedule in which each SSA participated in these events. Additionally, planning for the participation of SSAs in these events necessitated ensuring that our regular campus activities were adequately covered when events occur during our regular operating hours (8 AM to 8 PM). To meet this goal, we developed protocols for assigning event participation that ensure the burden of off-hour activities is spread throughout our team.

SSAs participated in Bringing the U to You in the following locations: San Diego/Los Angeles, Dallas/Houston, Denver, Santa Clara, St. George, Provo, Ogden, West Jordan, and Glendale. The unique nature of our initiative is a selling point for both students and parents who are considering the University, and the opportunity to begin connecting students with learning communities, cohort programs, and other deep engagement opportunities on campus before they even arrive is highly beneficial.

GOAL: Develop a strong knowledge of learning community opportunities on campus that are appropriate for a wide range of students.

OUTCOMES: Accomplishing this goal required that the SSEI continue to develop relationships with departments, programs and individuals involved with the development and maintenance of learning communities on campus. SSAs have been involved with the Block U program since its inception; this year, we focused on building our relationship with LEAP, adding assigned LEAP sections to our responsibilities. Additionally, we provided trainings and leadership development for the Beacon Scholars and made presentations for the New University Scholars.

ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS: In addition to accomplishing these specific goals, the SSEI honed its participation in University of Utah orientation programs. SSAs attended every new and transfer student orientation, introducing themselves to over **2500** students new to the University, and collecting contact information for students interested in meeting once school started. Over **2000** follow-up emails were sent to students three weeks into fall semester, asking if they would like to meet with the SSA. Over **200** students responded positively to these emails and SSAs continue to meet with these students, exploring with them the many possibilities available for learning community and cohort experiences on campus.

Every student has at least one deeply engaged learning experience—President Pershing's Presidential Promise: Through their direct work with students, SSAs can significantly influence their awareness of the myriad opportunities for engaging experiences available on campus. Our 2014-15 goals

centered on our individual relationships with students and the importance of providing meaningful, accurate information regarding these experiences.

GOAL: Engage in professional development opportunities that allow a deeper knowledge and understanding of: college student development, college student success and retention strategies, assessment, use of social media for engaging students, and strategies for encouraging the engagement of specific underserved and underrepresented populations of students.

OUTCOMES: We developed an in-house in-service rotation, with SSAs and the director sharing new theories, approaches to student interactions, ideas about diversity and communication, and the use of personality types in our work. Additionally, we brought individuals from around campus to our meetings to increase our understanding of resources, information, and interaction skills. Examples: Brad Lundahl (motivational interviewing); Lori McDonald (VAWA reporting requirements); Women's Resource Center (comprehensive view of services available for students); and, ASUU (connecting with student organizations and partnering with student government). We also presented on our work with students at the NASPA Region V conference, the UAAC Annual Conference, and the NASPA National Meeting.

GOAL: Increase the depth of our relationships with faculty and academic departments.

OUTCOMES: SSA liaisons with academic departments enabled us to increase our understanding of changes within these departments and our ability to identify helpful individuals in these spaces. As much as possible, we refer students to individuals, rather than departments. Additionally, we began work on developing student success modules that can be offered by faculty within their courses, a project that will come to fruition in 2015. Finally, along with our Marketing and Communication partners, we released an article in the new University newsletter targeted at teaming with faculty to support students.

ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Most important, related to this big UGS goal, is our work with individual students to enhance their experiences at the University of Utah. To allow us to fully report the impact of these efforts, we refined our tracking system and our outcomes and satisfaction survey. The data reported below reflect our work from July, 2014 through June, 2015, and all categories illustrate significant increases from the previous fiscal year.

Light interactions: Light interactions consist primarily of initial conversations with students in which SSAs introduce themselves, large classroom visits, tabling, or other presentations in which SSAs do not interact deeply with individual students. Light interactions are significant for ensuring student success, because they inform students about the work of the SSEI and raise their awareness of the supports available to them on campus. The numbers below show a **177%** in our light interactions during fiscal year 2014-15.

FY 2014-15 light interactions: **10,551**

FY 2013-14 light interactions: **3796**

Student Success Advocates are not on campus when classes are not in session. Between 1 July, 2014 and 30 June, 2015, SSAs worked 38 weeks, during which time they engaged in approximately **277 light interactions per week**. This equates to approximately **55 light interactions per SSA per week**.

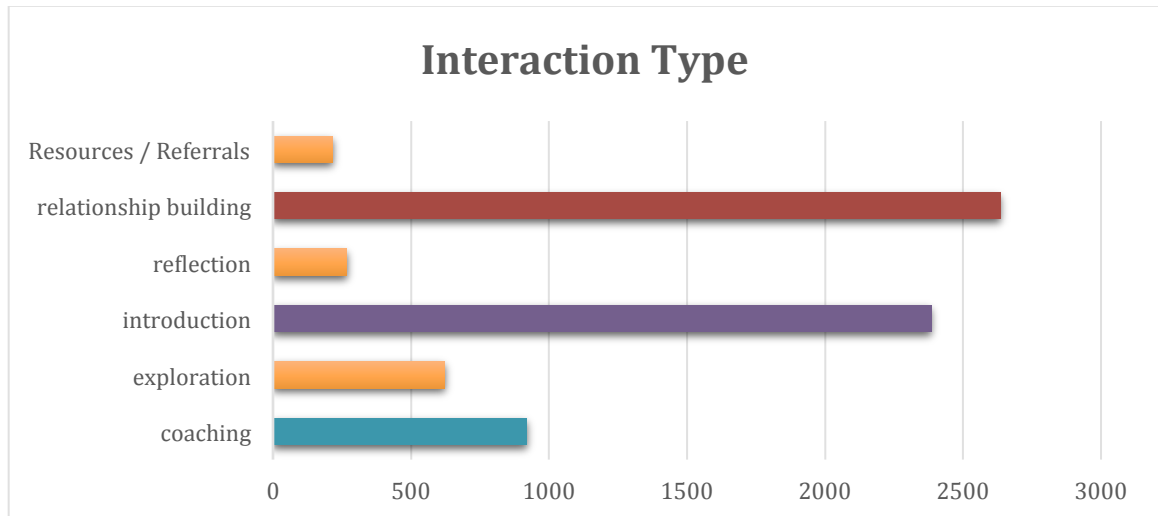
Significant interactions: Significant interactions are those in which SSAs move beyond basic introductions, are able to gather student contact information, and in which they engage more deeply with students. Significant interactions include initial conversations with students and follow-up interactions via email, text, phone, or in person. We **increased significant interactions over three times** this year.

FY 2014-15 significant interactions: **9871**

FY 2013-14 significant interactions: **2841**

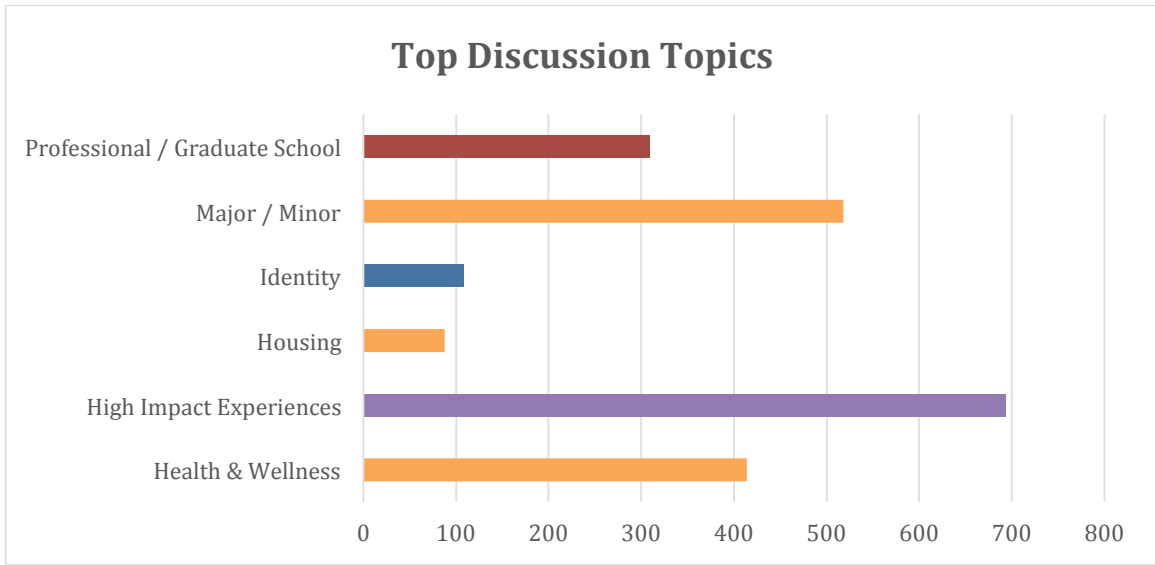
Figure 1 illustrates the types of significant interactions in which SSAs engage with students. Relationship building is a significant activity for SSAs. The impact of these relationships with students is illustrated by qualitative comments from students provided later in this report.

Figure 1: Interaction Types



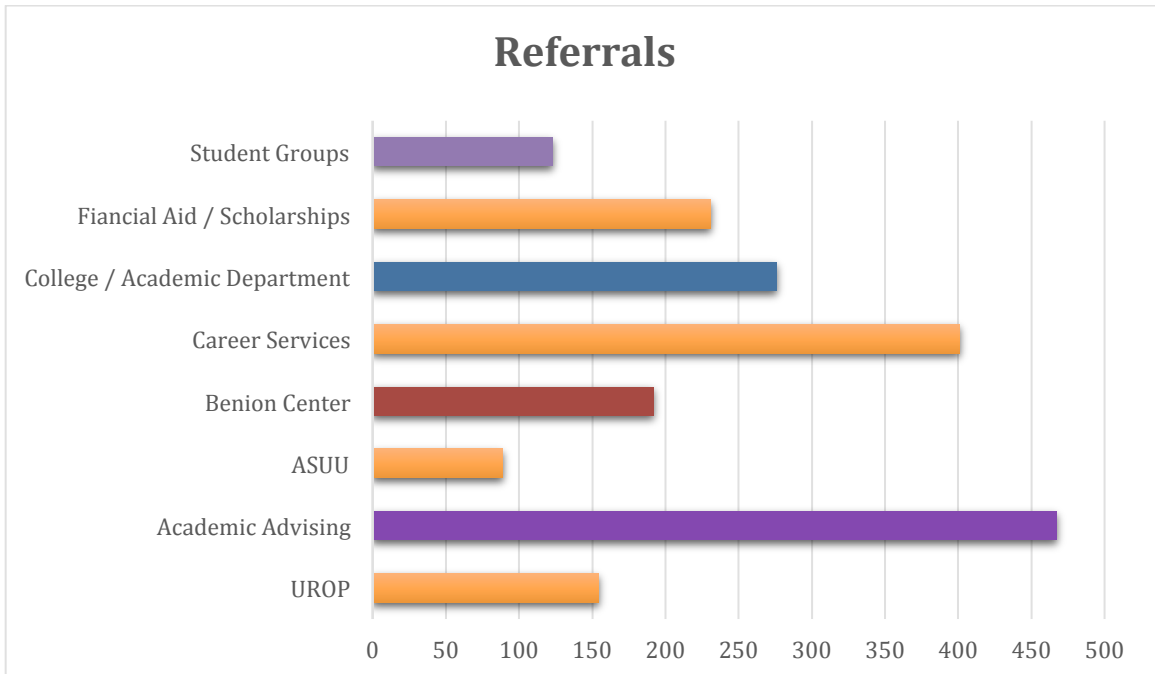
Because SSAs are not tied to any single department (e.g., academic advising, counseling center), they are able to develop deep relationships with students that allow them to support students in a wide variety of ways. The top six topics SSAs discuss with students are high impact experiences, major/minor exploration, health and wellness, professional/graduate school, identity, and housing (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Top Discussion Topics



SSAs also cultivate a basic knowledge of many aspects of the University of Utah campus. When students' needs surpass an SSA's knowledge, they provide referrals to specific individuals in various University programs and departments. Figure 3 illustrates the top referral areas for SSAs.

Figure 3: Top Referrals



In the 38 weeks worked by SSAs between 1 July, 2014 and 30 June, 2015, they engaged in approximately **259 significant interactions per week**; approximately 52 per SSA. As shown below, **83% of these significant interactions were follow-ups.**

Follow-ups: Follow-ups are what makes the SSEI unique on campus. Our goal is for every significant interaction to result in a follow-up interaction of some type. These include providing information, checking to see how a student is progressing on goals, meeting to discuss interests more deeply, or simply dropping a message to ask a student how they are doing. The numbers below illustrate a **66% increase** in follow-ups with students.

FY 2014-15 percentage of significant interactions that are follow-ups: **83%**

FY 2013-14 percentage of significant interactions that are follow-ups: **50%**

In addition to tracking student contacts, in about the 5th week of the semester SSAs sent a satisfaction and outcomes survey to all students with whom they interacted during the previous semester. Data from the spring 2015 survey indicate that students (**94%**) would contact a Student Success Advocate in the future, and that they (**96%**) would recommend an SSA to a friend. Additionally, the following representative qualitative comments illustrate the difference that working with an SSA can have on students' experiences.

When asked what they had done differently after meeting with an SSA, students responded:

I have been more aware of the spaces on campus that I occupy and am now conscientious of how I can positively impact those spaces. Speaking with my Student Success Advocate made me feel better about myself because it made me realize that "hey wow, I do a lot for this school and I should accredit myself more". I am learning to invest in myself and to understand that everything I do, I do because I want to and not because I feel obligated to.

I found more resources than I thought were available for scholarships and funding which in turn left be able to continue schooling here are the University of Utah.

I started to do some activities in the university, like yoga, and outside the university too, with a volunteer work. And it helped me to find research opportunities and internships.

I have worked on taking steps towards figuring out my major and other opportunities to take advantage of on campus.

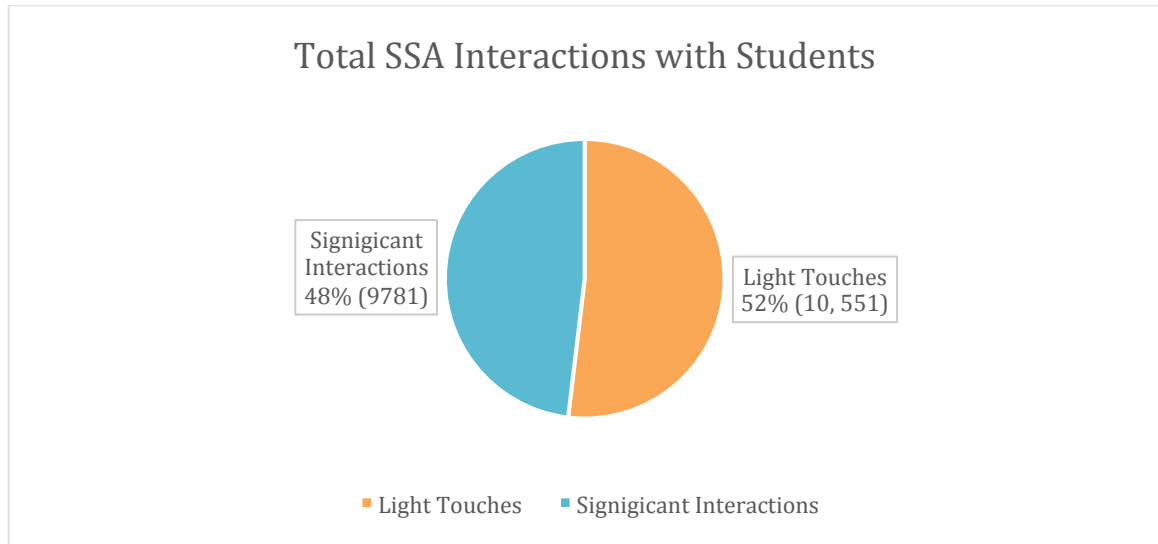
I am involved with more people and making wonderful new friends. It really helps to get by in the world because of it. I am also taking more initiative in planning events, which I never saw myself every doing, but it's really great nonetheless.

Became involved with a very exciting leadership program. - Became involved and in contact with a newspaper campus opportunity.

The above comments illustrate how SSAs connect students to the deep learning experiences available on campus. From encouraging students to engage in undergraduate research, to engaging with Career Services, SSAs assist students in understanding the resources that are

available for enhancing both their time at the University and the value of their degree. In summary, SSAs engaged in over 20,000 specific interactions with University of Utah students. Figure 4 shows that slightly over half of these interactions were light interactions and introductions, and just under half were deeper interactions in which relationships were cultivated and nurtured to support students in their academic success.

Figure 4: Total SSA Interactions



Every student has a Plan to Finish and is supported by student success advocates, mentors, and advisors: The Student Success and Empowerment Initiative was instrumental in the development of the Plan 4, contributing directly to its creation and providing feedback and ideas for its use with students. Our goals in this area focused on the use of the Plan 4 and other planning tools in our student interactions.

GOAL: Develop a strategy for assisting students in using the Plan 4 as they plan their time at the University of Utah.

OUTCOMES: As a team we created several uses for the Plan 4 tool in our work with students. The Plan 4 provides a structure for our conversations with students about what their meaningful University experiences will be.

GOAL: Expand our understanding of how community, self, campus life, and academics play into students' development.

OUTCOMES: Professional development and in-service activities have allowed us to build our understanding of how different students engage in various ways with the institution to enhance their success.

GOAL: Develop additional resources for working with students including interest assessments, motivational tools, planning instruments, and information sheets.

OUTCOMES: SSAs have developed major cheat sheets for a number of majors on campus, lists of scholarships, motivational interviewing templates, test-taking and study skills

guides, and a number of other resources that they utilize in their conversations with students. We are in the process of further developing these tools to place them on our recently re-developed website this spring.

ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS: One of the most significant accomplishments related to our work with students is the fact that students who have engaged with Student Success Advocates feel like the University *cares about them*. At a large institution, where it is easy to feel like one in a crowd and no one even knows your name, the SSAs' work with students stands out. The following representative comments from the satisfaction and outcomes survey illustrate the amazing impact SSAs have on students' feelings about the University of Utah.

When asked what was most valuable about their interaction with the SSA, students responded:

They related very well with me and were not judgmental, it's good having someone you feel is on your level and part of your generation, it's more comfortable than going around to different offices and the flexibility of meeting anywhere almost anytime is fantastic!

It was just a simple, fun meeting where I could express myself fully and find ways to better my character.

I liked how holistic the approach was. We talked about everything, not just school, which I appreciated.

It was fantastic to have a friendly face that knew a lot about activities and student groups on campus. I also felt reassured to know someone cared about my success and involvement on campus.

It was really helpful to talk a majors and fitting in classes with someone who is more neutral than the advisors for each major or the honors college because they tend to be really focus on you completely the requirements in their department whereas the student success advocate was more concerned with really figuring out what is best for me.

It was the sincerity that my Student Success Advocate expressed to me that touched me the most. Like, doing this wasn't just a job to her, it was a true passion and she genuinely wanted to get to know me better and to find ways to help me out. Just the encouragement from her for me to be better and to do more was enough because it is not everyday that you meet someone who is willing to only talk about your strengths/challenges and who pushes you to succeed.

It was very helpful to have someone on campus helping me through a difficult time. I felt supported, encouraged, and less isolate; she offered direction and helped locate the people and offices needed to resolve my issue. I could speak freely and in confidence, and explore my options.

Meeting with Bryce made me feel important, it reassured me I was in the right place at the right time. Even though there are thousands of students in campus, there was someone within that made me feel welcome, and cared for.

Stephanie was very caring and empathetic with my situation, which made it easy to find realistic solutions to my financial situation. She was constantly checking in to make sure that everything was going ok, and offering her schedule in case I needed to come in and talk.

These data indicate that Student Success Advocates not only act as resources on campus, but they promote the common good of our community by engaging students in ways that are holistic, caring, and consistent.

Accomplishments Summary: Fiscal year 2014-15 has been thrilling for the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative. We fine-tuned a number of our internal practices to support our essential work with students, including considering how to expand the time we devote to deep interactions. We continued to learn about individuals, programs, and policies on campus, which allows us to more effectively meet our goal of providing information and resources for students. Most importantly, we expanded our reach to students, engaged more students in deep conversations about their college experiences, and established our program as one that supports and cares about University of Utah students. Finally, we were recognized by the Utah System of Higher Education as an innovator in student success, through the Alan E. Hall Award. We are extremely proud of the work we do, and look forward to continuing to contribute to our community in many ways.

Our 2015-16 Goals

Three comprehensive SSEI goals for 2015-16 will enhance our ability to support students as they navigate their time at the University of Utah. Inherent in our support of students is connecting them to deeply-engaged learning opportunities and learning communities and cohorts, and working with them to plan their time at the University.

1. *Develop a user-friendly database to increase the effectiveness of our tracking.* Tracking our interactions with students is time-consuming, but it is an essential aspect of our work. Tracking allows us to follow up with students and helps us illustrate the impact we have on campus. Our current tracking system is rudimentary, particularly when SSAs want to get a snapshot of the numerous interactions they have had with a particular student. We are currently working with University College to determine whether the Appointment Manager system might allow us to track the data we need. If appointment manager is not adequate, we will work with on-campus supports to build a database that will serve our particular needs.
2. *Develop a Student Success Ambassador Program to assist with outreach and light interactions.* Fiscal year 2014-15 brought an increased focus on in-depth interactions with students. As our initiative is increasingly institutionalized on campus, more students know who we are.

However, because of the transient nature of college student populations, we must constantly introduce ourselves. A Student Ambassador program will enhance our ability to reach students across campus through outreach to student organizations, tabling, and initial introductions. Additionally, Student Success Ambassadors will work in tandem with SSAs on deeper conversations. Our experience with Presidential Ambassadors in the 2013-14 academic year indicated that student-SSA teams are highly effective in working with students. With the support of the Alan E. Hall Innovations in Student Success award, which we received from USHE, we are piloting an Ambassador program this year, with four Ambassadors. Our goal is to fully develop the program in fiscal year 2015-16 and formally propose the program in our 2016-17 budget.

3. *Broaden the scope of our essential support for campus-wide student success efforts.* With the addition of two new Student Success Advocates, we are embarking on two efforts to support the University's commitment to student success for *returning adult students*, and for *online learners*.

Returning adult students: Many of the adult students returning to the University after time away from college utilize the off-campus sites. In partnership with colleagues from Continuing Education the SSEI will engage in a plan to better support these students. Early in fall semester, one SSA will begin working at the Sandy Site two days a week. With cross-training in academic advising, this SSA will provide basic academic advising and the holistic support SSAs are known for to students at the Sandy Site. We will evaluate the effectiveness of this model and work with our Continuing Education colleagues to fine-tune our services and consider expansion to other sites.

Online learners: Several online programs will be offered starting in fall 2015. SSAs will participate in a community of practice for online learners to brainstorm best practices for supporting these students with other faculty and professional staff engaged with online learners. To facilitate our work with online learners, we will implement the use of Cranium Café, which will allow us to interface in real-time with these students. We will evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts and work with Cory Stokes to fine-tune our offerings and expand our support as needed.

Summary

This report highlights the activities of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative during the 2014-15 academic year. We have accomplished a great deal, particularly through refining a number of internal processes to enhance our ability to support students, and through the continuous work of nurturing relationships with campus partners who provide venues for our work with students. We have enjoyed a great deal of support from the University, which has made our job not only possible, but fun. Our data indicate that we have a significant impact on the University community. We have touched over 20,000 students in light and significant ways, and we are receiving positive feedback regarding our efforts. We have built strong relationships across

campus, with many more in the works. All of this requires the flexibility, creativity, and energy of the Student Success Advocates, who have, as a group, risen to the occasion of fully implementing our innovative approach to supporting the University's commitment to student success.

As we begin our third year at the University of Utah, we are very pleased with the recognition our program receives across campus and in the Utah higher education community. We are thrilled that many of our University of Utah colleagues often refer students to SSAs, that we are included as an important element of a number of emerging student success efforts, and that we were recognized by USHE as innovators in student success. This recognition motivates us to expand our reach across campuses, external sites, and the online environment, and to continue to contribute in vital ways to the University's mission to support student success.

The name, Student Success and Empowerment Initiative, brings with it a high level of responsibility to and for the University of Utah. The SSEI team is committed to working with students in an individually-tailored fashion that assists them in identifying, and acting to implement, a plan that provides them with the best college experience they can imagine. We appreciate the support the University has committed to our initiative, both in the openness to our unique work and the continued commitment of resources. We look forward to future opportunities to demonstrate the difference we are making in students' lives. Thank you for the chance to highlight this exciting year.