

Salisbury University

Center for Academic Achievement (Name to be determined)

Proposal

An important mission of any postsecondary enterprise is to develop the students' intellectual abilities through meaningful learning both inside and outside the classroom. There is a desire by higher education institutions to promote a passion for scientific inquiry, an awakened consciousness of social deficiencies, and a commitment to a greater purpose toward the advancement of society. To achieve these goals colleges and universities across the country are leveling the scales of opportunity for all students regardless of their abilities. As colleges and universities provide greater access to students of differing backgrounds, abilities, and preparation levels, intentional programmatic support efforts have become increasingly valued and necessary to help ensure student success (Higbee and Eaton, 2004).¹

During the Fall 2007 semester, a committee of faculty and staff members was given the task of investigating whether Salisbury University should develop an academic success center on campus. The committee was comprised of representatives of the faculty from each of the four schools, the library, Writing Center, and the office of Student Affairs. Members of the committee set out to determine whether the SU community would benefit from such an initiative, and if so, what form the center should take. **After identifying SU's current needs and our long-term goals for our students, consistent with the mission of the university, the committee recommends that the university establish a Center for Academic Achievement (CAA).** We believe the cost of such a center will be returned in tangible results such as increased retention and graduation rates, as well as in less tangible forms such as student and faculty satisfaction with the overall academic climate of the university. We expect that the Center for Academic Achievement will become a central part of the university's mission as a student-centered learning environment, serving those who require more focused intervention as well as those who are excelling.

The Justification for the Center at SU:

Salisbury University's mission is to provide "a superior learning community where students, faculty, and staff engage one another as teachers, scholars, and learners, and where a commitment to excellence and openness to a broad array of ideas and perspectives are central to all aspects of University life."² The university has had great success in achieving these goals, yet we are facing some challenges that require a

¹ Higbee, J and Eaton, S, 2004 "Implementing Universal Design in Learning Centers". Journal of College Student Development, 45.

² University Mission Statement.

proactive response to ensure that SU not only maintains its status as a leader in undergraduate education, but that we continue to improve. The challenges are clear: while our retention rates are still high compared with other System institutions, they have slipped in recent years. And while our graduation rates are higher than most other System institutions, they have demonstrated a slight decline. While the numbers certainly are not alarming, they indicate that the university needs to address the situation sooner rather than later.

In addition to the normal challenges of student retention and graduation, SU faces the difficulties associated with a steadily rising enrollment and the increasingly diverse background of students entering the university. In the last ten years, enrollment has increased by more than two thousand students. Many of these students come from underserved population and/or families where they are the first generation to go to college. These are categories that are recognized nationally as at-risk groups requiring special attention to assist them in succeeding academically at the college level. Increased enrollment has also brought more students with different learning backgrounds, as well as students from a myriad of two-year and/or community college experiences. As the college student profile changes locally and nationally, we, as an institution, will need to successfully provide services focused on the changing needs of this population if we are to maintain high retention and graduation rates for this institution.

Student Success and/or Academic Achievement or Enhancement Centers provide academic support for the enhancement of the intellectual development of students. These Centers provide very important mission-driven services and are located at a significant number of college and universities across the United States. The 2006 SU Foundations of Excellence Task Force (FOE) report recommends that “serious consideration should be given to establishing an Academic Resource Center where students can receive information and services that would enable them to realize their highest possible academic level of success. (Participation in the Foundations of Excellence project came as an outgrowth of a Faculty Senate directive to enhance the academic orientation of first-year students). This Center could function from a central location, promote awareness of academic services available to SU students, and promote retention through programs and services.”³ The establishment of a Student Achievement Center at Salisbury University would certainly serve to enhance our students’ academic performances, deepen their level of engagement with course work, and increase students’ potential for success and degree completion.

The scope of the programs and services offered by the Center for Academic Achievement will first and foremost be inclusive of all SU students. However, the Center will also be charged with assessing the needs of specific student populations in order to provide the needed services and support. For example, students on academic probation and/or in academic jeopardy could be required to utilize specific offerings of the CAA. In addition, the CAA could explore grant and other funding sources which might support its programs, services, and goals, including opportunities to create educational programs

³ *A Vision of Excellence In the First College Year*, Fall 2006. Page 12.

for students who are more likely to experience academic difficulty. Overall, services of the CAA would be promoted in such a manner to encourage any student to improve their learning experiences at SU.

In developing the Center for Academic Achievement, Salisbury University will be following the lead of many of our peer and aspirational institutions that have already created similar facilities on their campuses. For example, Towson University has had an Academic Achievement Center since 2003, and The College of New Jersey's Center for Academic Success has been a significant component of their effort to revitalize undergraduate education. Research has demonstrated that academic support centers can have a positive effect on retention, graduation, and student satisfaction rates. We expect that such a center will have similar results at SU.

Finally, an achievement center will enhance the university's ability to serve not only those students struggling with the demands of college education, but will also assist those who are already performing at an above-average level and who wish to achieve even higher academic goals. It is important to note that the Center for Academic Achievement will not duplicate or subsume any of the excellent programs already available to assist our students; instead, it will work collaboratively with those programs as an additional opportunity to make Salisbury University a vibrant community of scholars.

Recommended Functions

The Center will include but not be limited to the following five main functions: 1) provide services to students to enhance their learning, 2) act as a clearinghouse for all support services available to SU students, 3) act as a resource for individual departments that are studying prerequisite skills for high risk courses, 4) work closely with advising coordinators to promote support services and identify students most in need of academic support, and 5) provide training to student mentors to maximize their effectiveness as teachers and mentors.

1. Provide services to enhance the learning by SU students across the University Curriculum. Services would include, but not be limited to:

a. Learning how to learn strategies and techniques.

- Maximizing the comprehension of printed and electronic texts, classroom lectures and laboratory experiences
- Organizing and retaining information.
- Increasing rate of learning
- Enhancing critical thinking
- Preparing for and taking exams
- Acquiring Information Literacy
- Independent and group learning

b. Developmental Mathematics Skills: There is increasing anecdotal evidence that we have a subgroup of students who need "pre-college Mathematics" instruction in order

to successfully complete, not only the required mathematics courses, but other courses in the sciences, business and economics, nursing and education. These offerings would be under the CAA and would complement the tutoring and support program currently offered by the Mathematics Department.

c. Special Workshops *as needed* on preparing for examinations for professional school entrance and licensure programs, as for example Praxis, LSAT, GRE, etc. (not to duplicate programs currently offered by *other offices on campus*).

d. Workshops and offerings for English Language Learners (ELL) in English Language usage and conventions, grammar, and rhetoric. These offerings would be on an “as needed basis” contingent upon faculty and advising referrals as well as students electing to participate.

e. Selected offerings for successful students to further advance their learning and thinking. Seminars, institutes, mini-courses on possible topics such as; “Thinking Like A Chemist (or Physicist),” “The Mind of the Artist,” “Case Studies of A Political Event or Individual, Critical Business Decisions in Selected Companies,” “Appreciating the Opera for the Novice,” “Becoming an Information Literate Student,” etc.

2. The Center would act as a clearinghouse or conduit to direct students to other services available to them such as the Writing Center, Tutoring sponsored by the Math Department, Counseling Center, Career Services, etc. The CAA would collaborate with these other services. The Director of the Center would provide oversight for a website that would promote all services available to students that might improve their academic achievement at Salisbury University.

3. The Center could provide upon request, resources and aid to Schools and Departments who are determining needed prerequisite skills to help insure successful completion of selected courses and programs of study.

4. The CAA would work closely with advising and advising coordinators to promote services of the Center and to identify students in a timely manner that should avail themselves of CAA services.

5. The Center would provide workshops and training sessions to assist student mentors in working effectively with those students they are tutoring and mentoring.

CAA Funding and Support

The Committee recommends that an advisory council be established to advise, inform and support the Center for Academic Achievement and its Director on matters such as campus academic issues and services, student needs, development of strategic planning goals, and support for funding initiatives. Membership should include faculty members, an Academic Dean, a library representative, SGA representation, a staff

member from Residence Life, the Assistant Dean of Students, Vice President of Student Affairs and the Provost or their designee.

In addition, the committee recommends funding support for the following:

1. Personnel

- Director, Fulltime
- Staff Program Specialist
- Five liaison faculty members representing the four schools and the library for one course reassignment per semester
- Three to four Graduate Assistants for teaching, advising, coordinating etc.
- Three to four part-time adjunct or contractual faculty
- Peer Tutors/Student Workers, paid

2. Operational Costs

- Technology: software programs, computer lab, etc.
- Supplies
- Professional Development
- Printing and publication

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Committee strongly endorses the concept of a Center for Academic Achievement. We have gone to considerable lengths to present these preliminary plans so that the University community might have something tangible in which to respond. We believe the Center is an excellent investment and will have a significant positive impact on students, faculty, and the academic climate of this University over the near and long term.

Respectfully Submitted,
Advisory Committee on Academic Success

Dorsey Hammond, Chair	Faculty Senator, Education, Seidel School
Mike Bardzell	Math – Henson School
Sandra Cohea-Weible	Academic Affairs
Ed Cowell	Dean of Students
Stephen Ford	Librarian
Jim Forte	Social Work – Seidel School
Lance Garmon	Psychology – Fulton School
Stephen Gehnrich	Biology – Henson School
Kristen Kazmarek	Student Success and Parent Programs – Asst. Dean
Nicole Munday	Writing Center – English
Darrell Newton	Communication Arts – Fulton School
Melanie Perreault	History
Kathleen Wright	Perdue School