UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA

FIRST IN THE PACK

2015-2016 END-OF-YEAR REPORT

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First In the Pack (formerly First Scholars) 2016 End of Year Report

First in the Pack continues to be a ‘bare bones’ mentoring/coaching program designed to answer the following question: *Is there a low cost method of retaining freshmen with known risk factors such as low income, first generation, low placement scores or low high school GPA?* Although the TRiO Scholars Program is well funded to provide intensive services to this population, it is restricted to serving 175 students including approximately 25 freshmen annually. TRiO Scholars outcomes are very impressive: 90% six year graduation rate, 98% freshman year-to-year average retention rate and end of freshman year GPA of 3.0. The cost per student, however, is very high: over $2,000 per participant. In addition, far more eligible students apply for TRiO Scholars than can be accommodated, thus the impetus for developing an ‘overflow’ program that might also provide good results.

The 2015-2016 participants served during the second year of the program have enrolled for the following fall semester in impressive numbers with 90% of the cohort enrolled. Although the final number will not be available until the start of fall semester, this outcome is just 9 percentage points below that of the more robustly funded TRiO Scholars Program and 9 percentage points above the most recent UNR freshman retention rate of 81%. The First in the Pack enrollment rate is 39 percentage points above the enrollment rate for students who were recruited for the program but did not participate. Program participants also earned a significantly higher cumulative GPA (2.8) than that earned by the comparison group (1.99).

Although First in the Pack is funded and designed to serve only freshmen, we want to track the success of participants through their enrollment at UNR to better assess the impact of our low cost, no frills coaching model which is based on recent research supporting coaching interventions (*Baker & Bettinger, 2011 and **Ward, Thomas, and Disch, 2014). The outcomes of the first year pilot suggested promising outcomes: 87% of the 2014 cohort enrolled for fall of 2015. As of the writing of this report, 77% of the original 2014 cohort are enrolled for fall 2016 as compared to only 49% of the comparison group. First in the Pack participants are certainly doing better than those students who were invited to participate, but who declined the opportunity. Since both groups were selected from high schools whose graduates have low UNR graduation rates, we are cautiously optimistic that our interventions are showing significantly positive results beyond the second year at the University. We will continue to track our participants and compare them to a like population as each cohort makes its way through UNR.

Math Center Collaboration: As a result of information gleaned from the pilot program, we launched an initiative aimed at providing math support for First in the Pack participants. Extended Studies provided $3,000 to the UNR Math Center to hire tutor (s) to work with our participants. Sixty-three percent of our students used the Math Center during the course of the year. We are still waiting for a final report from the Math Center, but our preliminary conclusion is that the initiative had mixed results. Students had
difficulty matching times with the available slots scheduled for tutoring. Often, students would just meet with any available tutor. Our intent was to have a consistent tutor so that students could form a productive relationship and build a sense of trust with the tutor. We need to do more work evaluating this model in terms of final grades and number of individual tutoring contacts. It is possible that a more productive model can be developed before the start of the fall semester.

**Additional Outcomes:**

- 91% enrolled in 15 credits during the fall semester; 93% of those completed 15 credits
- 82% enrolled in 15 credits during the spring semester; 90% of those completed 15 credits
- 6 students on probation; all enrolled for fall 2016
- Contacts completed:
  - Individual Contacts: 1,038
  - Newsletters: 36
  - Informative Emails: 60
  - Group Text Announcements: 83
  - Individual Text Chats via Remind: 741

**Services Provided:** (*= new service for 2015-2016)

- Individual contacts every two weeks during fall and spring semester
- Winter retreat for all continuing participants*
- Annual contracts stating expectations and responsibilities
- Written goals established for each semester
- Early outreach during the summer via phone and e-mail
- Progress reports provided for each semester
- Weekly newsletter communicating important dates, reminders, and ‘news you can use’
- Important dates and deadlines also provided through e-mails
- Workshops/Events in conjunction with TRiO Scholars included a variety of relevant topics:
  - Study skills
  - MyNevada – how to use effectively
  - Using Campus Resources
  - Transition Workshops
  - Financial Aid workshops
  - Prep Day Cook-off contests
  - USAC presentations
- Orientation: Half day retreat provided at the start of the fall semester*
- ACE 100 class for First in the Pack
- End of year celebration*

**Miscellaneous Information**

- 37% lived on campus
- 36% worked on campus
- 26% used tutoring services
- 70% used the Writing Center
- 83% used the Financial Aid Office
- 63% used the Math Center
- 84% met with First in the Pack coach twice a month
- 70% found the individual meetings with coaches to be the most helpful service provided by the program
What Worked

- Location in PSAC enhanced collaboration with other support services
- Contacting/recruiting students during the summer to help with financial aid and enrollment issues
- Extended orientation connecting participants to one another and to First in the Pack staff
- Collaborating with TRiO Scholars for workshops and recreational events
- GPA Calculator: Showing students how grades impact GPA and showing students how to calculate GPA
- Retaking classes to replace poor grades
- Lessons on MyNevada: Class registration, Schedule Planner, Financial aid, Fees due
- Short, informational messages to reach students ignoring the newsletter
- Consistent coaching meetings every two weeks for both fall and spring semesters
- Peoplesoft access which allowed the graduate student coaches to see financial aid and class registration information
- Referring rising sophomores to TRiO Scholars as 100% of those have been retained into their third year.
- Referrals from the TRiO Scholar’s freshman wait list

Challenges

- Students struggled with time management skills
- Transition from high school to college proved difficult for many participants
  - Structured environment to no structure at all
  - Little accountability to 100% accountability
  - Multiple chances to redo assignments and missed work to very few chances
- ACE 100 – Many students did not take the course because it conflicted with their other classes or they did not want to pay the additional cost of the credit
- There is no immediately tangible benefit for participating in the program such as free tutoring or financial aid as is true for TRiO Scholars. Consequently, there is less urgency for some participants to meet their commitments for frequent contact with coaches.
- There is a need for more trust building between participants and coaches as too often problems were not disclosed until very late in the semester making interventions more difficult
- Too few students apply to TRiO Scholars

Recommendations

- Hire graduate students as early as possible so that coaching can begin in the spring and continue through the summer prior to the start of fall semester
- Continue to evaluate the impact of tutoring through the Math Center
- Contact Extended Studies to request continued funding for math tutoring, but explore options for providing tutoring through the Tutoring Center as it may be easier to coordinate individual sessions
- Follow up with Extended Studies request to assist with funding activities such as orientation
- Optimize location in the PSAC to strengthen collaborations with existing support services
- Continue to partner with TRiO Scholars to provide workshops and social events
- Explore the possibilities of pairing new participants with pervious participants in a mentoring relationship
- Invite TRiO Scholars staff to present information at orientation and again during spring semester to encourage more applications to the TRiO Scholars program
- Expanded recruitment initiatives early in the spring semester including school visits and presentations to school counselors
• Consider increasing the cohort to 120 if part of the Gear Up graduate student’s time can be used in conjunction with the First Scholars graduate student. Rather than hire an undergraduate mentor/coach, use the funds to hire a math tutor. Staff would then include 1.5 graduate students, and a math tutor. The Gear UP Ambassador will continue to spend some of her time working with First in the Pack.
• Continue to track First in the Pack cohorts as well as comparison cohorts through graduation
• Evaluate the need for the ACE class given the relatively low participation numbers

2016-2017 Cohort
• 63 applicants have applied to the program as of the end of May
• All 63 students have been contacted regarding FAFSA issues, orientation, and ‘to do’ items in My Nevada
• All have been contacted regarding enrolment in Freshmen Start
• All have been informed about test options through Accuplacer
• All have been informed about and encouraged to apply to NevadaFit


Student Testimonials

"If it weren't for this program, I wouldn't be where I am today. It has helped me in more ways that I can say." -Anonymous

"I felt lost when I entered college and this program help me not feel so lost and confused and it helps that there were people who we could talk to or ask questions to." -Anonymous

"They act as a second family especially if you're up here by yourself. You can tell the counselors practically anything and they'll give you the best advice possible" -Anonymous

"This program is very helpful and every first gen freshman should take advantage of the opportunities that this program offers" -Ravenne Go

"Overall it was a great experience being part of First in the pack and they really helped me find other place that are there to help me improve in math and English." -Leslie Estrada

"It really helped me grow confidence." -Vanessa Amaya

"Once in a lifetime opportunity & students get a more in depth experience their first year"- Anthony Madden

"This organization really cares about the success of students!" -Leslie Pacheco