Academic Affairs
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Tools for Improving Orientation Advising

End-of-Project Report
Project Description
The primary goal of this project was to help decrease time-to-degree by providing tools that enable advisers to help freshman and transfer students register for the best classes at orientation. Tools included making available to advisers a snapshot of incoming students’ transcripts, AP/IB scores, ACT/SAT scores, and any community college credits earned. An important component included allowing students in designated majors and pre-health professional programs to register for orientation only after they have verified they meet math prerequisites.

Project Outcomes
- Increased number of freshmen taking the math placement exam prior to attending orientation.
- Increased number of freshmen students completing science and math sequences in their first year at PSU.
- Increase in timely completion of degree programs due to adequate preparation and correct placement of students in math and science sequenced classes in their first term.
- Increased retention of freshmen STEM majors due to more informed orientation advising.
- Increased completion of pre-health curriculum by freshmen due to more informed orientation advising.
- Increased identification of high achieving students able to be successful with higher credit loads in their first year of college (many high-achieving students can easily take more than the typical 13 credits a term; they can be advised accordingly).
- Increased identification of lower achieving students leading to more referrals to campus services, college success curriculum, and preparatory classes.
- Improved faculty and professional adviser orientation experience due to availability of more thorough advising information.

Project Lead
- Martha Dyson - Academic Adviser, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Project Team
- Martha Dyson - Academic Adviser, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Marcella Flores - Assistant Director for Orientation Programs, Admissions, Enrollment Management & Student Affairs
- Karen Kennedy - Academic Adviser/Intl Student Liaison, Advising & Career Services, Enrollment Management & Student Affairs
- Melissa Yates - Pre-Health Adviser, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Steve Immel - Enrollment Management & Student Affairs

Project Sponsor(s)
- Robert Mercer - Assistant Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Cindy Skaruppa - Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, Enrollment Management & Student Affairs
Project Collaborators
- Kathy Thomas - Associate Registrar of Student Information Technology, Office of the Registrar, Academic Affairs
- Marci Kelly, Business Analyst/Report Writer, Office of Information Technology

Project Management Team
- Project Manager - Sarah Traxler, Project Manager, Office of Academic Affairs
- Project Manager - Hans VanDerSchaaf, Senior Project Manager, Office of Academic Affairs
- Project Coordinator - Brandi Bush Bergkvist, Project Coordinator, Office of Academic Affairs
- Project Assistant - Lia Halverson, Project Assistant, Office of Academic Affairs

Impact of Project
The implementation of the student academic snapshot is one of the key accomplishments of Project #96 - Tools for Improving Orientation Advising. The project used the Office of Information Technology’s DataMASTER report to support this feature. This one-page snapshot, given to each student attending new student orientation, provides valuable academic information to advisers assisting these students in planning their first term at PSU. Included in the snapshot are the student’s SAT/ACT scores, math placement scores, transfer credits, conditional admission requirements (where applicable), and key demographic information. Having this information at their fingertips has empowered advisers to offer more accurate and individualized advising to students at orientation, thus increasing student satisfaction and providing a more direct and efficient path to graduation.

Another key accomplishment of this project is the implementation of the math placement exam (for designated majors and pre-health professional programs) prior to orientation sign-up. Prior to this project, students were encouraged, but not required to take the math placement exam prior to attending orientation. Consequently, many students put off taking the exam and were not able to register for certain classes because they had not met the prerequisite requirement of the math placement exam. Failure to complete the exam prior to orientation meant that many students were not able to register for the courses they needed in their first term. This was particularly problematic for students in certain majors or pre-professional programs whose progression was tied to the completion of sequenced classes.

Project Deliverables
There are two key deliverables for this project:
1) The student academic snapshot (see description under Impact of Project)
2) The requirement of the math placement exam for certain majors and pre-professional programs prior to orientation sign-up. Requiring the timely completion of this exam enables students to register for the courses they need in their first term at PSU and reduces the time to degree completion.

Project Sustainability
Student Academic Snapshot
The student academic snapshot will be provided to advisers and all students attending new student orientation each term. Orientation will manage and maintain the snapshot going forward-- working with staff and student workers to print and assemble the snapshots.

Costs related to the snapshot (printing, materials, and labor) will be covered by the Provost’s Challenge project budget for the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

In June of 2014, Academic Advising Council agreed to cover the costs related to the snapshot of approximately $1,000 per year, beginning the 2015-2016 fiscal year and moving forward. Orientation will meet with the Chair of Advising Council in the spring of 2015 to determine:

1. The specific department and budget that will be responsible for providing these funds
2. The frequency and manner in which the funds will be distributed to Orientation (e.g. each term, once per year, etc.)

**Math Placement Requirement**
Requiring the math placement exam prior to signing up for orientation has been folded into Orientation’s sign-up process and as such, will be managed and maintained by Orientation going forward.

**Assessment of Project Outcomes**
The project team recommends that assessment of the project outcomes (as noted in the Project Management Plan) be conducted once fall 2015 data becomes available. A comparison of fall 2014 and fall 2015 data will provide insight on how the math placement requirement impacted the number of students who took the math placement exam prior to attending orientation. We will work with Academic Advising Council to determine who might own this body of work and whether or not this type of assessment should be conducted once or on an ongoing basis.

**Lessons Learned**
Project management was incredibly useful in helping us move the work forward. The exercises that took place during the planning phase helped provide clarity on the work involved and how much time it would take to complete. Mapping out the steps involved to complete the project allowed us to identify the most appropriate time to implement the work (e.g. fall or winter term). Project Management was also instrumental in facilitating relationships across departments and providing perspective on the bigger picture. In addition to clarifying the appropriate timeline for the project, we learned that the Student Snapshot triggered students to recognize what transcripts they had or had not sent over to PSU, thus causing them to take action on getting those to PSU Admissions.

**Organization of Provost’s Challenge**
The guidance we received from the project managers was absolutely essential to the success of this project. They helped us to navigate challenges, stay on track, and figure out next steps in each stage of the process.