

**Title: "From Triage to Triumph - the duality of Academic Advising for at-risk students"**

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**University: Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, Canada**

**Time: Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

### **Session Abstract**

The role of the Academic Advisor is defined by the ideal – to facilitate each student's ability to reach their potential – and limited by the real – time limitations and case-loads that supersede all but the most basic of academic discussions, interventions and reparations. However, what would it look like if Advisors had sufficient time and space in which to operate and interact with students, especially those most academically vulnerable? The First Year Success program housed at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada is precisely the environment in which two Academic Advisors function in such a context.

### **Presentation Overview**

The First Year Success program grew out of the Teaching and Learning Framework at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The research discovered that those students entering university with less than a 75% overall admissions average (based on five core academic subjects at their grade 12 (or equivalent) classes) were the most vulnerable – nearly 1/3 would not pass the first semester; a similar proportion would not complete a degree within 7 years of commencement.

However, the academics only tell one side of the story. Is it that the academics lead to the poor performance, high withdrawal and low completion rates? Or does it have more to do with the transition to a different learning environment, larger classes, greater workload and fewer (apparent) supports and resources?

The program was then conceived with an holistic vision in mind. It would that incorporates academic supports, smaller classes, supplemental instruction with unique, full credit courses, strategic academic and career advising, and a tightly-knit community of faculty, staff and students.

The Academic Advising team (two academic advisors dedicated to the program) play several very specific roles throughout the year-long program. First, in the recruitment phase, they disseminate program information to faculty and staff at the Spring Advising sessions, a time of year when faculty and staff visit high schools throughout the province. Typically, one First Year Success advisor attends each school so as to facilitate the conversation about the program, its objectives and benefits.

Then, throughout the year the Advisors have structured in-class discussions and coordinate individual one-on-one appointments, as well as respond to ad hoc requests for assistance, information and guidance.

These advisors are uniquely positioned at Memorial to experience the duality of the advising role. On the one hand, they develop an academic relationship early with the students – from their final year in high school, through the registration period and on through their first year. On the other hand, the advisors, being housed within the Academic Advising Centre, partake in general student advising as mandated by the office during the non-peak work periods with the First Year Success cohorts.

The First Year Success appointments are targeted covering topics such as goal setting, measures of academic success, skills acquisition and implementation, alongside timely conversations about academic guidance. The general advising sessions are typically one-time sessions of academic inquiry or concern.

The assessment based on the first year leads one to see that students are performing better academically, they have a higher completion rate, and they are generally in better standing after first year than a matched-sample group.

### **Assessment**

The assessment based on the first year demonstrates that FYS students are performing better academically, they have a higher completion rate, and they are generally in better standing after first year than a matched-sample group.

Consistently, a higher proportion of First Year Success students are in clear academic standing after their first semester of university studies (ranging from 1% in one particular semester to as high as 20% in another). Further, these students tend to perform stronger in their second year of university studies.

Finally, a larger proportion of students who participate in the program (fully) will proceed into their second year of studies.

Utilization of Academic Advising supports was also significantly higher for First Year Success participants. Further, these students typically had more courses completed toward their degree at 1.5 and 2.5 years.

Additional Resources:

First Year Success Website: [www.mun.ca/success](http://www.mun.ca/success)

Teaching and Learning Framework Report:

[http://www.delts.mun.ca/faculty/teachinglearning/FYS\\_Program\\_Full\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_Feb\\_14.pdf](http://www.delts.mun.ca/faculty/teachinglearning/FYS_Program_Full_Report_FINAL_Feb_14.pdf)