



Located at the center of Rollins College's campus in Orlando, the Kathleen W. Rollins Hall is being renovated to house academic and student affairs programs, including the career center. (Photo by Scott Cook)

Academic–Career Integration: A Symbiotic Infusion

“..staff sought to transform campus culture by infusing career- and life-planning education and resources into as many parts as possible of the student experience.”

TRICIA ZELAYA-LEON, DIRECTOR OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT, *ROLLINS COLLEGE*

Career center professionals feel pressure from external constituents to help students get jobs immediately upon graduation, yet students often fail to engage with these resources early or often enough to support career placement. Recent data have shown students typically visit career centers irregularly and only during their final months on campus (Hudson & Klein-Collins, 2018). At Rollins College, upperclass students were satisfied with the career center's services, but by the time they visited, it was almost too late for real progress to be made. In 2015, only 17 first-year students from a cohort of 493 voluntarily made appointments with career advisors. Understanding that engagement with a career center can have a positive impact on student satisfaction, retention, and graduation (Cuseo, 2005), we made the integration between career preparation and academic advising the focus of the college's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

Through R-Compass, the QEP, staff sought to transform campus culture by infusing career- and life-planning education and resources

into as many parts as possible of the student experience. Similarly, the staff at the Rollins career center were motivated to develop new and innovative ways to engage students earlier and more often.

PHASE I: FIRST-YEAR INFUSION

Career center staff leveraged partnerships with academic deans and faculty allies to develop the Career Liaison Program to increase their interactions with first-year students. Each liaison is assigned between three and five course sections, and they work with faculty to identify students' needs. The liaisons subsequently visit the class to discuss those specific areas with the students. They also reach out to the students individually throughout the semester to offer virtual and one-on-one major and career-related guidance.

In 2019, four years after the launch of R-Compass, 80% of Rollins' first-year students are engaging with the career center. R-Compass has become a

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staple of the first-year experience; faculty are motivated to participate, and students speak highly of the services they receive.

PHASE II: CURRICULAR INFUSION

The Career Liaison Program's success encouraged career center staff to expand their outreach. In partnership with Academic Affairs, they built a strategy around curricular infusion: *How could students engage with the career center beyond their first year?* They looked to the College of Liberal Arts, where all enrolled students are required to take a Health and Wellness course that focuses on the Nine Dimensions of Wellness, including occupational wellness. A common assignment for the Health & Wellness course was introduced that required students to reflect on the process of creating and reviewing a draft résumé with a career advisor. The assignment brings approximately 300 students (across 10 to 11 sections) to the career center each semester. Every student is now obligated to visit the center at least once during their academic career, because of this assignment.

"Uniting academic and student affairs partners from the beginning created innovative and integrative opportunities for curricular and cocurricular infusion."

PHASE III: FULL ENGAGEMENT

Career center staff saw modest success from increasing their visibility with first-year students and adding a required visit to the center to the curriculum, but they wanted to sustain that engagement. They found a solution in an article about the University of Nevada-Reno's career studio model (Calhoon, 2018). A career studio is an open, collaborative space where undergraduate peer leaders offer career guidance to students on a drop-in basis. Inspired by the idea, Rollins staff piloted a career studio in the 2018-2019 academic year. Within the first four months, an average of 200 students were visiting the studio each month. Students began inviting their friends. Faculty, staff, and individual departments throughout campus began requiring their students visit the studio for all of their career preparation needs. Over the course of its first year, almost 1,200 unique students participated, and many students were repeat visitors. Checkout survey responses indicated a 99% satisfaction rate.

OTHER R-COMPASS MEASURES OF SUCCESS

In addition to the success of the career center's initiatives, R-Compass made its own impact. Nearly 80% of faculty advisors have voluntarily attended regular training sessions that focus on infusing career preparation into their academic advisement. A new program, Advising Mentors, invites faculty to weekend-long training devoted to academic advising; they then serve as peer mentors to their fellow faculty. With nearly 200 faculty members at Rollins, 24 have been trained, and almost every major is represented. Nearly 70% of all academic departments' websites promote career-related content that demonstrates to current and prospective students (and their parents) the value of a Rollins education. Some sites highlight Rollins alumni and others include video testimonials from successful alums. Additionally, every second-semester student is partnered with an R-Compass Peer Mentor—an upperclass student who focuses on academic and career success. In their assessment of these 22 mentors, first-year students on the whole indicated they felt fully supported and prepared for a successful second year.

CULTURE SHIFT AND THE FUTURE

R-Compass has generated momentum for a shift in culture at Rollins College, and this momentum is also manifesting itself physically. A facility at the center of campus is being renovated and will bring together multiple academic and student affairs programs, including the career center. The career center has been located on the periphery of campus for nearly a decade, so relocating to the heart of campus will further keep career planning front and center for students.

For campuses contemplating how to effectively integrate career preparation in the first college year, a multipronged approach has been vital for Rollins College. Uniting academic and student affairs partners from the beginning created innovative and integrative opportunities for curricular and cocurricular infusion. Support from high-level campus constituents provided the necessary direction, and identifying those with the social capital to successfully implement the initiatives was also key. Finally, thoughtful assessment measures, both programmatic and summative, were essential in gauging the programs' advancements. Preparing students for lives after graduation should be everyone's job,

not just the staff of career centers. By deputizing campus constituents as partners in career preparation, higher education institutions will ensure that early and frequent engagement becomes the standard

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A CSI-Themed Chemistry Laboratory Experiment for First-Year Students

"The CSI-themed course is an example of how STEM experiential learning can be integrated into an FYE course."

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The first semester of college can be one of the most important for students, and many initiatives geared toward engaging and retaining students during the first year have been developed (Gilmer, 2007; Watkins & Mazur, 2013). First-year seminars have become a common fixture at most colleges and universities (Allen, 2006; Padgett et al., 2013), and these courses generally focus on helping students with the transition from high school to college, both academically and personally. At Merrimack College in Massachusetts, professionals in the chemistry and biochemistry departments introduced a themed first-year seminar for undecided science majors. Using an activity in the style of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, the goal was to introduce students to scientific techniques in an effort to simulate their interest in STEM.

COURSE DESIGN

While Merrimack College has offered a first-year experience (FYE) course to support students during their critical first semester of matriculation and to help them explore their college community, themed FYE courses were recently piloted across all schools at Merrimack in response to the faculty's request to integrate more academic content into the FYE curriculum using topics the instructors are passionate about. The themed courses are offered for one credit. The goal is to have all FYE courses themed and credit-bearing, with students earning a letter grade for the class.

FYE course instructors must have at least a master's degree and be a full-time employee. In addition to the instructor, each FYE section has a student peer mentor. Instructors interested in teaching a themed FYE course were asked to submit a proposal with a course description. Each of the themed courses must have the core learning objectives identified by the FYE advisory board but will typically contain several additional learning objectives unique to the course section. Only a few themed courses have been developed, such as photography, athletic training, and a career exploration course for undecided majors.

Every Merrimack student with fewer than 28 credits is automatically enrolled in an FYE course. Students are prepopulated into specific sections based on a number of factors that include major, academic preparedness, career interests, and scheduling constraints. The CSI-themed course is an example of how STEM experiential learning can be integrated into an FYE course. It enables first-year students to dive deeply into an active and hands-on learning experience early in their academic career. Students also develop college-level skills in research, writing, and speaking about their experiential learning experience. Incorporating this kind of theme-based experiential



Undecided science majors at Merrimack College participate in a CSI-style scenario—part of a first-year seminar that introduces students to scientific techniques in an effort to stimulate their interest in STEM. (Photos by Mary Schwalm)

learning fostered greater student engagement in Merrimack's FYE courses. The course enrolled 18 first-semester students, the majority of whom were undecided science majors. About half of the class was concurrently enrolled in general chemistry.

CRIME SCENE ACTIVITY

Students were presented with a mock crime scene and asked to examine evidence from the scene and suspects. Specifically, students analyzed a residue found at the crime scene and a substance found on each of the suspects' shoes. Students were tasked with using this information to identify the murderer.

The activity was completed in one 75-minute class. Before entering the laboratory, students completed a pre-lab assignment, which was to research the molecular weight and structure of all the possible compounds presented during the exercise. Inside the lab, students moved between four stations—infrared spectrometry, liquid chromatography, mass spectrometry, and thin layer chromatography—to identify the substances and subsequently identify the murderer. The majority of the students had no prior experience with these processes. For this reason, an instructor or student mentor was positioned at each station to help guide the students through the experiment. They would briefly explain the chemical concept associated with the instrument or analysis technique. Two additional chemistry majors were recruited to

help with the stations, which created an opportunity for students to connect with other students in the major. The various stations offered students an opportunity to discover and analyze evidence collected at the mock crime scene. The students then created a poster to present their findings. The FYE students were graded on their poster presentation and not necessarily on correctly identifying the murderer.

typically introduced in an upper-level course, the students were able to complete all of the experiments in one lab session, and the overall response to the experiment was positive. Additionally, the work illustrates that first-semester students are capable of conducting high-level experiments without extensive background on a particular topic, thus opening up myriad experiential learning opportunities for first-year students. This concept is not limited to chemistry. We hope Merrimack's experience with themed FYE

"One of the benefits of the exercise was exposing students to a situation that would enable them to use fundamental concepts from an introductory science class to solve a real-world problem."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the students' responses to the lab activity were positive. Even students with a modest understanding of the concepts still found the experiment very insightful and engaging. Of the students surveyed, 71.4% indicated the exercise increased their interest in science. The majority of students (64.3%) reported that using the lab instrumentation increased their interest in chemistry. A majority of students also noted they appreciated being able to see the application of chemistry techniques.

The goal of this exercise was to stimulate students' interest in chemistry and give them a preview of advanced chemical techniques. Students often have difficulties appreciating the material in general chemistry because many of the topics are not immediately applicable to them. One of the benefits of the exercise was exposing students to a situation that would enable them to use fundamental concepts from an introductory science class to solve a real-world problem.



In the laboratory, students moved between four stations using different scientific techniques to identify substances that could potentially determine the murderer. (Photos by Mary Schwalm)

CONCLUSION

This chemistry laboratory activity gave first-year students a hands-on experience with advanced instrumentation and an opportunity for critical thinking. Allowing these undecided science students to use chemical techniques to solve a crime helped generate more engagement in the course and fostered a greater interest in STEM fields, overall. While some of the techniques used are

courses will encourage other institutions to develop their own themed courses to promote greater student engagement.

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Explore Technology: A Meta-Major for Undecided Students

"Meta-majors provide a welcoming environment for exploration through advising conversations, introductory coursework, and investigating major options." (Kafka, 2019; Selingo, 2017)



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Undecided or exploratory majors are 3 of the 10 most popular majors for incoming first-year students at Virginia Tech (VT). Each college at VT hosts at least one undecided major (e.g., Exploring Life Sciences, Exploring Natural Resources, Explore Science). The University Studies Office (USO) also houses two undecided majors.

In 2017, USO staff created the Explore Technology meta-major for students who were interested in multiple colleges or majors. Meta-majors provide a welcoming environment for exploration through advising conversations, introductory coursework, and investigating major options (Kafka, 2019; Selingo, 2017). Students have time to decide their path and examine an estimated 60 majors that incorporate technology. Incoming students can declare this major when they apply for admission, and it meets their needs, engages them academically, and results in strong retention.

INCOMING STUDENT NEEDS

Students applying to VT must declare a major on their application. Most candidates apply directly to their chosen major. Some are hesitant to choose and can apply to undecided majors, where they can examine their options and weigh major interests across multiple colleges. Other students simply do not have a particular major in mind. Whatever the reason, more than 1,500 students (over 20% of the incoming class in 2019) enroll at VT each year with an undecided major, and Explore Technology is one of them.

Traditional and nontraditional first-year students change their minds about their major for many reasons ranging from multiple interests, varying stereotypes about certain majors, and their changing identities. Anecdotal information from academic advisors indicates many students are unaware of most majors available to them.

Changing majors can be positive and negative. From a negative perspective, it can be costly, demotivating, and time-consuming.



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However, moving to a major that fits the students' academic abilities, interests, and values can be life changing for a student. Students who pursue Explore Technology are still on pace to graduate, because they explore new subjects while also completing general education graduation requirements. Students can stay with Explore Technology until they find a major that fits them, typically within one academic year, or until they reach 60 credit hours as required by university policy.

ACADEMIC CONNECTION

Selingo (2018) believes students should explore majors within their first year rather than being pinned down to a singular choice before they begin college. To give students more structure within their exploration process, students in Explore Technology are required to take a three-hour course called UNIV 1824, Pathways to Success, which introduces the many technology-centric majors VT offers and allows for experiential research into those majors.

The three credit-hour course meets for 50 minutes three days a week; is traditionally graded (i.e., A-F); and counts as a social science, general education requirement. Each section includes a maximum of 50 students. The exploration occurs when students interact with technology but also through (a) completing self-assessments like StrengthsFinder and Type Focus; (b) studying psychosocial theories of development; and (c) getting involved on campus through major informational sessions, technology demonstrations, and academic or social organizations. Learning Outcomes for Pathways to Success include:

- Describe the components of decision-making theories related to real-life issues and problems facing college students.
- Apply psychosocial theories to college transition.
- Explain how major psychosocial theories inform a relevant major decision.

- Integrate multiple sources of information to inform a relevant major decision.
- Identify values and skills needed for academic success through cultural immersion.
- Examine research for global challenges and propose a solution using credible sources to validate the argument based on a student’s perspective major.

Students complete their first semester with a better idea about which major is right for them. From research conducted in 2017-2018 by the University Studies office, 100% of the Explore Technology students enrolled in Pathways to Success said it helped them make more informed decisions about their major or career while 96% of the other students who took the course in other sections reported the same.

With so many major options at VT, students may not know which major is best. Explore Technology exposes students to majors that students are not as popular or well known. Figure 1 shows the variety of majors students choose.

After completing the course, Explore Technology students can gain admission into competitive majors. Some students can apply to their new major as early as the start of their second semester. About half (49%) of the students in the fall 2018 class chose a restricted (selective) major that requires completion of certain courses or a competitive GPA. The College of Engineering was the most popular choice with 20 students, followed closely by the Pamplin College of Business with 18.

Explore Technology is a stopgap meta-major to help students who need more time to make their decision. The course formalizes the exploration process and gives students the opportunity to explore within the technological offerings at VT. Explore Technology meets student needs, improves retention, and provides a broad foundation for students in their first semester of college.

RETENTION AND PERSISTENCE RATES

The Explore Technology program has also more than doubled in size in its first three years, from 84 students in the 2017-2018 cohort to 205 students in the 2019-2020 cohort. The course helps students establish a sense of belonging at VT by immersing them in the campus culture, which leads to high retention rates (Table 1). Starting in 2019, each college has hosted an undecided major but with inconsistent success. For example, one college’s undecided students were retained in 2018 at a rate of 87%.

Higher retention rates yield higher persistence and ultimately higher graduation rates. Table 2 demonstrates the high persistence rates of Explore Technology students. Explore Technology’s persistence to the third year was 89.3%, on par with VT’s overall persistence rate of 89.4%. With a retention rate for the 2018-2019 cohort of Explore Technology students that is 1.7% above the VT student average, the persistence rate to the third year is expected to exceed that of all students. Although these students have one significant negative factor for student retention (i.e., undecided status; Beal et al., 1980), they are retained at a higher rate than the overall student population.

“Students who pursue Explore Technology are still on pace to graduate, because they explore new subjects while also completing general education graduation requirements.”

Table 1
First-Year Explore Technology Students and Retention Rates

Cohort	Students in Explore Technology	Explore Technology retention rate	VT retention rate
2017-2018	84	92.9%	92.8%
2018-2019	105	94.3%	92.6%

Table 2
Persistence of Students in Explore Technology

Cohort	Students in Explore Technology	Students persisted to 2nd year	Students persisted to 3rd year
2017-2018	84	78	75
2018-2019	105	99	N/A

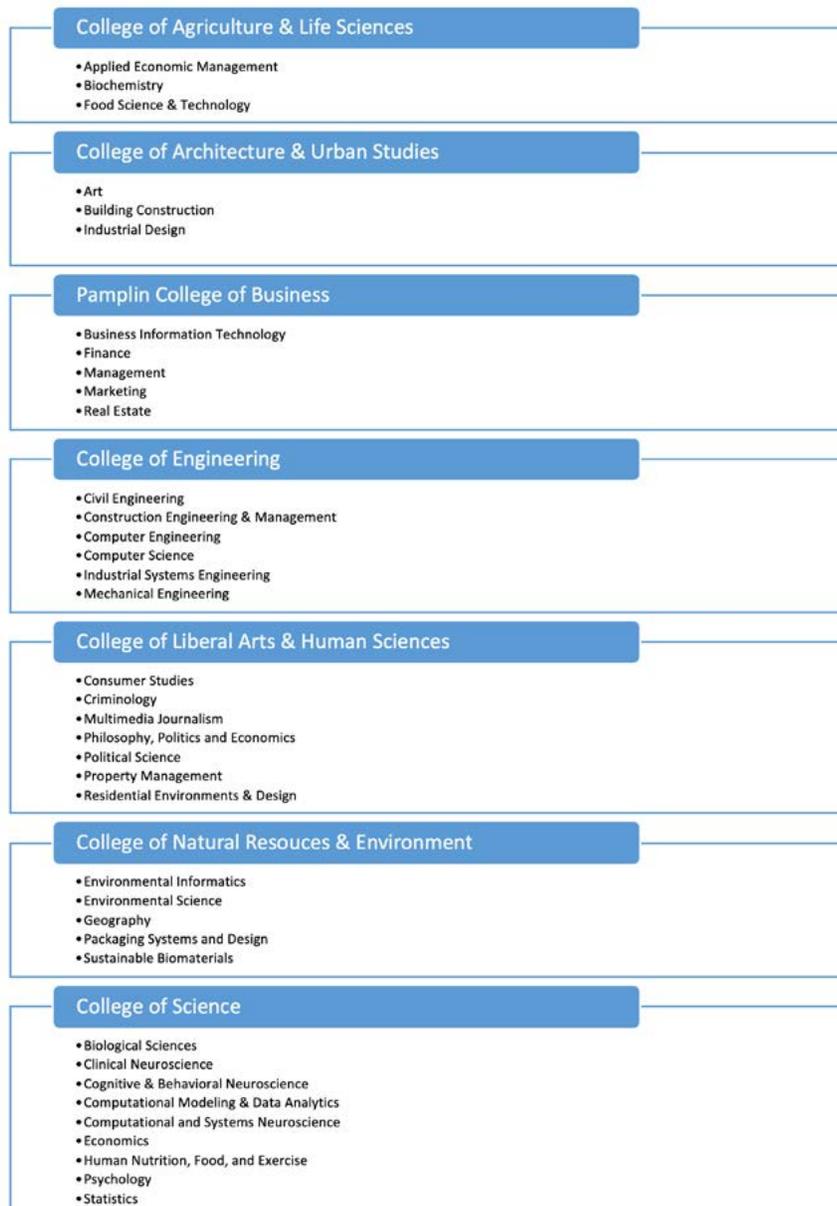


Figure 1. Majors students pursued after Explore Technology, 2017-2018 cohort.

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Second and Transfer Year Experience: Remembering the Forgotten Middle Children

“Since SYE’s implementation in fall 2013, the number of second-year students on track to begin their third year has increased from 71.2% to 77.6%.”

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The story goes that middle children tend to feel left out or excluded, but with the introduction of the Second Year Experience (SYE) and the Transfer Year Experience (TYE) programs at Oakland University (OU), in Rochester, Michigan, the *middle children* (i.e., the second-year and transfer students) no longer need to fight for attention. Housed in the Office of Student Success (OSS), the SYE and TYE programs were created to support students who (a) are transitioning from their first year to their second year or (b) who have transferred from another university. OU is home to approximately 19,000 students each year, and 2,285 of those were second- or transfer-year students in the 2018-2019 academic year.

The SYE program began in 2013 after winning the 2012 OU Grand Idea contest, which invites academic professionals to submit to the office of the president their ideas for new or improved practices, programs, or facilities. The concept was submitted by a group of academic advising directors and academic advisors who knew that students are most likely to transfer during their second year (Hossler et al., 2012). The goal of the SYE program is “to facilitate student involvement and continued academic success in *second-year students* as they progress through their degree programs.” The need to also support transfer students through their first year at OU was recognized in 2016, and TYE was established “to facilitate student involvement and continued academic success in *transition year for first-time transfer students* as they progress through their degree programs.” Students who are classified as First Time in Any College (FTIAC) have completed their first year, met with their First Year Advising Center academic advisor, completed at least 28 credits, and enrolled in SYE for their second year. Students who are new to OU with less than 56 credits are enrolled in TYE. The enrollment process is automatic, but the program is voluntary, and no holds are placed on accounts if students do not participate. These initiatives help hundreds of the program’s students each year feel more connected and engaged on campus while reinforcing the larger mission of OSS “to promote campus-wide initiatives for all OU students with an emphasis on academic engagement that encourages student persistence to graduation.”

AREAS OF ENGAGEMENT

According to Williams and Manning (2014), academic advisors must “utilize an individualistic approach to advising that facilitates self- and career-exploration, while encouraging student engagement in the academic community” (para. 2). These programs were designed around five areas of engagement: major/minor exploration, research engagement, career engagement, campus/community engagement, and wellness engagement. The five areas are defined as:

- **Major/minor exploration**, which helps students discover ways to browse majors and minors available at OU. Students can spend time weighing their likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses to determine their future major/minor.
- **Research engagement**, which gives students an opportunity to explore ways to participate in academic research. Talking to experts about research can expose students to different research needs and allow them to evaluate their own research interests.
- **Career engagement**, which shows students the necessary steps to choose a career. Using career service amenities, students can browse potential employers, career-related events, internships, and open positions for which they can immediately apply. Students are also able to review their résumé and cover letter, manage personal social media branding, or prepare for interviews and career fairs.
- **Campus/community engagement**, which gives students an opportunity to use the OU GrizzOrgs service to browse hundreds of clubs and organizations and to also encourage students to get involved on campus. Students work with the Office of Student Involvement’s Volunteer, Involvement, and Partnership program where students log volunteer hours for service recognition and the opportunity to be acknowledged for giving back to the community.
- **Wellness engagement**, which encourages students to identify what wellness means to them. Complimentary wellness coaching is available by appointment, and the Oakland Counseling Center can help students through issues like anxiety or depression.

SYE includes all five areas of engagement; however, TYE does not address major/minor engagement because transfer students typically have an idea for their major/minor.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

With the goal of encouraging students to be involved with the engagement areas and to ensure they are staying on track with their major and persisting to graduation, OSS (a) encourages participants in these programs to meet with their academic adviser once in the fall (August-December) and again in the winter (January-April), (b) sends monthly e-newsletters to participants, (c) hosts several SYE/TYE engagement events throughout the academic year, (d) hosts weekly informational tables throughout campus, and (e) collaborates regularly with campus partners, so students know about the events and opportunities taking place.

Meeting with academic advisors helps students determine if they are still in the best major/minor for them and to talk about the SYE



A group of Oakland University students wear their Second Year Experience T-shirts and proudly hold up two fingers to signify the second year of their college journey. (Photo by Kelli Titus)

and TYE programs. The monthly e-newsletters remind participants of the programs' many offerings, which include four events hosted by OSS, each targeting a different engagement area: (a) Speed Friending (campus/community), (b) Well-come to a Healthier yOU (wellness), (c) StudyFest (research engagement), and (d) Finish Strong (career engagement). For major/minor exploration, OSS relies on campus partners who host career fairs and major/minor fairs. The signature event is Halfway to Graduation, where SYE and TYE participants celebrate reaching the halfway point of their college experience with games, music, food and drinks, and a raffle for various campus goods including the grand prize of a PS4 gaming system.

Furthermore, through its collaboration with other departments, OSS encourages students to make meaningful connections with campus resources like Academic Advising, Career Services, the Tutoring Center, the Writing Center, Disability Support Services, OU Student Congress, the Center for Multicultural Initiatives, and the Office of Student Involvement.

Every student interaction is logged in Argos, the tracking system used by all advising areas and the majority of student support service offices. This ensures continuity and communication among the offices on campus and ultimately, the success of the students.

Among the 2,285 SYE and TYE participants, OSS logged 1,452 student interactions during the 2018-2019 academic year; these interactions included advising appointments, informational tables, the four engagement events, and the signature event. (Multiple interactions with one student are logged as separate interactions.)

ASSESSMENT AND FINDINGS

At the end of each academic year, a survey is sent to SYE and TYE participants to gather information on the programs' success. During the 2018-2019 academic year, 1,679 second-year students and 606 transfer students were enrolled in the program. Of those, 200 students (157 second-year students and 21 transfer students) responded to the 2018 survey.

When asked how they felt as a result of meeting with their academic advisor, 79% of the responding cohort said they were more knowledgeable about campus resources, and 98% said they had a better understanding of the requirements for their major. One student said:

Oakland definitely was the right choice for me and SYE helped get me more involved and comfortable on campus. The connections I've made at OU through involvement definitely help motivate me to be my best self with my education and social life.

Another student said, "I would have already attended OU without SYE or not, I've loved OU since day 1, but SYE did help me know more about opportunities OU had and helped me feel more connected with my advisor."

Since SYE's implementation in Fall 2013, the number of second-year students on track to begin their third year has increased from 71.2% to 77.6%. The first cohort of SYE students graduated in May 2016, with five- and six-year graduates having done so in 2017 and 2018. Furthermore, OSS is working in partnership with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment for analysis on SYE's and TYE's success. With TYE implemented in the fall of 2016, 2020 will be the first year graduates who have been part of this program are anticipated, with five- and six-year graduates expected in the years following.

IMPLICATIONS

Based on these findings, other higher education institutions may be interested in adopting SYE and TYE programs. These programs provide an excellent conversation for academic advising professionals to have with students about college and opportunities. The SYE and TYE programs also use what is already being offered around campus (i.e., student organization events or professional schools' events). Tying into these events does not cost additional time or money. OSS filled in gaps by adding fresh and relevant events to give students a stronger sense of belonging. By including academic advisors, collaborating with campus partners, and adding the OSS events, Oakland University is able to better retain second-year and transfer-year students.

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SEEKING NOMINATIONS

The Editor seeks three to five higher education scholars or practitioners to serve as members of the editorial review board for *E-Source for College Transitions*. Review board members will serve a three-year term, advise the editor on suitability of submitted manuscripts for publication in *E-Source*, and provide detailed suggestions for reframing or improving the manuscript to authors. Successful candidates will have:

- A master's degree or higher;
- A minimum of two years' experience in one or more of the following areas within a higher education setting: instruction, first-year programs, transfer initiatives, sophomore initiatives, academic support initiatives, retention initiatives, assessment;
- An affiliation with an accredited college or university; and
- Strong writing and editorial skills

To apply, submit a current CV and a letter of interest, highlighting topical areas of expertise/interest related to student transition and describing any previous writing/editorial experience to Dr. Rebecca Campbell, *E-Source* Editor, at ESOURCE@mailbox.sc.edu no later than **April 15, 2020**.

Appointments to the review board will be made in mid-May, with terms beginning **June 1, 2020**.

SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT

The deadline for the October 2020 issue of *E-Source* is **Monday, March 23**. Visit sc.edu/fye/esource to learn more.

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