

Campus-Wide Academic Coaching and a Centralized Academic Success Center

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The purpose of this paper is to suggest that CU Boulder create a centralized academic support center with academic coaching at its heart. During our collective years of working closely with students here at CU Boulder as academic advisors and academic coaches, we have regularly referred students to the many great academic support resources across campus. The problem is that these resources are largely disconnected, making student access, referrals, collaboration among staff and faculty, and assessment difficult and under-utilized.

CU's academic support services are housed in a wide variety of departments on campus. Some are in academic departments, for example subject-specific help rooms, but they are only offered for a handful of subjects. Some are housed in student affairs, for example free ASAP tutoring, but this is only offered to first-year students and students who live in campus housing. Others are college-specific, for example academic coaching, which is only offered to students in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences and Engineering & Applied Science. Bounce Back, like academic coaching, targets only students on academic alert, probation, and suspension. CU's current Student Academic Success Center's (SASC) programs are also for targeted populations, with the exception of their academic skills workshops and coaching drop-ins. The multiple, aforementioned efforts are disjointed, and although they may be individually successful, are limited in the effect they can have on the entirety of the CU student body. It has been our experience that although students can and should benefit from the resources listed above (among others), many are unlikely to come across these options on their own and are even less likely to use them given how the programs and offices are situated across campus and not always available to all students.

There is great potential to have a far-reaching impact on student success if these programs collaborate and build a larger initiative together. To streamline and expand the resources offered, CU Boulder should attempt to replicate what many other universities have achieved by centralizing academic support services. For example:

- Academic Success Center at Oregon State University: <http://success.oregonstate.edu/>
- Dennis Learning Center at The Ohio State University: <https://dennislearningcenter.osu.edu/>
- Academic Success Center at Iowa State University: <https://www.asc.dso.iastate.edu/>
- Academic Success Center at Purdue University:
<http://www.purdue.edu/studentsuccess/academic/index.html>
- Center for Academic Success at Louisiana State University: <http://www.lsu.edu/students/cas/>

Similar to the above examples, the services offered at CU Boulder's centralized academic success center should include academic coaching; workshops/consulting for students, faculty, and staff on metacognitive topics (an expansion of SASC's academic skills workshops); individual tutoring; supplemental instruction (similar to the ASAP Tutoring program); exploratory advising (an expansion of the current UEAC); writing support (The Writing Center); peer mentoring; and potentially international student support (ISSS & IEC). By joining CU's existing efforts, they would become altogether more easily accessible and impactful, as the center would provide academic services to all students regardless of major, college,

and/or academic standing. We believe this would greatly benefit the student experience, year-to-year retention, overall graduation rates, and CU's campus cohesiveness.

We also recommend that this center coordinate a for-credit course focused on achieving academic success (similar to Bounce Back but offered for credit); a second course focused on academic and career exploration (similar to the previously-offered ARSC 1810); and a third course that would guide international students through the transition of learning how to study and succeed at a U.S. higher education institution. These developmental courses mirror what a number of CU's peer institutions offer to their students.

Our experience building a new academic coaching program in the College of Arts & Sciences shows that coaching can be a highly effective student retention strategy. Academic coaching currently supports students in or approaching academic difficulty to help them develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to achieve academic success and overall wellbeing. This type of support is a key component of student retention, and we have intentionally developed the program using research-based practices and student development theory while considering students' varying levels of readiness for change. By increasing self-awareness and enhancing learning strategies, academic coaching fills a gap in retention efforts for CU Arts & Sciences and Engineering & Applied Science students who are in academic difficulty. Academic coaching provides frequent and consistent contact (typically, meetings occur every two to three weeks in addition to periodic emails and phone calls) with a trusted professional academic coach who can effectively guide students toward academic success. The feedback we have received from students tells us that what they appreciate most about the program is the ability to meet with their coach regularly throughout the semester and to build a close relationship with that person. Additionally, what we hear from many students is that they would have liked the opportunity to meet with their coach even *more* frequently than they did.

Academic coaches individualize their approach to working with each student and facilitate activities and conversations around the following topics: time management and procrastination, study techniques, connections on campus and campus resources, test preparation and test taking, wellness, goal setting, reading and note taking, and motivation. Typically what we find is that students initially believe they need to focus on improving in one or two areas, and through coaching discover that many, if not all, of the above topics are interconnected and impact each other. Thus, we recognize the importance of taking a holistic approach to coaching students and see this approach as unique among other student support services offered on campus.

Academic coaching can be offered in a variety of formats, but what we see as having the highest positive impact for students in or nearing academic difficulty is the one-on-one coaching relationship between a student and a professional academic coach. For this to be effective, the design calls for small caseloads of students for each professional academic coach. We also believe in offering academic coaching to students in good academic standing, given that retention is not always tied to GPA. Coaching can benefit all students in college, as motivation, wellness, time management, and study skills are not exclusively issues for students in academic difficulty. Plenty of students leave CU because they do not feel connected, have not identified their goals, and/or are not satisfied with their academic experience, and we believe that offering academic coaching to these students is a solution that could help them find their way here.

To create this access, a team of several professional academic coaches needs to be hired to lead the initiative. An additional step and cost-effective solution to expanding access would be to offer

supplemental coaching services (i.e. group coaching, drop-ins, workshops, classes) through graduate and undergraduate students.

We believe an excellent, high-impact opportunity to expand the availability of academic coaching is to create the aforementioned for-credit course focused on academic coaching topics. This would not only scale up this retention effort but simultaneously be an opportunity for community building among students, as this course would be small and discussion-based in nature.

Finally, a campus-wide academic coaching program would present opportunities for closer collaboration between faculty and staff. In the past year, academic coaches have started reaching out to coaching participants' instructors and have welcomed feedback on each student's performance. Coaches have also been piloting an early-alert effort by collecting mid-semester grade lists from select academic departments and outreaching to those students. We view these initiatives as being in their very early stages and hope that a campus-wide early-alert system will soon be implemented to streamline this process. We see early alert and academic coaching as going hand-in-hand. The other collaboration opportunity within the academic success center would be for cross training and consulting between academic coaches, faculty, and staff on all academic success-related topics.

Student success and retention are key initiatives on campus and we believe that academic coaching has had a direct impact on the increased retention of CU Boulder students. Ninety percent of students who completed the academic coaching program in the Spring 2017 term persisted to their second year at CU Boulder. These students began the spring term on academic alert or nearing academic difficulty. When we are intentional about how we support our students, students are given further opportunity to fulfill their potential and are much more likely to persist at CU. We hope that as CU Boulder leadership makes decisions about how to fund and organize student services in the coming years, that academic coaching and a larger academic success center, as proposed in this paper, will emerge as a priority and be shaped in a way that benefits students, faculty, and staff alike.

Lastly, we would like to end by including a few of the many messages sent by students to their academic coaches in recent semesters:

"Just wanted to let you know I walked out of my Calculus exam feeling more confident than I ever have! Thanks for all the help and support! Things are going really well right now thanks to the techniques you have suggested." – Fall 2017 academic coaching student

"I know I'm meeting with you tomorrow, but I just couldn't wait to tell you about this. I really worked on reading all the documents these past couple weeks and I got a 93% on my [redacted for student privacy] Midterm. I also received a 90 on my most recent discussion in my [redacted for student privacy] and [redacted for student privacy] class, which I had previously been struggling. See you tomorrow!" – Fall 2017 academic coaching student

"I wanted to start off by saying thank you for all the help...and resources you provided me throughout the semester to help contribute to my success at CU. The learning strategies that I started using for my classes have made me feel more organized and confident. I feel like my study habits have really improved from the first semester. I now begin studying more in advance for exams. I have also learned to use different studying methods that help me grasp a better understanding of a concept and am taking more effective notes, making it easier to study for exams. I think I was much more motivated to do

better this semester because you pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me realize that I can do better than what I was doing.” – Spring 2017 academic coaching student