2024 Saginaw Valley State University Student Success Plan

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Members of the HLC Student Success Academy: Deborah Huntley, Sidney Childs, Sue Crane, Josh Ode, Poonam Kumar, Brian Thomas, Dawn Hinton, Jenna Briggs, Nick Wagner, Erik Trump

Members of the SVSU Student Success Advisory Committee: Brian Thomas, Marie Rabideau, Sue Crane, Dawn Hinton, Terra Luckett, Joe Weaver, Erik Trump, Ken Jolly, Gary Brasseur, Jason Swackhamer

1. Executive Summary

This report is the product of SVSU's participation in the Higher Learning Commission Student Success Academy. SVSU joined this program because, as a regional, public university, student success is central to our mission as a university. As stated in one of our strategic goals "SVSU delivers high-quality academic programs that lead to student success, improved retention and enrollment stability."   The team that put together this report included faculty and administrators from Academic Affairs, Students Affairs, and Administration and Business Affairs. With guidance from the Higher Learning Commission, our goal was to conduct inventories of the ways in which SVSU is supporting student success, identify gaps, and make recommendations regarding how to fill these gaps. This was not seen as a linear process as every attempt was made to make recommendations and implement policy and programmatic changes throughout the process, rather than waiting until this final report was made. Furthermore, the team made every effort to make this an inclusive process that involved input from all members of the university community.

A total of four inventories were conducted over a period of two years from 2019 until 2021. The inventories, which examined university data, programs, infrastructure and policy and engagement, were collected using a wide-range of methodologies including drawing from current institutional data, quantitative surveys, focus groups, participant observation, university-wide forums, and regular meetings with stake-holders through existing committees

including, but not limited to, the Strategic Enrollment Management Steering Committee, the Retention and Completion Council, and the Provost's Executive Council. Importantly, these committees included representatives from units across campus that have a direct impact on student success, including academic deans, financial aid and services, academic advising, tutoring centers, student life, faculty, and our teaching and learning center. Additional information was collected formally via surveys and focus groups and through other committees.

The inventories highlighted many powerful ways in which SVSU is contributing to student success. In particular, as a teaching focused institution, student learning was a clear priority at our university. Interestingly, this was evident in all employment categories that were inventoried including faculty, staff, and students. Our overall retention and graduation rates have been increasing over the past five years and, while there rates differ across ethnicity, these differences disappear when we control for the academic preparation of different groups. SVSU also has a robust support network for students including academic tutoring services, advising, and mental health services. Recent expansion of services such as our Multicultural Student Center and College Transitions, our first year seminar, demonstrate SVSU's commitment to student success.

At the same time, the team identified several gaps that may be hindering SVSU's ability to fully serve our students. In terms of data, we have leaned heavily on quantitative data with little reliance on qualitative information related to the student experience, which can be particularly problematic when trying to assess things like personal satisfaction. Data collection is often fragmented and assessment is not uniform across programs and units, making evaluation of effectiveness challenging. Student awareness and utilization of support services could have been higher, although it was difficult to evaluate this in the context of the pandemic. At the same time, it was clear that we lacked comprehensive student success programs, such as a required first year seminar, which is common at many universities as well as specialized student success programs for marginalized populations. Finally, the implementation of changes was also hindered by a lack of centralized support for student success, which hindered program development and coordination as well as assessment. At the university level, the process for implementing larger changes to policies and procedures was also not always clear.

From these gaps, the team developed four recommendations that are listed below. While SVSU is clearly an institution that is dedicated to student success, we believe that the implementation of these recommendations will help us increase efficiency, meet the needs of diverse students, and assist with university-level changes that meet our goals of student success.

1. <u>Publicize the six dimensions of student success and encourage their use:</u> This should take place at the department/unit level (academic and support) to evaluate and guide programming. We recommend that those dimensions be incorporated into the university's new Strategic Plan.

2. Task the Student Success Advisory Committee with continuously reviewing university policies and procedures: This will ensure that they align with and support the overarching goals of student success and equity.
3. Broaden Student Success Programming: Expand and diversify student success programs, with a special focus on supporting marginalized populations, to ensure comprehensive and inclusive support for a wider range of students.
4. Continue efforts to centralize Student Success services: In order to streamline support services, enhance efficiency, and improve coordination of student success initiatives it is important that efforts in different units operate in collaboration with each other.

As this report details, in response to recommendations from Student Success Academy team, other actions in support of student success have already been taken.

2. Methodology

To get a baseline understanding of student success at SVSU, the team gathered and analyzed evidence in four areas: a data inventory, which examined student retention and completion trends; an initiatives inventory, that cataloged programs intended to support student success among various dimensions; an infrastructure inventory, which identified potential policy barriers impeding student success; and an engagement inventory, which surveyed students about their experiences and opinions.

For the *Data Inventory*, the team used quantitative data provided by the Office of Institutional Research to analyze longitudinal trends/patterns in student retention and completion rates, as well as factors that affected GPA. Data points included gender, ethnicity, residency (commuter vs. on-campus), class standing enrollments, average age, percent who are Pell-eligible, first-generation, international students, ESL students, veterans, and athletes. Other metrics to evaluate our student population were average test scores, average high school grade point averages, retention/persistence, and six-year graduation rates both in aggregate and across some of the demographic groups mentioned. The initial data inventory was completed in the fall 2019 semester. The data represented cohorts from 2014-2018. After all the data was compiled, the SSA team created an infographic that was shared with the campus community, both in print form and through a formal presentation. Later, the team updated the inventory with 2019 and 2020 data.

The *Initiatives Inventory* data was collected using a multimethodological approach. First, a survey was sent out to deans and directors in Academic and Student Affairs asking them to identify and provide details regarding programs that contributed to student success. Also, a series of four open forums were held with SVSU employees during which the university community was updated on the activities of the Student Success Academy Team and participants were asked to complete surveys regarding student success programs. Finally, members of the SSA Team reviewed and discussed the programs listed in the inventory to try to

identify any active programs on campus that were omitted. This process was initiated in January of 2020 and primarily completed by March of 2020. While there were initially plans to continue to collect information during university-wide workshops focused on students, these were cancelled due to the pandemic and not rescheduled. The SSA Team met several times during the fall of 2020 to review the information. A result of those discussions was the recognition that some programs operating through academic departments may have been omitted. In order to address this gap, in early 2021 the Office of Academic Affairs began a review of all academic program annual assessment reports to identify student success programs that may have been omitted. This review was completed by the end of March 2021 and used to update the current inventory. Additional updates were made in the summer of 2021, after university departments submitted annual assessment reports from 2020-2021.

The *Infrastructure Inventory* required our committee to review our campus policies to uncover any unintended obstacles that may hinder student success, and to pinpoint any complex issues associated with these policies. The SVSU SSA Academy team developed a template to include the following data points: 1) Potential Inhibitor to Student Success, 2) Category (Unit/entity/concept in which the inhibitor resides including Admissions, Student Academic Support, Student Experience, Student Administrative Services, Instruction, Academic Programs, Facilities, ITS), 3) Student Success Factor (Student success factor that the inhibitor impacts such as Student Learning, Retention/Persistence, Completion/Graduation, Engagement, Employability, Satisfaction, Personal Goals), 4) Owner (Specific unit that would address the inhibitor), 5) Why (Short description of why it is an inhibitor), 6) Student Success Issue (Detail on the impact of the inhibitor on student success), 7) Considerations (Identify additional considerations related to the inhibitor). This template was shared with the deans/directors of various units on campus. Each dean/director was asked to discuss and identify and describe possible policy and practices that inhibit student success and why it inhibits student success. Focus groups with university committees including the Academic Instructional Committee, Academic Affairs Executive Council, and Academic Affairs Director meeting were also conducted to identify possible inhibitors to student success. Members of the SVSU SSA team evaluated each response and completed the seven components of the infrastructure template. The infrastructure inventory was started in the late summer/early fall of 2020. The first phase of the inventory was completed in November 2020. Following the HLC SSA Roundtable, we recognized the need for continued work on the inventory. We currently have identified 68 possible infrastructure inhibitors across campus, some of which have already been addressed.

The *Engagement Inventory* included two surveys sent to all SVSU students using Anthology Baseline and included a Fall Semester 2020 Student Affairs COVID-19 Engagement Survey (n=961) and the Winter Semester 2021 Student Success Academy Engagement Inventory (n=807). Through a combination of a Likert scale and open-ended questions, the two surveys assessed students' perceived engagement and identified their unmet needs. Responses to the open-ended questions were thematized to aid in interpretation. Question areas included the following: 1) How do you define success? 2) How has SVSU prepared you for success (Nine areas)? 3) What are other ways SVSU could offer more support? 4) Demographic

questions.   Focus groups with students were held through student organizations, student committees, and capstone courses in each of the 5 colleges. Focus group questions were centered around the following: 1) Whether they perceive SVSU as enrollment-centered or student-centered? 2) Why their perceptions exist? 3) What prevents SVSU from becoming a student-centered institution? 4) Which SVSU policies and/or practices support their perceptions?   In addition, a 'Gallery Walk' was conducted to gain feedback on the physical layout, wayfinding (signage), and location of departments and programs on the SVSU campus.

4. Inventory Analysis

A review of data from the four inventories revealed important findings that helped the team understand the trends, strengths, and areas for improvement in SVSU's approach to defining and supporting student success.

Findings from the *Data Inventory* revealed trends about SVSU's students and the role of academic support centers in supporting student success. SVSU has more female students (60%) and our population of undergraduate students is primarily commuters, although, 70% of our first-time in college population lives on-campus in their first year. Almost 40% of our students are Pell-eligible and almost 25% first-generation. Success rates related to both retention and graduation are lower for these two groups (Pell & first-generation) compared to our overall population. Success rates differ across ethnicity, but when controlling for academic preparation in these groups, there really are not significant differences. Our overall retention and graduation rates have increased steadily in the past five years. Beyond these trends, the OIR data analysis revealed one significant finding related to student success: students who use the university's academic support centers tend to have better academic outcomes as related to retention and term grade point average. This result holds even when controlling for academic preparation and looking at all groups who use these services compared to those students who do not.

The student success *Initiatives Inventory* produced a list of 42 programs which were designed to serve special populations and to meet University strategic goals. Each initiative was evaluated in terms of how it fit within the student success categories of Completion/Graduation, Employability, Engagement, Learning, Personal Goals, Retention/Persistence, and Satisfaction. What we have discovered is that the majority (~70%) of our initiatives are designed to address to address two categories "Engagement" and "Retention /Persistence." In addition, "Personal Goals" and "Employability" are the categories with the least number of initiatives. When considering the populations served by each initiative, we discovered that our initiatives primarily addressed students who were First Time in College (FTIC), followed by High Performing Students, Under-Prepared Students, and Transfer Students, with one initiative which addressed Pell Eligible and First-Generation Students. Forty-three percent of initiatives served undefined populations. The majority of initiatives at SVSU are focused on students either before they arrive to SVSU or impact students during their first year. Although in many cases these initiatives collect data related to student satisfaction, student demographics, or

completion/participation rates, few programs are directly assessing their impact on the various dimensions of student success. Also, when the initiatives were mapped against reach and commitment, it was clear that the majority of initiatives were targeting small groups of students.

The *Infrastructure Inventory* indicated several key findings. First, it uncovered over 60 policies that were potentially hindering academic success among students. Second, it pointed out the lack of a student success-focused review in existing policy oversight committees. Currently, the university has several committees that review policy implementation and procedures that influence operational efficiency. However, these committees have not focused on policies from primarily a student success perspective. Finally, it highlighted inconsistent communication to students as a significant obstacle to their success and identified a need for enhanced mental health support services for students.

In terms of the *Engagement Inventory*, the results from the Student Success Survey illuminated how students define their own success from a list of choices: to have a positive experience, earn a degree, have a job after graduation, reach a personal goal, or attain a 'good' GPA (3.00 or better). Approximately, 85% of students defined success as earning a degree; 77% indicated having a job after graduation as being successful. When asked to provide their own definition of student success, several themes emerged: doing well in their classes; having a positive relationship with faculty, obtaining their professional goals, maintaining mental health and wellness, and developing personal relationships and skills. Students were asked their opinion of how SVSU prepared them for success. Areas in which students reported that the University has prepared them "a great deal" or "much" for success include continued enrollment after the first semester (63%), graduation/completion (53%), opportunities to participate in programs and activities (62%). Only 26% of students believe SVSU's mental health and wellness services support their success "a great deal" or "much." Students were also queried on what other forms of support the University could offered toward their success. Their responses coalesced around seven major themes, which include the following: more mental health and counseling support, enhanced academic support in the classroom for faculty and students, the establishment of clear academic polices, strengthening of the academic advising services and outreach to students, offering a more structured career development and services area, and providing more opportunities for engagement in Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) to include funding structure and support to groups such as commuters and multicultural students. Finally, students offered opinions about ways to improve the SVSU learning environment (on-line classes, DEI training, attendance, semester breaks, etc.).

5. Gap Analysis

When our team reviewed the contents of the different inventories, we were able to identify several gaps that both threaded through all the inventories and were part of the individual inventories.

First, the *Data Inventory* revealed gaps in our quantitative and qualitative data related to student success. The OIR, for practical and understandable reasons, defines student success narrowly with the metrics of retention, persistence, and completion. More broadly, the university tends to use quantitative data to monitor student success, with much less collection of qualitative value that could capture student voices in a more nuanced way. Similarly, while progress is being made to assess student engagement in a range of areas, the collection of this data is irregular and not coordinated. Finally, our data related to student outcomes after graduation largely focuses on employment post-graduation.

The *Initiatives Inventory* revealed several gaps that could be filled. First, the current SVSU programs are strongly focused on first-year students with a relative lack of programs after the first year. Second, and probably related to the first gap, few programs focus on personal goal attainment, student satisfaction, completion/graduation, or learning and employability. Despite the fact that there are many programs that impact relatively small numbers of students, there are few specialized programs for underrepresented populations such as commuters or transfers students. Furthermore, assessment of initiatives and evaluation of program goals was often only minimal. The team also noted that a number of narrowly-targeted programs operate directly under academic departments (for the benefit of students in their majors) but that these programs are not fully represented in our inventory because they fall somewhat outside of direct administrative control.

The *Infrastructure Initiative* noted a lack of regular, centralized, and coordinated efforts to review policies in terms of their impact on student success. Students, however, perceived barriers to access or success in financial and other policies and procedures. The team noted that part of the issues related to financial policies and, in fact, many policy barriers to student success stemmed from a lack of organizational infrastructure to engage in ongoing evaluation and maintenance of policies and procedures under a continuous improvement model. Additional gaps were noted in internal communication, mental health services, adjunct faculty and support, and mechanisms to evaluate student experience.

In the area of *Student Engagement*, the team noted a gap in terms of student awareness of support services (e.g. students are told about support services in their first year, but not after that.) While support for first-year students is strong, the management and advising of upper-level students is more strongly influenced by academic departments. While some departments provided robust support, the inconsistencies in terms of departmental support revealed another gap in terms of student engagement. Within this area, student support in the area of financial aid and services were again identified as a gap with communication regarding institutional fees. The lack of programs that engaged specific populations such as transfer

students, commuter students, and non-traditional students was another gap noted by the team.

In general, a number of themes emerged related to coordination, assessment, communication, and support for both individual populations of interest and support for success after the first year. The team is continuing to refine and prioritize the gaps that have been identified in order to determine which gaps can be addressed rapidly and which will require longer-term planning and implementation. Of course, significant questions remain regarding prioritization of efforts to reduce gaps to student success in the context of limited resources. However, the team feels well positioned to move forward as the Student Success Advisory Committee (SSAC) and begin to address the issues that we have identified.

6. Recommendations

In this Recommendations section, we outline a series of targeted initiatives designed to address the identified gaps and enhance SVSU's commitment to student success. These recommendations are not just solutions to the challenges we've uncovered; they are also proactive steps towards building a more inclusive, efficient, and student-centered university environment. Grounded in the data-driven insights from our earlier inventories and analyses, the following recommendations aim to strategically bolster SVSU's efforts in creating an educational landscape where every student has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

Recommendation 1: Integrate the Six Dimension of Student Success into SVSU Culture

In its study, the Student Success Academy identified six fundamental dimensions of student success that it strongly recommends should serve as operational definitions for our student success initiatives. Thus, we propose first, that the SSAC publicize these dimensions; second, that those dimensions be used at the department level (academic and support) to evaluate and guide programming; and third, that these six dimensions be built into the university's new Strategic Plan.

1. Academic Progress/Graduation: This dimension underscores the university's commitment to fostering academic excellence and ensuring students not only progress through their courses but also reach the pinnacle of their academic journey: graduation. Every program, including the digital badges offered through the Rural Pathways program, is designed to contribute to this fundamental goal.
2. Engagement and Belonging: Recognizing that a student's university experience extends beyond the classroom, this dimension emphasizes the importance of cultivating a sense of community and connection. Through various initiatives, students are encouraged to engage with the university and the wider community, fostering a sense of belonging that enriches their educational experience.
3. Career Preparation: SVSU is dedicated to equipping students with the skills and experiences necessary for career success. This dimension guides the development of

programs and services aimed at preparing students for the workforce, ensuring they are not only academically competent but also professionally ready.

4. <u>Student Satisfaction/Wellbeing</u>: Understanding that student success is inextricably linked to overall wellbeing, this dimension encompasses the financial, mental, social, and physical aspects of student life. SVSU's programs are tailored to support students in all these areas, contributing to their overall satisfaction and wellbeing.

5. <u>Academic Optimism, Self-Efficacy, Personal Goal Attainment</u>: This dimension focuses on the individual student's mindset and personal development. By fostering academic optimism and self-efficacy, SVSU empowers students to set and achieve their personal and academic goals, an essential component of student success.

6. <u>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Global Views/Citizenship</u>: Finally, this dimension reflects SVSU's commitment to creating an inclusive environment that values diversity and global perspectives. It guides the university's efforts in promoting equity and preparing students to be informed and engaged global citizens.

These six dimensions are not standalone entities but are interwoven into the fabric of all SVSU's student success efforts. They serve as a comprehensive framework, guiding the implementation of initiatives like the Rural Pathways program's digital badges, and ensuring that every strategy employed is aligned with SVSU's holistic vision for student success. This multi-dimensional approach reaffirms SVSU's dedication to nurturing well-rounded individuals who are academically accomplished, personally fulfilled, and prepared to contribute meaningfully to society.

Recommendation 2: Task Student Success Advisory Committee with Policy Review

The second recommendation proposes that the <u>Student Success Advisory Committee take on the responsibility of performing an</u> ongoing review of policies and procedures impacting student success at Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU). This committee's vision is to ensure that every aspect of university operations is aligned with and conducive to the overarching goal of enhancing student success.

Objective of Policy Alignment and Continuous Improvement: At the core of this recommendation is the belief that policies and procedures are the backbone of an educational institution's operational efficacy and student-centric approach. The SSAC will serve as a guardian of these principles, continuously evaluating and recommending modifications to existing policies to better serve the diverse needs of our student body. This initiative recognizes the dynamic nature of higher education and the need for policies that not only respond to current challenges but are also forward-thinking and adaptable.

Focus on Inclusivity and Equity: A significant focus of the committee will be on ensuring that policies and procedures at SVSU promote inclusivity and equity. This involves identifying any existing systemic barriers that may disproportionately affect certain student groups and proposing changes to mitigate these issues. The committee will work towards creating a more

equitable educational environment where every student, regardless of their background, has equal access to opportunities and resources necessary for success.

Enhanced Communication and Implementation: In addition to policy review, the committee will also play a vital role in improving communication and implementation strategies for new or revised policies. This will ensure that changes are effectively communicated to all relevant parties and that there is a clear understanding of the rationale behind these changes. Improved communication and implementation are key to ensuring that policy changes are embraced and effectively integrated into the university's operational framework.

Recommendation 3: Broadening Student Success Programming

Our second recommendation focuses on the strategic expansion and diversification of student success programming at Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU), with an emphasis on reaching marginalized student populations, especially beyond the first-year experience. This initiative is driven by our commitment to inclusivity and the belief that a successful student body is a diverse one, where every individual, regardless of their background, has access to robust support and opportunities. We should balance programming so that we have both initiatives geared toward special, non-marginalized populations and initiatives that target underrepresented or underserved populations.

Targeted Expansion for Marginalized Populations: Recognizing the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups on campus, SVSU is committed to developing and broadening programs that specifically address the needs of these students. This initiative involves not only enhancing existing programs but also innovating new ones that cater to the varied experiences and challenges of marginalized populations. By doing so, we aim to bridge the gap in support services, ensuring that no student is left behind due to systemic barriers or lack of resources. This approach is vital in fostering a university culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion at its core.

Inclusive Programming for Broader Impact: The expansion of student success programs will be undertaken with a strategic focus on inclusivity, ensuring that these programs are accessible and beneficial to a larger segment of our student population. By broadening the reach of our support services, we aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where every student feels valued and empowered to achieve their full potential. This means not only expanding the scope of existing programs but also creating new initiatives that address the specific needs of diverse student groups, including first-generation college students, students from various socio-economic backgrounds, and those with different learning preferences and challenges.

Recommendation 4: Continued centralization of Student Success efforts and offices

At the heart of enhancing student success at Saginaw Valley State University lies the need for a strategic reorganization that brings together disparate yet interrelated student support

functions under one umbrella. As this report demonstrates, there has already been some reorganization of committees to achieve greater collaboration, but the university lacks a formal Student Success Unit or a designated Student Success Director. Recognizing that developing a distinct Student Success Unit with its own Director is an aspirational recommendation the SSAC nonetheless offers several reasons why continued centralization and oversight of student success initiatives would serve students' interests.

Centralization for Coherence and Clarity: The creation of a unified Student Success Unit would be a transformative step towards a more integrated approach to student support. By bringing various support services, such as academic advising, tutoring, mental health counseling, and career services, into a single unit, SVSU could ensure that these services work in tandem rather than in isolation. This coordination promises a more seamless experience for students, where their diverse needs are met through a well-orchestrated support system.

The Role of a Student Success Director: Central to this reorganization would be the appointment of a Student Success Director. This role is envisioned to be a strategic one, where the Director would not only oversee the unit but also act as a visionary leader who can identify emerging student needs, spearhead innovative support programs, and foster a culture of student-centeredness. The Director's responsibilities would include strategic planning, cross-departmental collaboration, and leading efforts in continuous improvement of student services. Their leadership will be instrumental in breaking down silos within the university, promoting a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for student success.

Efficiency and Impact: A centralized unit could also enhance operational efficiency. With a unified direction and consolidated resources, the unit could avoid duplication of efforts, optimize resource allocation, and achieve greater impact with its initiatives. This restructuring would also be aimed at simplifying administrative processes for both students and staff, making the university's support system more accessible and effective.

Enhanced Tracking and Assessment: An integrated unit would also offer the advantage of streamlined data collection and assessment, in addition to standardized assessment measures/expectations. With a holistic view of student engagement and success, the unit could more effectively track student progress, identify at-risk students, and tailor interventions to individual needs. This data-driven approach will be crucial in not only addressing current student challenges but also in anticipating future trends and preparing accordingly.

In conclusion, these four recommendations — the promotion of the six dimensions of student success, the continuation of university-level policy review, the broadening of student success programming, and the centralization of student success efforts — represent a comprehensive and strategic approach towards elevating student success at Saginaw Valley State University. By providing a shared multi-dimensional definition of student success and centralizing success efforts, we aim to foster a more cohesive and efficient support system. Expanding our programming to cater specifically to marginalized populations ensures that our commitment to diversity and inclusion translates into tangible support for all students. And through the

establishment of a policy review committee, we ensure that our university's policies are continually aligned with our core mission of student success. Together, these recommendations embody a holistic and forward-thinking blueprint, one that is poised to transform SVSU into a beacon of student-centered excellence, inclusivity, and innovation in higher education.

7. Fall of 2023 Update

As we reflect on Saginaw Valley State University's recent history in the area of student success, it is important to recognize the proactive and dynamic approach that has characterized our efforts. From the inception of our participation in the Higher Learning Commission Student Success Academy, we were guided by the principle of immediate action. Adhering to the instructions provided by the Academy, our team did not wait for the finalization of this report to begin implementing changes. Instead, we initiated a series of actions and reforms early in the process, believing firmly in the value of immediate and continuous improvement. This proactive approach has not only accelerated our progress towards achieving our student success goals but has also demonstrated our commitment to being a responsive and agile institution, always ready to adapt and advance for the benefit of our student community.

In response to our goal of broadening student success programming, the team used data from the OIR to recommend an expansion of SVSU's first-semester transition program, CT100. This one-credit course was originally developed to help a small population of underprepared students (as indicated by test scores) learn college success strategies, and OIR data revealed it had a significant positive impact on retention and GPA. In response, the team convinced the university open additional sections and make them available to all students. In the fall of 2023, we witnessed a remarkable increase in enrollment in CT100, exceeding 500 students, nearly half of the first-year class. This surge not only reflects our dedication to inclusive education but also underscores our commitment to supporting a diverse range of students right from their initial university experience.

Moreover, the curriculum of CT100 is undergoing a continuous and dynamic review process. This is in recognition of the evolving needs of our student body and the crucial role the program plays in easing the transition into university life. The emphasis is on creating a curriculum that is not only academically enriching but also supportive of students' social integration and overall well-being.

Programs like CT100 are vital in higher education, especially for their positive impact on retention and success among first-generation and underrepresented student groups. These programs offer an essential platform for new students to acclimate to the university environment, fostering a sense of belonging and laying a strong foundation for their future academic achievements. Through such initiatives, SVSU continues to advance in its mission to provide a supportive, engaging, and inclusive educational experience for all students.

The team tasked with the Infrastructure Inventory identified several policies that it felt should be revised as quickly as possible. Working with the appropriate offices, these policies were modified to better support student success.

The Infrastructure Inventory team also raised awareness about the fact that SVSU's academic forgiveness policy was out-of-step with other universities in the state. The punitive policy served as a barrier to re-admission for stopped-out students, as well as an obstacle to graduate studies for students who switched academic programs. As a result of this discovery, faculty proposed a revised policy which is currently under review in the Curriculum and Academic Programs ratification process.

As a result of student survey data from the Engagement Inventory, the University enhanced the campus mental health and wellness center to more effectively address students' mental health needs.

In the late winter and early spring of 2022, Saginaw Valley State University also undertook a significant restructuring of the committees overseeing student success. This reorganization led to the formation of two key committees: the Student Success Program (SSP) committee and the Student Success Advisory (SSA) committee, both playing distinct yet complementary roles in the overarching student success framework.

The SSP Committee, comprising directors of various student success grants and programs, is focused on the implementation and coordination of initiatives aimed at supporting diverse student populations. These populations include academically disadvantaged, low-income, first-generation, disabled, and charter school students. The committee's primary goal is to facilitate information sharing, coordinate program efforts, and evaluate the impact of these initiatives. This ensures that SVSU's efforts in student retention are synergized and reach the maximum number of students effectively. Concurrently, the SSA Committee, replacing the Retention Committee and the HLC Student Success Team, brings together faculty, staff, and administrators who have been independently exploring retention issues. This committee is dedicated to broad, university-level goals that support the retention and graduation of SVSU students and operates as a subcommittee of the Strategic Enrollment Management Council. Together, these committees represent a strategic and collaborative approach to addressing student success at SVSU, aligning various efforts and expertise towards a unified objective.

In 2021, as part of our ongoing commitment to enhancing student success, we began exploring external funding opportunities to support our initiatives. Recognizing the critical need for additional resources, we submitted a grant proposal to the Department of Education. Our aim was to expand and enrich our programming for student success, aligning with the three core recommendations identified earlier: developing academic programs, engaging students effectively, and ensuring diversity and inclusivity in our approach.

Our efforts bore fruit in the summer of 2022 when we received the Rural Pathways grant. This financial boost was a pivotal moment, enabling us to significantly enhance our student success

programs. We initiated a comprehensive plan, focusing on expanding existing programs and developing new ones, specifically tailored to the needs of our diverse student population. This expansion was particularly beneficial for our rural students, who constitute a significant portion of our student body. By utilizing this grant, we were able to extend our reach and impact, offering more inclusive and effective support to students from various backgrounds.

The grant's impact was multifaceted. Firstly, it allowed us to enhance our admissions outreach and college preparatory programming, particularly for rural students. A dedicated Rural Admissions Representative was appointed to focus on outreach to rural high schools, and an Instructional Designer was brought on board to develop college preparatory programming using technology to maximize accessibility for rural students. Secondly, the grant facilitated the implementation of strategies to connect SVSU students to critical student success resources. These resources were identified as part of the Higher Learning Commission Student Success Academy and included peer student success coaches and additional staff to support student success. These roles were pivotal in enhancing student retention and success, while also preparing students for future employability. Finally, we focused on ensuring that our curriculum met the unique needs of rural students, thus enhancing their educational experience and future career prospects.

In the fall of 2023, Saginaw Valley State University proudly opened the doors to the Cardinal Student Success Center, a pivotal development in our continuous endeavor to enhance student success. This center, aligned with the strategic recommendations of the Higher Learning Commission Student Success Academy, stands as a testament to our commitment to providing high-quality academic programs and robust support for all students.

The Cardinal Student Success Center is a multifaceted facility designed to centralize and streamline student success efforts. It serves a critical role in supporting various student success grants and internal programming, ensuring that our initiatives are coordinated and effective. The center offers essential office and meeting spaces for staff administering external grant programs, signifying our proactive approach to leveraging external resources for student success.

In addition to supporting grant-related activities, the center is a dynamic space dedicated to specialized student success programming, particularly for special populations. It houses supervised, general-use small group study areas that are directly linked to student support services, fostering an environment conducive to academic collaboration and peer learning. This deliberate design reflects our understanding of the importance of social belonging and its positive impact on academic achievement, as evidenced in educational research.

Overall, the Cardinal Student Success Center embodies SVSU's dedication to creating social and academic spaces that facilitate meaningful student engagement and success. Its establishment marks a significant stride in reinforcing our university's mission of ensuring student success, improved retention, and enrollment stability, while also providing a nurturing environment where every student can find a sense of belonging and the resources necessary to thrive.

8. Conclusion

It is evident that partial progress has already been made towards achieving the four recommendations outlined in our Student Success Plan. However, it is equally clear that our journey towards enhancing student success is an ongoing process, with more work to be done. The efforts undertaken thus far on the recommendations have laid a solid foundation for future endeavors. These efforts are already streamlining our support services and increasing efficiency but are also ensuring that our commitment to diversity and inclusivity translates into tangible support for all students.

Looking forward, this document serves as a guide for SVSU's continuous pursuit of student success. It outlines a strategic direction that we hope will inspire and guide future efforts in this crucial area. As we continue to seek innovative ways to address the four recommendations, our ultimate goal remains steadfast: to create an educational landscape where every student has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. The path ahead is one of constant evolution and improvement, and SVSU is committed to adapting and advancing our strategies to meet the ever-changing needs of our students and the broader educational landscape.