

**Student Success and Empowerment Initiative**

**2015-16 Annual Report**

**Submitted by Amy Aldous Bergerson, Director**

**20 June, 2016**



## **Introduction**

The Student Success and Empowerment Initiative (SSEI) is an integral component of the mission of Undergraduate Studies to provide students with “transformative undergraduate experiences,” and of the University of Utah’s focus on ensuring that each undergraduate has a meaningful and successful experience at the U. In this annual report, we highlight our accomplishments during the 2015-16 academic year, provide data to illustrate our impact on the University of Utah campus, tie our work to the three big goals outlined in the University of Utah Presidential Pledge, and highlight our contributions to the broader University community. Additionally, this report outlines the SSEI goals for the upcoming year.

### **Our Mission**

The mission of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative (SSEI) is to support students in making the most of their University of Utah experience. As caring, knowledgeable professionals, Student Success Advocates engage and empower undergraduate students in exploring and clarifying their interests and goals, overcoming personal and academic challenges, and connecting to campus resources and opportunities. Our holistic, individualized, mobile approach allows us to meet students right where they are.

### **Our Staff**

The 2015-16 staff of the SSEI consisted of:

*Director:* Amy Aldous Bergerson

*Student Success Advocates:* Bianca Bellot, Jon Bernal, Christine Contestable, Wazir Jefferson, Tramaine Jones, Lisa Lewis, Maggie Roque, and Stephanie Santarosa

*Administrative Assistant:* Juan Rios

*Outreach Ambassadors:* Sydney Magana (Lead), Odalys Levya, Kambasia Tarr, and Haoran Yu

### **2015-16 Accomplishments**

During fiscal year 2015-16, our work focused on supporting the three big goals outlined in the University of Utah Presidential Pledge, which states that students will be supported by “learning communities, mentors and advisors, financial guidance, and deeply engaged learning experiences.” The University is currently investing significantly in initiatives designed to support student success. Key to these efforts is the work of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative, specifically the Student Success Advocate (SSA) program. Student Success Advocates meet students where they are, engage with them to develop a holistic understanding of their experiences as students, and provide individualized support for students’ success. *SSAs embody the University’s commitment to student success* through their understanding of a range of campus resources and information, their connections to other individuals whose roles include supporting students, and their on-going, in-depth relationships with students. Recently one student told his SSA, “It is easy to survive. It is hard to be successful.” *Our job is to make it easier for students to succeed at the University of Utah.*

Through these efforts, we can contribute to increased retention and graduation rates, as well as students' satisfaction with their University experience, all of which are essential to the University's bright future. The following summary describes our major accomplishments in the following four areas: learning communities, mentors and advisors, financial guidance, and deeply engaged learning experiences.

### *Learning Communities*

In 2015-16, the SSEI partnered with three specific learning communities: BlockU, LEAP, and Beacon Scholars. In BlockU each set of integrated courses is assigned an SSA who attends class regularly to ensure that students have the support they need. Students are quick to take advantage of a supportive SSA whom they get to know through the BlockU program. We also strengthened our partnership with the LEAP program. SSAs presented in most LEAP courses, sharing with students how they can support them in their University endeavors. Our partnership with the Beacon Scholars program was significantly strengthened when Maggie Roque took over as the SSEI liaison with Beacon. Maggie met with Beacon Scholars weekly, presented workshops, and worked individually with students. Several other SSAs joined her in a resume and cover letter writing workshop in February, and she continues to loop our team into the activities of the Beacon Scholars. Finally, with Amy Bergerson assuming responsibility for the New University Scholars (NUS) program, SSA involvement in this program increased. SSAs presented at NUS meetings, and in the coming year, Lisa Lewis will implement a leadership development curriculum with the New University Scholars.

Through these efforts, the SSEI supports the University's endeavor to provide meaningful learning community opportunities to students. These partnerships will expand in the coming year, with the addition of Humanities Scholars to our list of learning community partners.

### *Financial Guidance*

Financing a college education is a weighty topic for University of Utah students. This academic year, SSAs provided support to **731 students** around this concern. Because many students have financial concerns, the SSEI marketing team, led by Christine Contestable, created ads displayed on campus shuttles highlighting our ability to provide scholarship information. We also developed a comprehensive list of scholarships available on and off campus, which aided SSAs in assisting **149 students** with this topic during the ad campaign in January and February. We also actively encouraged eligible students to take advantage of summer completion initiatives developed by the Enrollment Management. We will continue to develop a strong relationship with the offices of Financial Aid and Scholarships and the Money Management Center to refine our resources and provide timely and accurate financial guidance to students.

In addition to our general support of students around financial issues, three of our team members are participating in a campus wide initiative to support students who are experiencing homelessness. Maggie Roque, Bianca Bellot, and Amy Bergerson are working with the task force to set up procedures for assisting students with accessing campus and community resources, and the

SSEI will house and disperse emergency funds for these students. The program is expected to roll out early in fall, 2016.

### *Engaged Learning Experiences*

Along with participating in the learning community partnerships mentioned above, SSAs are strong advocates for engaged learning experiences on campus, discussing the benefits of these experiences with students as well as referring them directly to individuals who can help students navigate the process of getting involved. Over the course of this year, SSAs worked with **612 students** specifically around the topic of engaged learning.

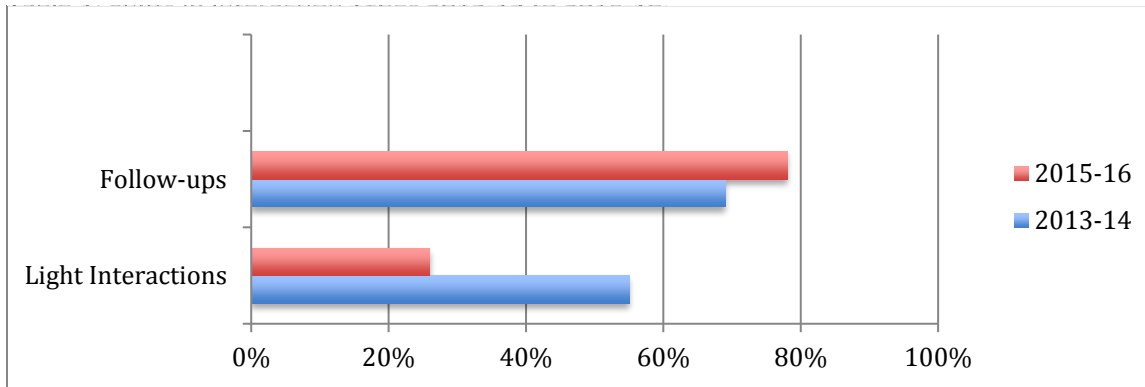
Additionally, SSAs engaged students in learning processes that assist them in setting and attaining goals, determining strengths and areas of growth, and making decisions about their futures. The Student Success website's "Tools for Success" page contains articles, podcasts, videos, and inventories that SSAs use to actively engage students in determining what they need to be successful. The high-touch, individualized approach of the SSAs is an illustration of an informal form of engaged learning occurring across campus on a daily basis.

### *Mentors and Advisors*

The vast majority of SSA work with students fulfills the big goal of providing every student with mentoring and advising. During academic year 2015-16, SSAs had **19,590 interactions** with University of Utah students. Of these interactions, 70% are significant, meaning the SSA had a conversation with a student that was deep enough to collect contact information. Light interactions, (30% of the total), are those in which SSAs talk briefly to students, mainly introducing themselves and their work. Interesting is the significant increase in the proportion of significant interactions over the last few years. In 2013-14, the first year the SSAs were on campus, light interactions made up 55% of our total interactions, while current year data indicate that light interactions only comprise 30% of total interactions. This means that SSAs are spending more of their time developing trusting relationships with students in order to provide them with the information, resources, and personal support that are most meaningful for them.

Additionally, the increasing proportion of significant interactions is significant, because collecting students' contact information allows SSAs to follow up with them around specific topics. This resulted in 77% of the 2015-17 significant interactions being follow-ups. The percentage of follow-up interactions has increased from 69% in 2013-14 to 77% currently. Table 1 illustrates these shifts. These changes are a direct result of encouragement from the University to focus on developing long-term, personalized relationships.

Figure 1: Shifts in Interaction Type FY 2014 and FY 2016



The addition of undergraduate Outreach Ambassadors contributed to SSAs' focus on significant interactions with students. In May, 2015, the SSEI was awarded the Alan E. Hall Innovations in Student Success award by the Utah System of Higher Education. The \$5000 award was invested in the development of the Outreach Ambassador program, which was launched in August. Under the guidance of Stephanie Santarosa, four undergraduate students were trained in the work of SSAs, and participated in a number of outreach events across campus including tabling, one-on-one introductions, and class and student organization visits. Of particular assistance to the SSAs was the introduction of Ambassador Referrals, through which Ambassadors assisted students in completing an online interest form reaching out to an SSA. Over the course of the year, Outreach Ambassadors connected with 79 students and made 24 referrals to SSAs. They also created videos for the Student Success website, in which students share their experiences of working with an SSA, and conducted focus groups to provide qualitative data that illustrate SSAs' impact on students.

Outreach Ambassadors allowed SSAs to reduce the time spent making one-on-one introductions, and added another element to the support the SSEI can provide University of Utah students. Our one-time award money financed the implementation of this program, which will grow with the support of the University in the coming year.

Equally important to the number of SSA interactions with student is the content of those interactions. The following figures illustrate the nature of these interactions. Figure 2 indicates the types of interactions SSAs have with students. Relationship building is the most frequent type of interaction, followed by coaching and resources/referrals. All of these interactions reflect the University's commitment to providing students with mentoring and advising.

Figure 2: Interaction Types

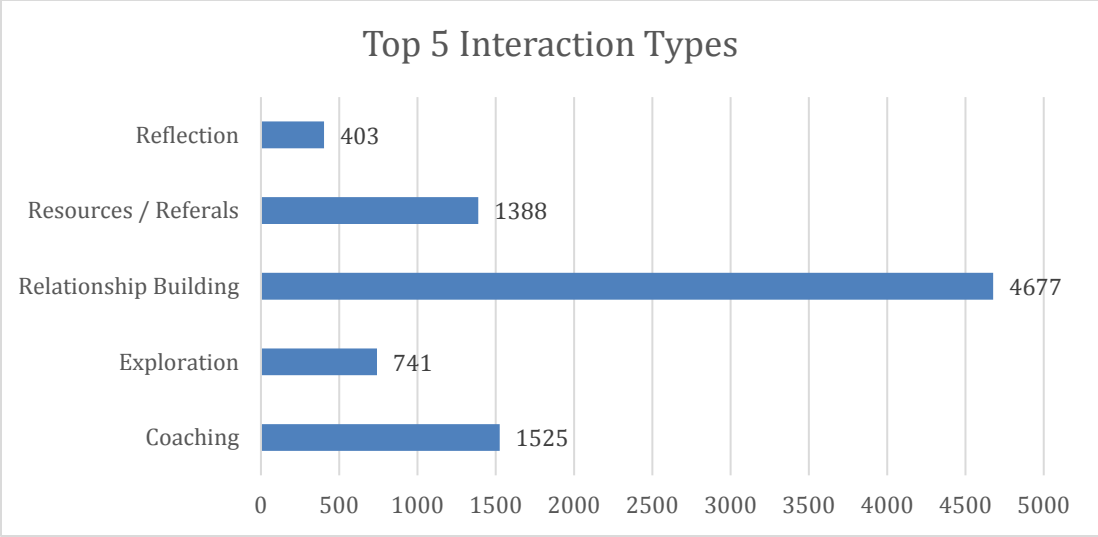


Figure 3 indicates the topics students most frequently discuss with Student Success Advocates. SSAs talk with students about the classes and coursework, which can include anything from which classes to take, to how to set up a schedule that is manageable, to how to talk with a professor and get assistance with a course. Goal setting is another prominent topic. SSAs frequently work with students to develop a clear understanding of what they want to accomplish in their time at the University and the steps necessary to reaching these goals. Importantly, SSAs also provide accountability on progress towards these goals for many students. Paying for college is a concern for nearly all students, and our data show that this is true for those working with SSAs as well. All of these topics reflect students’ reliance on SSAs as advisors and mentors as they navigate their college experience.

*Figure 3: Topics Discussed*

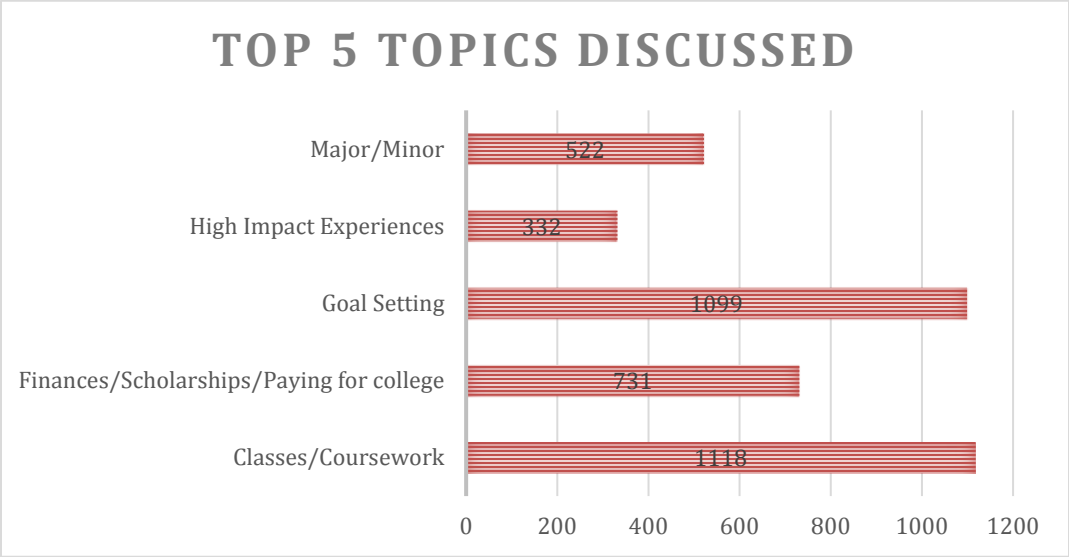
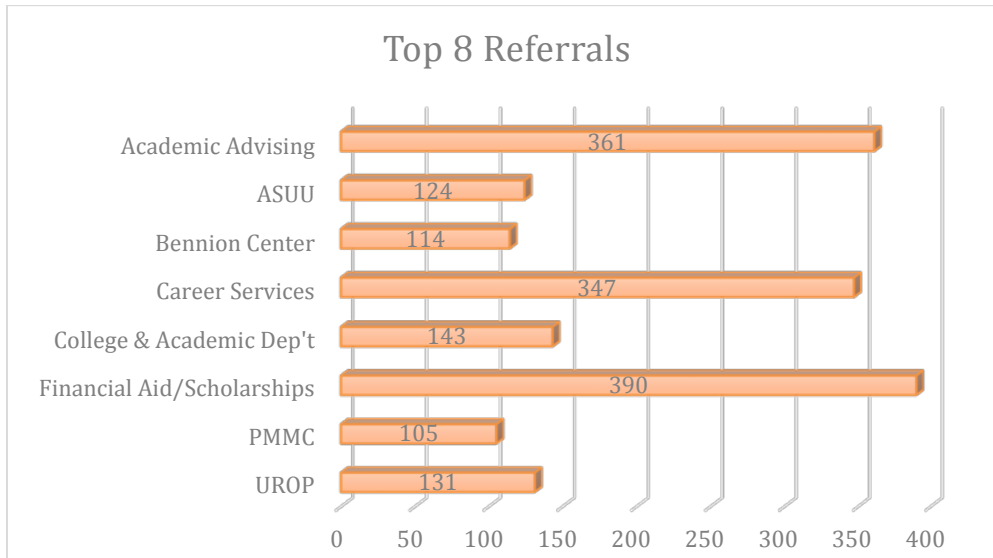


Figure 4: Top Referrals



In Figure 4, we show which offices and programs on campus SSAs most frequently refer students to. These referrals indicate not only SSAs' role in advising and mentoring, but in linking students to the engaged learning opportunities that are part of the Presidential Pledge. Financial Aid and Scholarships and Academic Advising areas are the most common referrals, followed by Career Services. ASUU, UROP and the Bennion Center represent engaged learning opportunities. It is clear from this figure that SSAs are an important source of referrals for offices across campus, including academic departments and the Personal Money Management Center.

These quantitative data tell only part of the story related to SSAs' impact on students' University of Utah experiences. Below, we provide unsolicited comments from students that underscore how SSAs fill the University's commitment to providing every student with mentoring and advising support.

"I just wanted to thank you for everything you've done for me so far because I don't believe I've thanked you. The scholarship links you sent me have helped me tremendously and I passed them on to other students. I have applied to many scholarships and so far I've gotten the alumni scholarship and zuni. You've also helped me get in touch with premed programs and the honors college which has helped me become aware of events on campus along with groups that I would have never known about without the resource of the student success advocates. I am very, very grateful and just wanted to say that."

"Thanks for your help it pointed me in the right direction to find out how to get involved in research."

"Thank you for meeting with me today. I really enjoyed our conversation, and feel as though it has guided me in a productive direction. Also, thank you for sending me these links. I will be sure to set up a meeting with Damien sometime soon, and I am excited to explore my options through Hinckley and the Bennion Center."

“Thank you very much for this email! I truly appreciate your support. You've been very resourceful to me and I am very grateful I was able to meet with you! I hope to continue working with you in the years to come. You are truly a helping hand to my success and I appreciate your genuine interest in helping me become successful. “

“First of all, I think. It is so wonderful that you are reaching out to all of individually and making us feel so important. I appreciate that!”

“Thanks again for reaching out, it is so nice to have some extra support.”

“I enjoyed our conversation the other day, if possible with you I would like to have almost like a monthly visit just to touch base on how things are going and if you have any suggestions.”

“Thank you very much for all your help today. I'm really grateful for your mini-lesson on my presentation and public speaking skills. You've helped me quite a lot. You are a true student success advocate☺. Enjoy the rest of your day.”

“Thanks so much for meeting with me, it really helps to have someone to talk to about literally EVERYTHING!!”

“Thank you for your take care of me. Everything was fine in my course.”

These comments illustrate the impact SSAs have on students. In the next section, we address how our work helps to ensure a bright future for the University of Utah.

#### *Additional Contributions to the University*

##### The common good:

The Presidential Pledge is not limited to students attending college on the University's main campus. The SSEI engaged in offering support to students at the U's off-campus sites and online. Jon Bernal spent two afternoons a week at the Sandy Center, occasionally mixing in visits to the Murray Center. SSAs participated in several off-site transfer orientations, which were well-attended. We believe the commitment to having SSAs at these sites is important, and that as students come to know that we are there, they will avail themselves of SSA support. We are in conversation with Betsy Oswald about bringing other services to the Sandy Center to help in promoting the growth that the University desires at this location. Finally, we look forward to being an integral part of the University's plan to establish Welcome U Centers across the Salt Lake Valley.

The SSEI collaborated with Cory Stokes and others involved with online programs to provide online students with the support they need to be successful. We participated in monthly meetings centered generally on online programs, as well as a monthly meeting related to support for online students. SSA engagement with online students is dependent on the implementation of Cranium Café or another virtual meeting platform, which should occur in the coming year.



In addition to ensuring that all University of Utah students have access to SSA expertise and support, SSAs have become a valued community partner for a number of different initiatives and programs on campus. SSAs are frequently sought out to share vital information with students, including marketing summer completion initiatives, informing students about the Sexual Assault Victims Advocate program, and participating in “Bringing the U to You” events with the Office of Admissions. SSAs participated in every new student and transfer orientation program, offering support to students transitioning to the University. And, we were an essential component of what we call CUSP interventions. Based on data analytics supplied by Mike Martineau in OBIA, SSAs contacted students with low predicted rates of success. This effort is described in more detail below. SSEI team members served on Welcome Week, recruitment, Women’s Leadership Summit, academic appeals, and online student success committees. Tramaine Jones, Wazir Jefferson, Bianca Bellot, and Lisa Lewis led dialogues about diversity for the Office of Undergraduate Studies, and Bianca Bellot and Maggie Roque provided safe spaces where students could process the impact of often-hostile campus, community, and political climates. Students see SSAs as trusted listeners, and their University colleagues see them as competent professionals with a unique view of students’ experiences. In just three years, SSAs have grown to be viewed as an integral part of the University of Utah community with a reputation for working for the common good.

#### Adapting to a changing environment:

Essential to the growth of a new initiative is constant evaluation of effort to ensure that goals are achieved. When the SSEI was initially conceptualized, the mission statement referred to SSAs as “human information portals”. Under this view, random, chance, and brief encounters with students was an effective modality. Over time, we have come to understand that students do not trust the information we share unless they have a relationship with us. As a result, the focus of our work with students shifted to developing a holistic sense of individual students to more effectively provide both information and support for their success. Relationship building requires that SSAs have intentional and sustained contact with students. The increase in the percentage of significant interactions mentioned above is one indicator that this focus works, as is the increase in the percentage of follow-up interactions. In this section, we highlight three adaptations to our work that have contributed to our effort to be more intentional in our interactions with students: CUSP interventions, Outreach Ambassadors, and off-site SSAs.

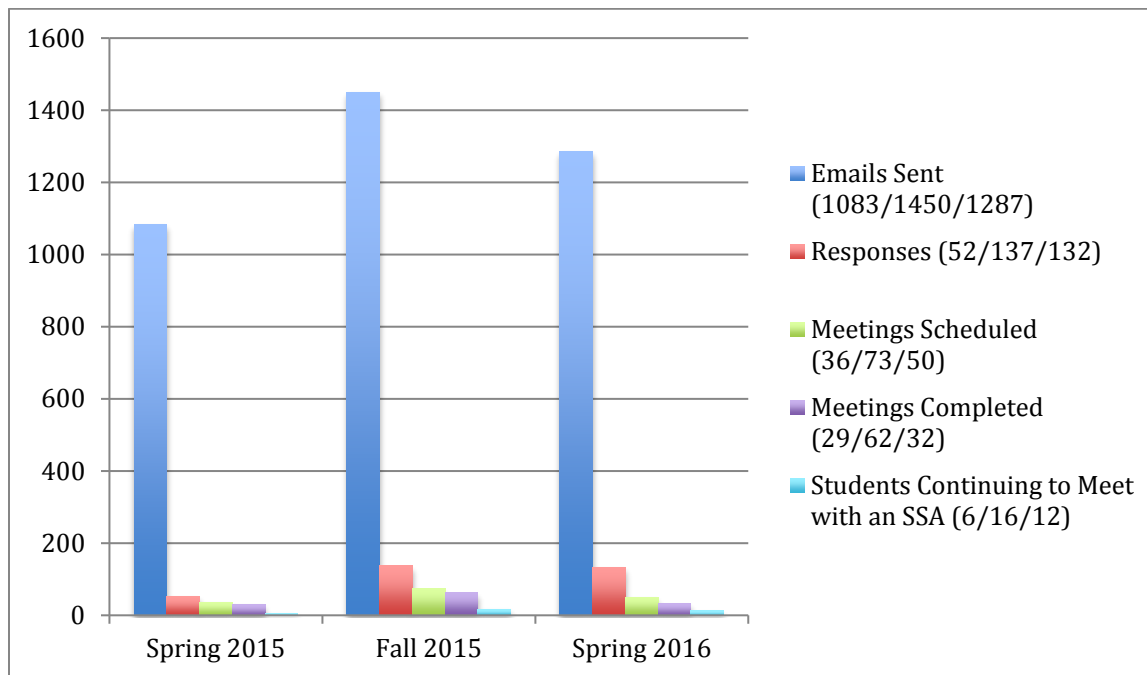
CUSP interventions represent our effort to work intentionally with students who are on the cusp of success at the University. Utilizing a model developed by Mike Martineau, SSAs directly contact students who have a predicted low rate of student success (50% or below). In a brief message, SSAs explain how they assist students and offer to meet with them. In our first iteration of this intervention, we reached out to students only through email, which resulted in a small response rate (5%). Despite the low response rate from spring 2015, we did see a significant difference in the fall retention rate for students who responded to our invitation to meet with an SSA and those who did not. Of the **1083 students** who were

contacted through the initial CUSP email, 75% re-enrolled in fall, 2015, while 94% of those students who responded to the invitation re-enrolled in the fall.

We were not satisfied with the spring response rate, so in fall of 2015, we sent one email, followed by a text message, to **1450 students**, which resulted in a nearly double response rate of **9.4%**. With the intention of increasing response rates again, in spring 2016 SSAs contacted **1287 students** via text only and offered a \$5 Starbucks gift card incentive for them to meet with the SSA. A **total of 132 (10%)** of contacted students responded to the text messaging approach. While the response rate in the spring increased slightly, the number of meetings scheduled and accomplished declined. We will work on timing of the spring message and other ideas to improve these numbers in the future.

Figure 5 illustrates response rates, meetings scheduled, and completed meetings for the fall and spring 2015 CUSP interventions.

Figure 5: CUSP Results



The CUSP intervention represents our effort to contribute to significant campus student success goals, as well as adapt to the needs of the campus in ways that support the long-term viability of the University. We look forward to continued participation in CUSP interventions, as well as planned interventions for second-semester sophomores who have not selected majors, and future opportunities to positively impact student success.

Our Outreach Ambassador program is a work in progress, but we are excited about its potential for allowing SSAs to spend more of their time in significant student interactions. Because 2015-16 funding for this program came from outside the University, our program had a late start. We hired three Ambassadors and assigned Sydney Magana, our Student Intern, the role of Lead Ambassador.

Ambassadors were trained in August and September, shadowed with SSAs for the months of October and November, and were on the ground running in December. From December forward, Ambassadors reported interactions with 79 students, separate from tabling and other events where they participated alongside SSAs. During this same time period, they made 24 referrals to SSAs. Referrals are essential, because they allow SSAs to reach out to students who have already expressed a need for, or interest in, working with them.

We engaged in a more interactive interview process to hire new Ambassadors in May, and are pleased to report that seven Outreach Ambassadors will work with us in the coming academic year. They have completed their first training and will engage in a second training right before the beginning of fall semester. As we continue to develop the Outreach Ambassador program, we see the need to create an efficient way for Ambassadors to track their work; we will report more significant contributions to our overall efforts in the future. Outreach Ambassadors represent the SSEI's adaptability as we have seen the focus of our work change over time. We intend to incorporate their outreach work more fully into our plan to have SSAs focus on intentional and significant interactions with students.

In Summer 2015, Amy Bergerson participated in developing a grant proposal to fund Welcome U Centers across the Salt Lake Valley. Although the proposal was not funded, a commitment was made to increase services to students enrolled in off-site locations, and in particular the new Sandy Center. As a result, Jon Bernal was in residence at Sandy two afternoons a week during the spring semester. On average, Jon interacted with 4-5 students per week. He visited class sessions and staff at the Sandy Center assisted in marketing Jon's presence at the site. Because of the low number of student interactions, we determined that we should rotate SSAs at Sandy, and reduced our presence for the summer to one day a week. We are committed to maintaining an SSA presence at the site, as long as this is a University priority. In addition to Jon's visits to Sandy, the SSA team participated in well-attended transfer orientations held at the off-site locations. As the University continues to develop plans for off-site locations, including Welcome U Centers, we see SSAs as an integral component to providing student support. Additionally, our work with online students will continue to grow as we implement the virtual meeting technologies that will make this possible.

We are committed to ensuring that every student at the University of Utah has access to a Student Success Advocate, regardless of where or through what modality they enroll. We will continue to adapt as needed to support the University's mission to reach a broader population of students.

### **Our 2016-17 Goals**

The following comprehensive SSEI goals for 2015-16 will enhance our ability to support students as they navigate their experiences at the University of Utah. Each of these goals will assist us in supporting the elements of the Utah Pledge.

1. *Improve our ability to support University of Utah students through relationship building, creating services for specific students, and improving processes.*

Objectives: refine the SSEI role in the new Homelessness Initiative, develop faculty outreach and campus panels/workshops to maintain existing and build new

relationships across campus, and develop a tool for helping students understand the process of declaring their major.

2. *Continue to build the Student Success Outreach Ambassador Program to assist with outreach and light interactions.*

Objectives: develop a comprehensive training program for SSOAs, develop an assessment and tracking tool for the program, and build strong relationships across the SSA and SSOA teams.

3. *Develop tools and resources to enhance students' SSEI experience.*

Objectives: work with Continuing Education technical support staff to develop new tracker database, utilize data more fully to understand our work with students and its impact, develop videos to help market our work with students.

4. *Support and enhance University efforts to address campus climate and increase students' sense of belonging.*

Objective: be a campus leader in addressing campus climate issues by offering safe spaces where students can process the impact of campus, community and larger political climates on them.

### **Summary**

This report highlights the activities of the Student Success and Empowerment Initiative during the 2015-16 academic year. We accomplished a great deal, as we worked to support the important mission and goals of the University. We have enjoyed a great deal of support from the University, which has made our job not only possible, but fun. Our data indicate that we have a significant impact on the University community. Our nearly 20,000 light and significant student interactions have touched the lives of a multitude of University of Utah students, and we consistently receive positive feedback regarding our efforts. We have built strong relationships across campus, with many more in the works. All of this requires the flexibility, creativity, and energy of the Student Success Advocates, who have, as a group, risen to the occasion of fully implementing our innovative approach to supporting the University's commitment to student success.

As we begin our fourth year at the University of Utah, we are very pleased with the recognition our program receives across campus. We are thrilled that many of our University of Utah colleagues refer students to SSAs, that we are included as an important element of a number of emerging student success efforts, and that more and more students are accessing our services to support their educational goals. We are motivated to continue to expand our reach to students who participate in the University at off-campus centers and online, to build our Outreach Ambassador program, and to continue to meet the needs of the diverse students who are part of our community.

The name, Student Success and Empowerment Initiative, brings with it a high level of responsibility to and for the University of Utah. The SSEI team is committed to working with students in an individually-tailored fashion that assists them in identifying, and acting to implement, a plan that provides them with the best college experience they can imagine. We appreciate the support the University has committed to our initiative, both in the openness to our unique work and the continued commitment of resources. We look forward to future opportunities to demonstrate the difference we are making in students' lives. Thank you for the chance to highlight this exciting year.