

Quality Enhancement Plan

Succeed Together:
First year advising at Eastern
Mennonite University

July 2021

*A quality enhancement plan submitted to the on-site review committee
and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for reaffirmation of accreditation*

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Executive Summary

Eastern Mennonite University's first year advising Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) will increase students' sense of belonging and increase student success by providing wholistic, student-centered support and equipping new EMU students to own their college and career plans.

This QEP is firmly grounded in EMU's mission and vision and was selected and developed through university-wide conversations by QEP task forces representing diverse stakeholders. The first year advising QEP supports objectives in our strategic plan under the goals *Diversify, Grow, and Engage*.

Institutional research around student achievement (retention & graduation) and the themes of belonging and student navigation of academic advising and other university functions revealed a disparity in experiences of students from various demographic groups. This presented an opportunity to meaningfully intervene to support a sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and success for our undergraduate students, particularly for students of color, commuters, first-generation students, and students who do not come from Mennonite cultural contexts.

We have identified three hoped-for outcomes for the first year advising initiative:

1. *Students will demonstrate an increased sense of belonging.*
2. *New students will exhibit increased self-efficacy towards managing academic, personal, and vocational responsibilities as they develop a 4-year college and career plan.*
3. *Students will demonstrate increased college success, as measured by retention, D/F/W rates, and persistence.*



We have reviewed the available literature in order to better understand the relationship between sense of belonging and student success, and to develop a first year advising model in support of these outcomes. This model is wholistic and student-centered, and successful implementation requires culturally competent advisors to follow best practices in supporting student learning and development through advising processes during students' first years on campus.

The First Year Advising QEP Implementation Team and the Assistant Provost for Student Success will lay significant groundwork for the initiative during the 2020-21 school year, developing an advising handbook and training modules in collaboration with academic programs and student services offices. For 2021-22 the team will hire and train a qualified individual who is able to connect with the

diverse lived experiences of our student body and serve as first-year advisor to a pilot group of students beginning in summer 2021. After the pilot year, the team will hire and train two additional advisors and begin academic advising via the new model for all students entering EMU in the summer of 2022.

First year advisors will serve as instructors in the CORE 101 Transitions course, which orients first-year students to EMU and will meet with students multiple times during their first year at EMU to facilitate their initial stages of academic and career planning. They will provide additional interventions as needed for at-risk students. Further, advisors will be available to students for assistance with navigating the functional aspects of university life, with an advising hub serving as a “one stop shop” for students to connect with appropriate university resources. When students are ready, they will transition to academic advisors within their academic programs, taking with them personalized career and academic plans.

In support of these advising processes, the First Year Advising QEP Implementation Team will collect, analyze, and evaluate assessment data annually, devising and implementing improvements when necessary. At the end of our five-year QEP period, we expect to see an increased sense of belonging and self-efficacy in our students, along with corresponding improvements in student success.

Submitted by the QEP Drafting Task Force, Spring 2020

- *Co-chair Kirsten Beachy, Director of Core Curriculum and Assistant Professor of English*
- *Co-chair Shannon Dycus, Dean of Students*
- *Scott Barge, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness*
- *Alyssa Breidigan, Student government representative*
- *Stephen Cessna, Professor of Biochemistry*
- *Emily Forrer, Operations Manager for Student Life*
- *Fred Kniss, Provost*
- *Philip Krabill, Student government representative*
- *Amy Springer Hartsell, Assistant Dean and Coordinator of Student Success*
- *Ron Shultz, Assistant Professor of Education*
- *Mary Sprunger, Professor of History*
- *Zachary Yoder, Director of Retention*

1. Topic Identified Through Ongoing, Comprehensive Planning and Evaluation

1.1 Institutional context

Eastern Mennonite University, founded in 1917, is an educational institution of Mennonite Church USA, serving students of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. EMU confers undergraduate, graduate, and seminary degrees in the liberal arts, applied sciences, and professions. EMU's mission and vision is grounded in the enduring biblical values of community, service to others, sustainability, peacemaking, and discipleship.

Mission Statement: EMU prepares students to serve and lead in a global context. Our community of learning integrates Christian faith, academic rigor, artistic creation and reflective practice informed by the liberal arts, interdisciplinary engagement, and cross-cultural encounter.

Vision Statement: We will open new pathways of access and achievement for all students who aspire to grow as unifying leaders equipped with intercultural competence, oriented toward peace and justice, and rooted in an active faith modeled on the life and teachings of Jesus.

Our QEP supports this vision as it aims to increase student success, belongingness, and equity by providing new students with equitable access to institutional services and fostering student self-efficacy through their relationships with first-year advisors. We believe it will have positive impacts on success and retention, allowing students to develop into the bridge-building leaders we believe this world needs.

1.2 EMU's Strategic Plan

EMU recently completed a strategic planning "refresh", recognizing that a more nimble three-year institutional planning cycle was needed. Numerous significant changes have taken place since the previous strategic plan was developed. Within the 2017-2020 time period, EMU transitioned to a new three-school structure that incorporated undergraduate, graduate, seminary, and accelerated degree programs into three schools: a School for Social Sciences and Professions; a School of Theology, Humanities, and the Performing Arts; and a School of Science, Engineering, Art, and Nursing. An Innovation Hub served as an incubator for new ideas. A three-pronged "EMU for Century Two" initiative included a brand audit, development of an enrollment action plan, and an advancement campaign readiness audit. The strategic planning refresh was an opportunity to create coherence in the midst of significant change with the input of a broad group of stakeholders [Fig. 1].

Figure 1. Strategic Planning Refresh



EMU’s strategic direction process from Spring 2019 through Winter 2020 involved two task forces and input from the entire faculty and staff of the university during the fall 2019 faculty/staff conference. Their work culminated in a revised vision statement and articulation of four strategic priorities described in the attached “EMU Vision, Strategic Direction, and 3-year Priorities 2020-2023” document ([Appendix A](#)). These priorities remain the same as those in the prior Strategic Plan, with updated objectives. The four strategic priorities are:

- *Celebrate*: Celebrate and promote our unique identity as an academically rigorous Christian liberal arts university, strengthening our identity in the communities we serve.
- *Diversify*: Reimagine our university through the eyes of our increasingly diverse student body—meeting our students where they are, and valuing the contributions they make to our learning community.
- *Grow*: Enhance our program offerings and grow our student body.
- *Engage*: Engage in new ways and with new partners to achieve our mission, vision and brand.

This planning document also articulates the challenges and opportunities of our current context: a contractionary environment, a declining number of college-bound high school students, increasing variety of student needs for support, a more racially and ethnically diverse student body than EMU has

traditionally served, the uncertainty of economics in higher education at this time, increased social and political polarization, and broadening skepticism about the value or relevance of a liberal arts education, particularly at an institution with a Christian denominational marker in its name. Since the writing of the planning document, we must add to this list our concern for the health and safety of students, staff, and faculty in the midst of a global pandemic and the challenge of reformatting our curricula for virtual and socially distanced environments.

1.3 The QEP Selection Task Force: Guiding Principles and Representative Composition

In recognition of these priorities and challenges, President's Cabinet provided the QEP Selection Task Force with the following guidelines to help align the QEP selection with institutional priorities. The selected QEP should:

- Support three of the strategic priorities: Grow, Diversify, Engage
- Have a positive impact on undergraduate retention
- Be focused enough that it would not detract from other critical work underway in the university

The QEP selection task force included representation from EMU's administration, undergraduate academics, student life division, and faculty of each school: Scott Barge (vice president for institutional effectiveness; chair), Kirsten Beachy (director of EMU Core curriculum, assistant professor of English), Kate Clark (assistant professor of nursing), Fred Kniss (provost), Micah Shristi (director of international student services), Mary Sprunger (professor of history), Jon Swartz (director of residence life, student accountability, and restorative justice), Johonna Turner (assistant professor, Center for Justice and Peacebuilding), and Zachary Yoder (director of retention).

1.4 Parallel Student Life/Academics Collaboration Task Force

A parallel collaboration between EMU's student life and undergraduate academics divisions in 2018-2019 fed into the strategic planning process and, ultimately, the selected QEP. A task force formed with the goal of exploring possibilities for increased collaboration and integration between undergraduate academics and student life around student success. Members of the task force were Jim Smucker (vice president for enrollment and student life), Deirdre Smeltzer (undergraduate dean), Amy Springer Hartsell (assistant dean and coordinator of student success), Zachary Yoder (director of retention), Rachel Roth Sawatzky (associate dean of students) and Jon Swartz (associate dean of students).

This group facilitated a large gathering in May 2018 which included interested students, student life staff, undergraduate academics administrators, faculty, and other university staff to generate ideas and vision. Out of this, the task force developed draft learning goals and processed these through

surveys, at a student life retreat, with members of Undergraduate Council, and with focus groups across campus throughout Fall 2018. They met with the president and provost to test the idea of collaboration, and the task force engaged student life directors and undergraduate council members in discussion of possible changes to institutional structure. This culminated in a proposal for Undergraduate Academics/Student Life Collaboration that was shared with the President's Cabinet in spring 2019 ([Appendix B](#)).

The proposal included shared student learning goals to be carried in common by student life and undergraduate academics in support of the shared vision, “*To create an equitable community of engaged learners.*” In addition, it recommended an institutional restructuring that would include two new positions reporting to the provost: a dean of students to superintend directors for residence life and various student services, and an assistant provost for student success who would manage the academic success center, advising, and career services. The assistant provost would also coordinate with the EMU Core director on the first-year Transitions course and supervise additional new positions: “Student Success Coordinators”, who would be hired to collaborate with students on an individual basis to deliver a curriculum of developmental tasks centered around the shared learning goals developed by student life and undergraduate academics.

Two of these proposed positions have been created. Shannon Dycus started at EMU in the new role of Dean of Students in fall 2019. Zachary Yoder stepped into the new role of Assistant Provost for Student Success in summer of 2020.

The proposed “student success coordinator” positions ultimately evolved into the selected QEP topic related to first year advising.

1.5 Fall 2019 EMU Faculty/Staff Conference Visioning Process

In addition to informing EMU’s strategic vision, ideas collected at the fall 2019 EMU Faculty/Staff Conference, “Engage!” informed the QEP Selection Task Force’s evaluation of potential topics. This conference enabled high levels of engagement from the entire body of university faculty and staff through a series of participatory processes. These processes were facilitated by Catherine Barnes, affiliate associate professor in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.

The first morning of the conference [Fig. 3] was dedicated to articulating shared priorities for the next three years using a ‘world cafe’ process where community members moved from table to table, discussing questions related to EMU’s strategic priorities:

- How will we build a community in which all people feel engaged and valued?
- How will we enable more students to find, join and succeed in our community of learning?
- How will we enhance our capacity to support, retain and INCREASE the various forms of diversity present in our community?

- Who are we at our best? What do we want to celebrate? What would we like the wider world to know about OUR university community?

The afternoon and second morning focused on generating and exploring ideas, initiatives and projects aimed at addressing the question “How will we live into our vision of the university we want to become together?” These conversations were formatted around “open space,” a uniquely flexible process in which the agenda and content was entirely determined by participants, who proposed topics or ideas for a session or chose the session they wanted to explore. Topics were assigned times and locations, and all faculty and staff were invited to attend and flow between as many sessions as interested them. Participants were invited to each “take responsibility for making this time inventive, creative, productive and meaningful.”

The themes that arose from the World Cafe and Open Space processes fed into the QEP Selection Task Force’s selection process.

Figure 2. Design by Bruce van Patter, capturing World Cafe reporting in visual form from Day 1 of the “Engage” conference



1.6 QEP Selection Process

The QEP selection task force (described in section 1.3) met throughout the fall 2019 semester to prepare a recommendation to the campus regarding EMU’s next QEP. The group considered various ideas contributed during the Open Space process in the August 2019 staff/faculty conference as well as the recommendations of the Student Life/Undergraduate Academics Collaboration Task Force.

Ultimately, the task force identified two potential topics that aligned with strategic priorities and connected to three of the eight themes arising from the Open Space processes ([Appendix C](#)). They further vetted and developed the following two concepts, which were submitted to the campus community for discernment and feedback.

QEP Option 1: “Storytelling for Transformation” - Storytelling & Narrative Pedagogy to Build Community.	QEP Option 2: First Year Advisors to Support Undergraduate Student Success.
<p>Integrate storytelling and narrative pedagogy into the EMU curriculum in order to foster stronger shared understanding, celebrate the identities and cultures present on our campus, and reshape a new narrative of EMU. Community building through narrative and storytelling will foster a greater sense of connection and belonging among students, which in turn supports student resilience, persistence and success.</p> <p>This option arose out of two frequently referenced themes at EMU’s fall faculty/staff conference: (1) fostering student sense of belonging; (2) supporting constructive conversations across difference (Note: we selected ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ as the vehicle for conversation rather than ‘dialogue’ as the latter can place a burden on those defined as ‘different’ to educate the mainstream, and requires skilled facilitation. In contrast, storytelling can be done through a variety of methods and approaches, and enables individual and group stories to be shared.)</p> <p>This QEP initiative would be student-focused, but also connect to broader institutional efforts for personal, collective and institutional transformation.</p>	<p>Connect incoming traditional undergraduate students with a First Year Advisor equipped to help them with both traditional academic advising and more general support. In addition to course scheduling and major declaration, the advisor would be prepared to connect students to support in areas such as mental health, study habits, financial aid, billing, etc. This more holistic approach to student support fosters student resilience, persistence and success.</p> <p>This option arose out of two frequently referenced themes at fall conference: (1) support for students (2) fostering student sense of belonging.</p> <p>Possible goals articulated at that time for the initiative included: 1) Providing equitable and consistent advising experiences for all undergraduates new to EMU; 2) Connecting students with advisors equipped to provide those who need it with more coordinated support in non-academic areas; 3) Increasing advisor continuity during the first year for students that may be undecided or exploring several majors (de-emphasize the importance of having a particular declared major that drives advisor assignment during the first year) 4) Decreasing advisee load for faculty in large programs. First-year Advisors might replace or work alongside program-based faculty advising. Additionally, the initiative might influence (or even reshape) the Transitions course for incoming first-year students.</p>

The QEP Selection Task Force sought feedback from faculty, staff, and students via a survey sent out in November 2019. In addition, given minimal student response, they conducted a focus group with the elected representatives of the undergraduate student body, the student government association.

Survey Results

The survey received responses from 77 EMU staff members, 65 EMU faculty, and 3 EMU students. In response to the question, “To what extent could you support a QEP centered around this idea?” more

members of all groups “mostly” or “very much” supported the second proposed topic, First Year Advisors. [Fig. 3].

Figure 3. QEP topic selection survey results

Overall Results - All Respondents

Storytelling (Q2) - To what extent could you support a QEP centered around this idea?



First Year Advisors (Q7) - To what extent could you support a QEP centered around this idea?

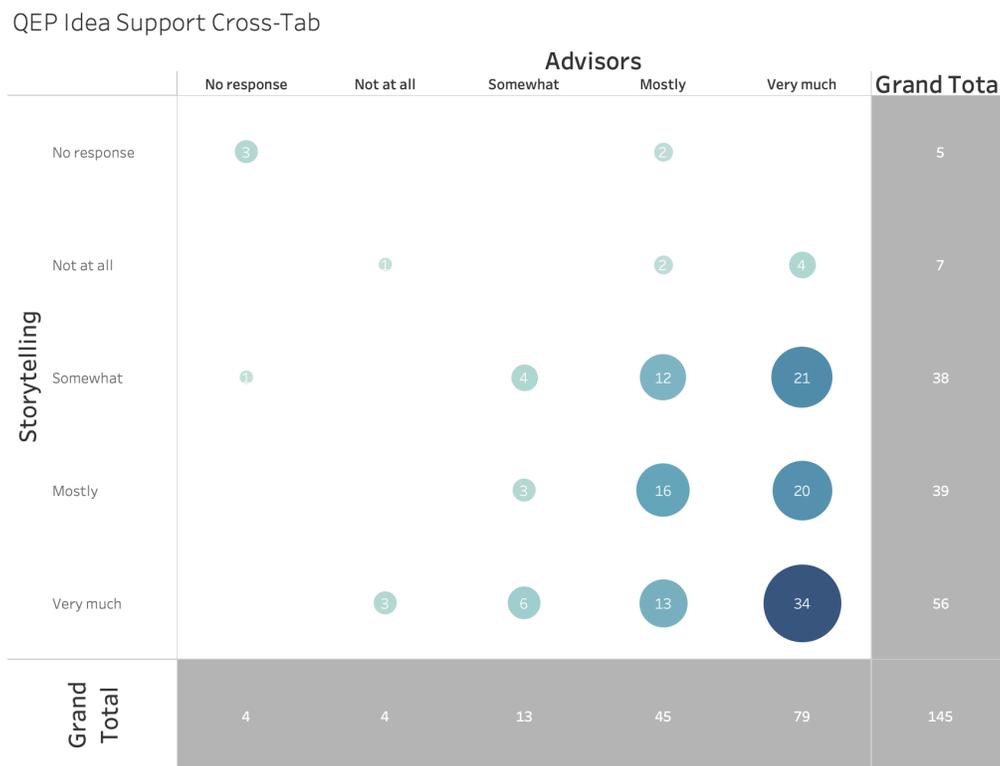


Faculty members favored First Year Advisors over Storytelling, with 86% Very Much or Mostly supporting Advisors and 70% Very Much or Mostly supporting Storytelling. Staff members favored Advising over Storytelling 90% over 67%.

A crosstab of results [Fig. 4] indicated that 57% of respondents supported both options Mostly or Very Much. In addition,

- Of those who supported Storytelling mostly or very much 87% (83/95) supported Advisors mostly or very much.
- Of those who supported Advisors mostly or very much 67% (83/124) supported Storytelling mostly or very much.

Figure 4. QEP idea support cross-tab



The survey results showed a community preference for the First Year Advisors QEP, with 88% expressing that they Mostly or Very Much supported the proposed QEP topic.

Themes in the qualitative portion of the survey also tilted in favor of first year advising, along with interest in further details related to the initiative. Top themes included:

- An interest in further clarification about implementation, new hires, and training.
- More enthusiasm among university staff in particular for the advising idea.
- A wider range of concerns regarding implementation for storytelling; (e.g., potential for adverse impact if the idea isn't implemented well).
- A sense that the campus may not be ready yet to implement storytelling or narrative pedagogy well (more capacity-building is required).

Student Government Association Focus Group

The focus group with the Student Government Association elicited the following responses to the proposed topics:

- Both are valid--the Storytelling initiative is more pedagogical, First Year Advisors are more practical.
- Are there practical examples of how Storytelling has helped other campuses?
- How will first year advising help cultivate a sense of belonging? It seems highly individualized.

- A desire for stronger advising, coupled with concern that students won't take advantage of advising
- First year advising should be differentiated from the first year Transitions class, where student experience varies widely depending on who is leading the course.
- Asking how this initiative will be sustained over the long term--student sentiment that our last QEP related to sustainability is no longer prominent
- Concerns about the impact of both options on faculty/staff workload

Student government leaders engaged more specifically with the idea of first year advising. They further shared a general concern about implications for workload and ongoing sustainability of both proposed QEPs.

1.7 QEP Selection Task Force Recommendations

Given this campus feedback, the QEP Selection Task Force recommended to President's Cabinet that EMU move forward with a QEP focused on first year advising.

Further, the task force forwarded the following recommendations from the survey responses to the QEP Drafting Task Force which began work in January 2020:

1. Racial/ethnic diversity of advisors is critical
2. Training for the advisors beyond academic logistics (i.e., curriculum, policies) is important for success; consider trainings such as Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience, Mental Health First Aid, etc.

Given strong energy from some of the faculty for the other proposed QEP topic centered on storytelling, the committee further recommended that EMU's teaching and learning initiative move forward with faculty development to advance the use of storytelling and narrative pedagogy in programming across the university. Campus feedback for this topic had included concerns about faculty and staff readiness to immediately move forward with that QEP idea without additional capacity-building work in competencies around racial justice and cultural awareness. Although the task force ultimately selected the first year advising QEP, they did not want the university to abandon the storytelling idea entirely.

1.8 Connections Between the Identified QEP Topic and the Finalized Three-Year Strategic Priorities

The first year advising QEP has clear connections to several items in our strategic plan under the goals Diversity, Grow, and Engage.

Under Diversify: As first-year advisors provide individualized, wholistic support to students and help them to build community in the small-group settings of Transitions courses, they will help to realize objective D1: *Invest in ways to increase the sense of belonging among all students, building an invitational community of communities with permeable boundaries.* This new model of supporting incoming students connects directly to item D2: *Reimagine support processes for a student population that is more diverse across multiple dimensions (demographics, age, motivation for study, modality, etc.).* Our commitment to hiring a team of first-year advisors that reflects the variety of our student body supports D3. *Diversify our faculty/staff.*

Under Grow: First year advisors may help us to assess student interests as we work on G1: *Refresh/repackage existing curriculum to align with student interest (incorporate customization as appropriate) and build on EMU strengths and distinctives.* If, as we expect, first year advising improves student retention, this will also support G4: *Ensure financial strength through increased enrollments and vigilant attention to optimization (e.g. student/faculty and student/staff ratios) in our operations, consistently achieving a positive operating margin.*

Finally, under Engage, a wholistic, student-centered advising model will support item E1: *Focus on new employee and organizational capacities and structures to achieve our student-centered goals.*

1.9 QEP development rooted in institutional evaluation and student experiences

As the QEP Drafting Task Force worked to flesh out the selected topic in spring 2020, they drew on the expertise of their members and other university faculty and staff, and they reviewed literature and best practices related to first year advising. Drawing on EMU's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes, they analyzed student achievement data as well as data from external surveys related to belongingness, retention, and student experiences of advising and other functional aspects of the university.

Student Achievement

As a cornerstone for its work, the task force reviewed EMU's high-level achievement data for traditional undergraduate students. Specifically, this review consisted of a careful look at first- to second-year retention rates and six-year graduation rates within the context of peer institutions and also disaggregated to look specifically at achievement among key subgroups of students on campus (presented in tables below).

First-time, full-time student retention, overall and by key subgroups.

	Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 2016 Cohort	Fall 2017 Cohort	Fall 2018 Cohort
EMU Overall	73%	74%	79%	70%	85%
EMU Peer Median*	74%	75%	76%	75%	*
Mennonite Students	88%	91%	87%	92%	93%
First Generation Students	67%	58%	71%	58%	68%
AHANA Students ¹	64%	73%	70%	66%	76%
Gender (F/M)	74%/72%	75%/72%	83%/74%	73%/68%	88%/83%

* IPEDS data not available for benchmarking

¹AHANA: African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American (i.e., minority students)

Traditional undergraduate six-year graduation rates, overall, benchmark, and for key subgroups.

	Fall 2008 Cohort	Fall 2009 Cohort	Fall 2010 Cohort	Fall 2011 Cohort	Fall 2012 Cohort
EMU Overall	61%	61%	63%	64%	60%
EMU Peer Median	52%	54%	55%	55%	57%
Mennonite Students	78%	77%	82%	82%	84%
First Generation Students	44%	43%	50%	40%	48%
AHANA Students	40%	47%	36%	45%	47%
Gender (F/M)	64%/58%	64%/57%	68%/54%	63%/63%	67%/48%

The data, and more specifically the differences identified in the disaggregated results, informed a more comprehensive review of students’ experiences along a variety of dimensions discussed below.

Belongingness

In August 2019, EMU Institutional Research published a newsletter focused on “Belongingness” at EMU. This data and analysis surely informed conversations among faculty and staff at the fall “Engage” conference. Institutional research defined “belongingness” thus:

It's the sense of whether or not someone feels like they're part of EMU in a real way. It is a really hard thing to pinpoint or measure, yet it's one of the most crucial pieces of our success as an institution: our people feeling like they are part of something together, and each contributes something important to that something.

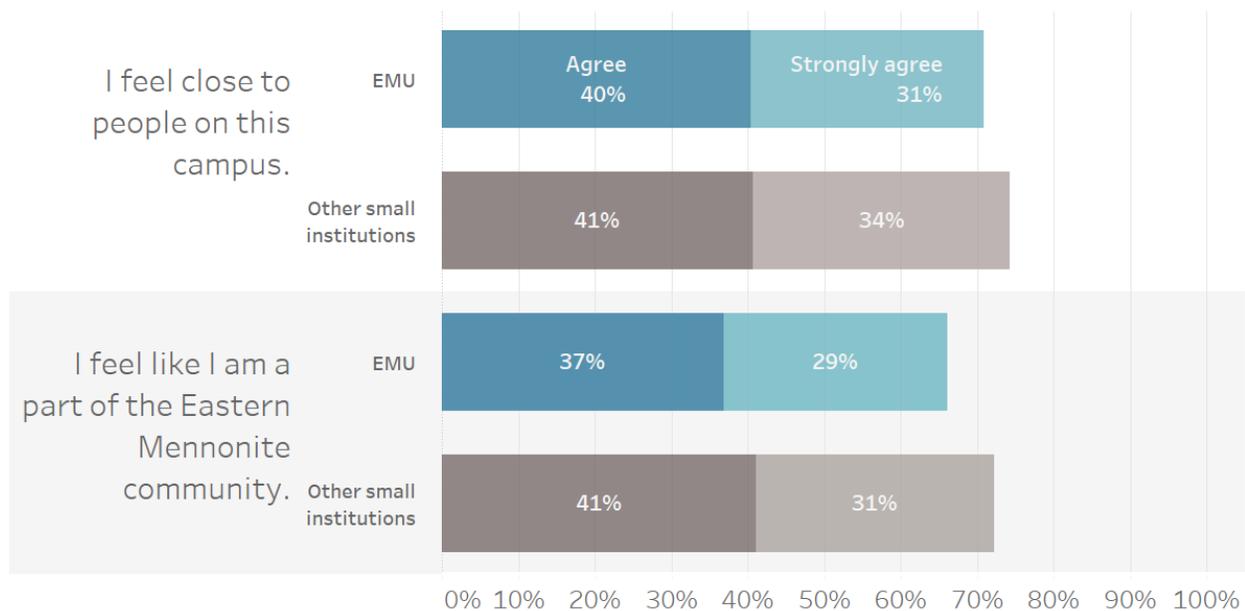
¹ EMU uses the AHANA acronym to delineate students of African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American and Pacific Islander heritage.

After investigating whether students feel that they belong at EMU, institutional research concluded, “not as much as we’d like them to.” Two recent surveys related to campus climate contributed to this analysis of belongingness on the EMU campus:

The Higher Education Data Sharing consortium (HEDS) Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey conducted in January 2018 focused primarily on elements related to sexual assault and campus support, but included a number of useful questions about students' experience on campus, such as the two shown in Fig. 5.

Figure 5. HEDS Campus Climate Survey responses

Below are statements about your views on the general climate at Eastern Mennonite. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each.

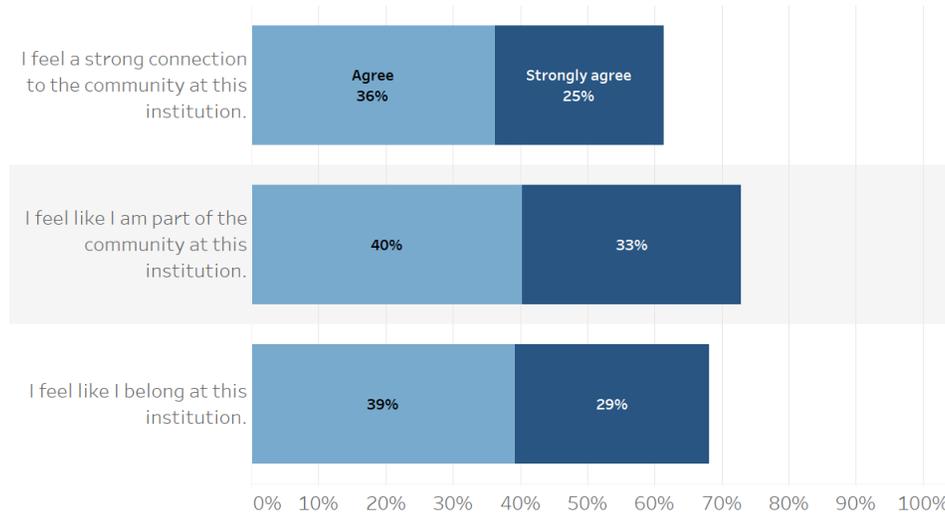


Although the difference was small, fewer students at EMU than at other institutions felt they could agree with the statements. More critical to our understanding of student sense of belongingness at EMU was the fact that a full third of students didn’t feel they could agree with the statement that they felt like part of the Eastern Mennonite community.

The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) survey, conducted in the same year, dealt with how students felt their cultural communities were represented and supported on our campus. Here are some of the key questions related to belongingness [Fig. 6].

Figure 6. CECE survey responses

To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?



The similarity of questions and responses to those on the HEDS survey suggests a pattern of experience on campus that extends beyond the set of respondents to a single survey. The picture becomes even more complex when responses are broken out demographically. The same questions are broken out by white students and students of color in Fig. 7.

Figure 7. CECE responses, broken out white/AHANA

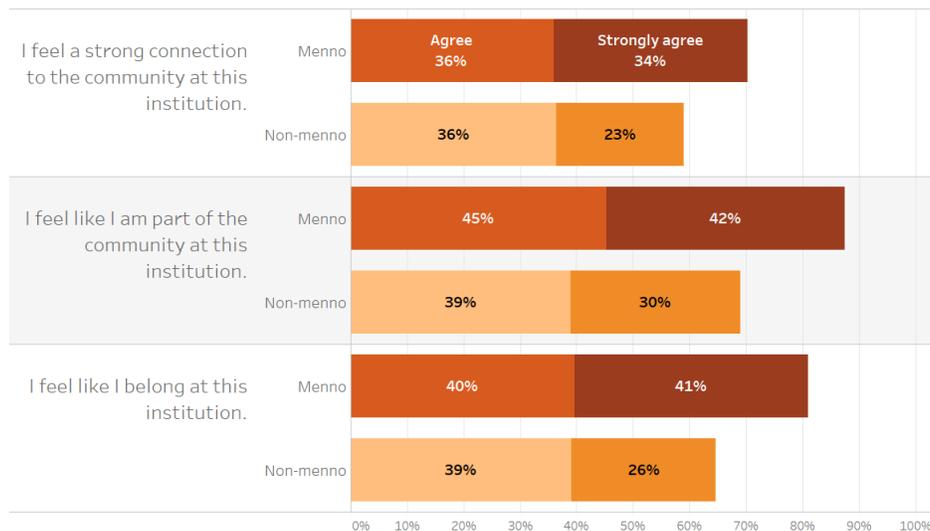
To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?



We also split the data out to reflect how students from EMU’s traditional cultural group, Mennonites, experienced belongingness in contrast to the majority non-Mennonite students (Fig. 8).

Figure 8. CECE, broken out by Mennonite/Not Mennonite

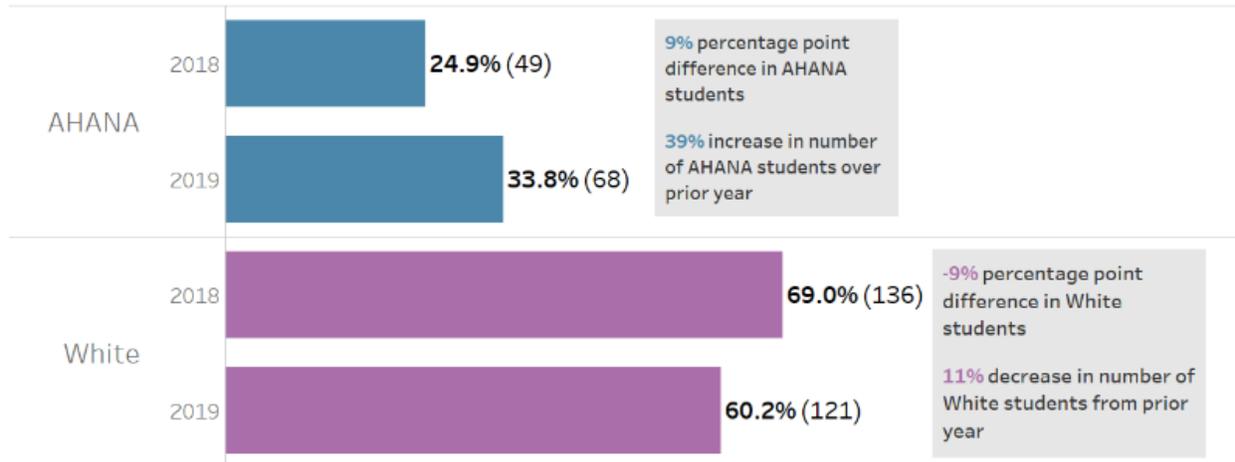
To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?



All together, these survey responses reveal that a meaningful proportion of our students do not feel a strong sense of belonging at EMU, and that the students who feel a weaker sense of belonging are more likely to be students of color and students who come from backgrounds outside of the Mennonite context. We observe these results and acknowledge the contextual reality that our student body is more racially and ethnically diverse (28% students of color) than our faculty staff (16% persons of color). We see the need to do substantial work to invest in the success of students from all backgrounds so that all students, in turn, may feel equally invested in EMU’s community of learning. This becomes particularly urgent as our student body sees steady increases in students of color over the past ten years, as exemplified in the composition of our 2019 incoming class. [Fig. 9]

Figure 9. Racial/Ethnic Categories of incoming class, 2018 vs. 2019

Race/Ethnic Categories of incoming class, 2018 vs 2019



Retention

Also contributing to the conversations at the Fall 2019 “Engage” conference was another Institutional Research newsletter released in August, which focused on retention. Retention is an important financial indicator, and retention patterns can also reveal critical information about student success and belongingness. Which students feel they belong and remain at the institution? Which students are successful here?

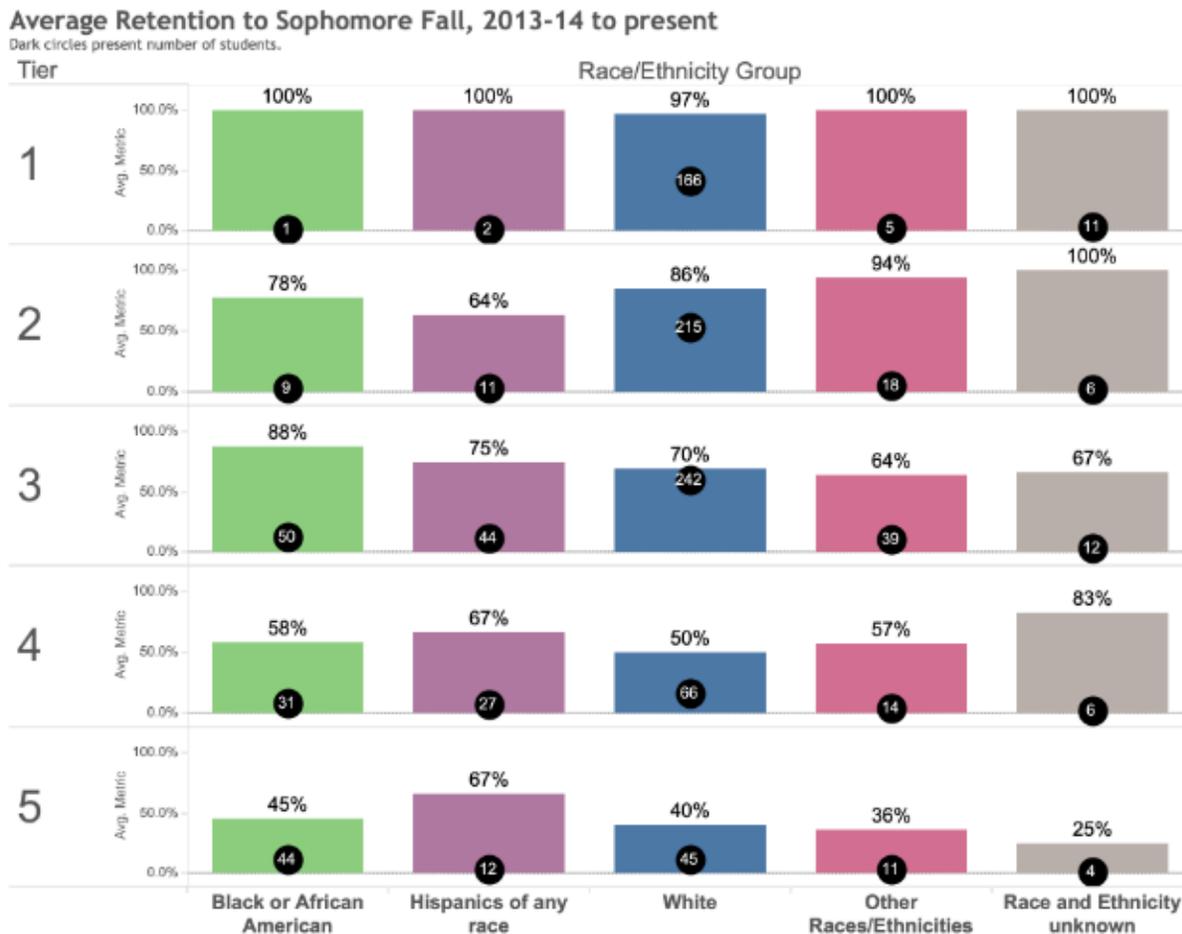
A statistical analysis of five years of retention data revealed retention patterns for a variety of demographic groups:

- Students with stronger academic preparation (as measured by admissions tier; tier is a weighted composite of high school GPA and test score, with 1=strongest) are more likely to retain than students with lower levels of preparation. It is interesting to note that students in the lowest tier, tier 5, retained at a higher rate than students in tier 4.
- Students identifying as female are more likely to retain than those identifying as male.
- Students identifying as Mennonite are more likely to retain than those who identify as another religion or do not identify with a religious/denominational tradition.
- Students who identify as first-generation in college are less likely to retain than those who have had a parent complete a bachelor's degree (or beyond).
- The study findings did not identify race/ethnicity as a statistically significant predictor of retention when the effects of other variables have been taken into account.

When we look at retention rates by race/ethnicity only (without considering other factors), white students retain at higher rates than students who identify with other racial/ethnic groups. When we

include multiple factors in the analysis, the story becomes more nuanced. See, for example, the higher retention rates of Black/African American students and Hispanic/Latinx students in tiers 4 and 5 relative to white students in the same academic tiers. [Fig. 10]²

Figure 10. Retention rates by admissions tier and race/ethnicity



Choosing to stay or leave EMU is a complex decision for our students. Quantitative analyses can help us understand the complexities of a topic such as retention, but they surely cannot offer a comprehensive explanation. In the case of this analysis, we might be surprised by the fact that race/ethnicity is not a statistically significant predictor of retention when other factors such as academic preparation are taken into account. This is not to say, however, that race and ethnicity have no impact on students' experiences at EMU, nor is it a suggestion that pre-EMU academic preparation is not itself impacted by systemic racism. Indeed, the data on belongingness that was shared above points to meaningful and disconcerting disparities in the experiences of our AHANA students. It is

² Tier is calculated as part of the admissions process and is a weighted composite of high school GPA and standardized test score (i.e., SAT or ACT).

important that we take all of this information into account as we work to ensure that all of our students have positive experiences at EMU.

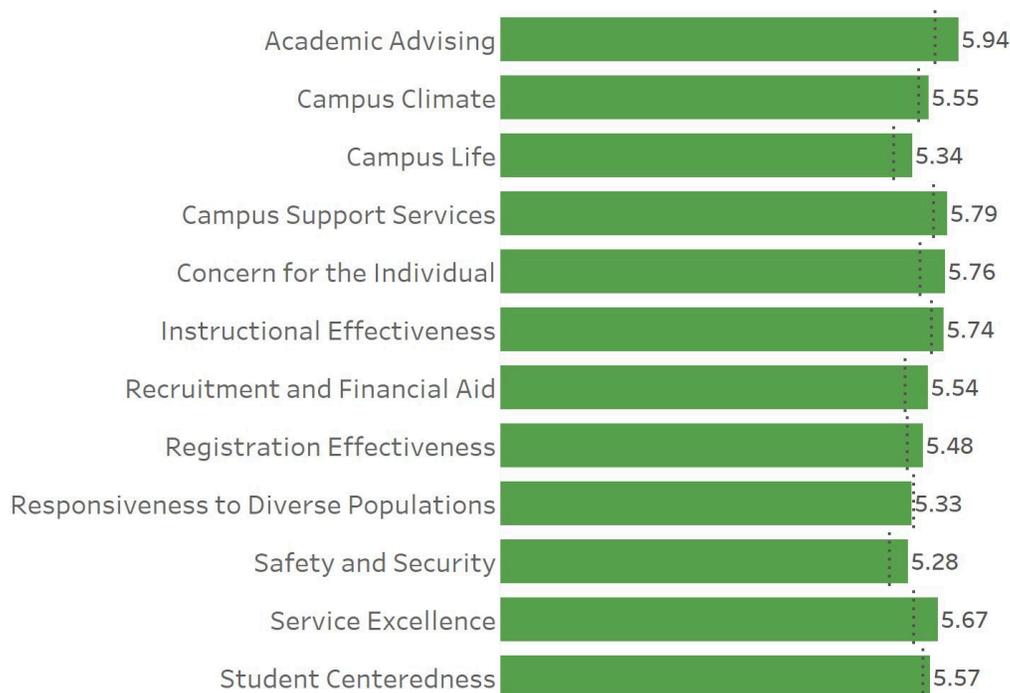
Advising and Functional Aspects of the University

Because our chosen QEP focuses on an enhanced, wholistic advising model for first-year students, it was important to understand how students currently experience academic advising at EMU. Because we conceive of first-year advisors as guides to other functional aspects of the university experience, it is also important to understand how students are experiencing these additional interactions.

A recent review of the academic advising loads of EMU faculty showed that full-time faculty members may advise as few as 2 students or as many as 25 in a given semester, depending on the number of students and the division of labor in their program. This advising is unloaded work and comes on top of a full load of teaching duties. Although the statistics shared below reveal that students are generally satisfied with their academic advising experience, the workload is a real concern for faculty in high-enrollment programs, and faculty attention given to students in advising sessions must vary greatly, given the disparities in faculty availability during key advising weeks.

The Student Satisfaction Inventory (2018), shows, on its surface, that our students experience comparable or better satisfaction than students at other institutions with advising and other aspects of navigating the institution. [Fig. 11]

Figure 11. Student Satisfaction expressed on the SSI (Scale = 1-7 [very satisfied]; dotted line indicates peer institutions)



However, different groups of students experience these factors differently on campus. A statistical analysis of the results broken out by various demographics including gender, white/AHANA, and on-campus/commuters reveal statistically significant disparities in experience. Notably,

- AHANA students rated the item “My academic advisor is approachable” lower than white students.
- Male students rated the item “Academic support services adequately meet the needs of students” lower than female students.
- Commuter students rated the item “There are adequate services to help me decide upon a career” lower than on-campus residential students.
- Both AHANA and commuter students rated the item “This institution shows concern for students as individuals” lower than white and on-campus residential students, respectively.

Similar disparities in students’ experience of the functional aspects of EMU as an institution surfaced in the NSSE 2017, where an analysis of the results broken out by demographics including gender, white/AHANA, on- or off-campus residence, and first-generation/not first-generation revealed additional statistically significant disparities in experience. Notably,

- AHANA students rated the following items lower than their white counterparts:
 - Quality of interactions with faculty
 - Quality of interactions with student services staff
- Off-campus students rated the following items lower than on-campus students:
 - Institutional emphasis on learning support services
 - Institutional emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds
 - Institutional emphasis on providing opportunities to be involved socially
 - Institutional emphasis on providing support for overall well-being
 - Institutional emphasis on attending campus activities and events
 - Institutional emphasis on attending events that address important issues
- On-campus students rated one item lower than off-campus students:
 - Quality of interactions with student services staff
- First-generation students rated the following items lower than their non-first-generation counterparts:
 - Institutional emphasis on learning support services
 - Institutional emphasis on providing opportunities to be involved socially
 - Institutional emphasis on providing support for overall well-being
 - Institutional emphasis on attending campus activities and events
 - Institutional emphasis on attending events that address important issues

Taken together with the data on sense of belonging and retention of various student groups, we read in these results a clear opportunity to improve student sense of belonging, success, and retention with an intervention focused on giving students in their first year equitable access to advisors who can help them navigate academic, social, and functional aspects of the university community.

2. Broad-Based Support of Institutional Constituencies

2.1 Broad-based involvement in QEP selection

As described above, the selected first year advising QEP topic coalesced out of an initiative intended to strengthen the integrative nature of EMU's undergraduate experience by building collaboration between Student Life and Undergraduate Academics divisions. This process involved visioning by faculty, staff, students, and administrators throughout the 2018-19 school-year; moreover, the QEP aligns with themes and priorities arising from in-person strategic planning conversations that included the entire faculty and staff of EMU in Fall of 2019, which were informed by numerous data sources on the student experience. The QEP selection committee also used feedback from student government to shape the topic selection.

A campus survey garnered 145 responses, primarily from faculty and staff, with 88% “mostly” or “very much” supporting the first year advising QEP.

2.2. Representative Composition of the QEP Drafting Task Force

The QEP Selection Task Force evolved into a QEP Drafting Task Force in Spring 2020, and some members cycled off as others with closer connections to student services and academic advising came onto the task force. The group represented relevant stakeholders but was small enough to work nimbly, meeting nine times throughout the semester and also in separate working groups to review data, relevant literature, and further develop the first year advising concept and vet it with the campus community.

The spring 2020 QEP task force was co-chaired by Kirsten Beachy (EMU Core) and Shannon Dycus (Dean of Students), representing academics and student life. Amy Springer Hartsell (Assistant Dean and Coordinator of Student Success) and Zachary Yoder (Director of Retention) represented undergraduate academics, and three faculty members represented EMU's three schools: Stephen Cessna (Professor of Biochemistry), Ron Shultz (Assistant Professor of Education), and Mary Sprunger (Professor of History). Additional student life representation and administrative assistance came from Emily Forrer (Operations Manager for Student Life). EMU administration was represented by Scott Barge (VP for Institutional Effectiveness) and Fred Kniss (Provost). First-year students Alyssa Breidigan and Philip Krabill represented the student government. As the QEP concept developed, additional people were brought into the conversation for their counsel: Kimberly Phillips, director of Career Services; Timothy Stutzman, VP for Finance, and Violet Dutcher, incoming director of the Academic Success Center.

2.3 Faculty and staff engagement and support for the QEP

The drafting task force sought the input of faculty, staff, and students for the evolving concept for first year advising. Rich qualitative feedback on the fall topic selection survey provided initial guidance, and survey responses following a March 23 university-wide QEP rollout continued to shape the direction of the QEP.

Two major themes emerged in the fall QEP selection survey and were referred to the drafting task force along with the selected topic:

1. *Racial/ethnic diversity of advisors is critical.* One faculty member noted, “Some first-year advisors must include persons able to work with bilingual students.” A staff member wrote, “It would be especially important to pair students of color with an advisor who looks like them, which probably means that we need to hire more staff/faculty of color and make sure they feel welcome enough to stay here.” A student asked whether any effort would be made to hire “minority persons to fill this role,” and another staff member observed that, “Whether first-generational or non-Mennonite, many EMU students come from backgrounds where acclimating to the systems of higher education (and EMU-style) is significant learning.”
2. *Training for advisors beyond academic logistics (i.e., curriculum, policies) is important for success; consider trainings such as Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience, Mental Health First Aid, etc.* Various responses expressed support for uniform training in order to provide students with quality, wholistic, and equitable advising experiences. One faculty member wrote, “I do think this could help with equity. Being more intentional with first year advising (and training for those advisors) could definitely help with retention and belongingness.”

On Monday, March 23, the QEP drafting task force pioneered the first campus-wide virtual meeting after news broke on March 16 that the campus would close for the remainder of the spring semester due to COVID-19. Sixty individuals, primarily faculty and staff, participated in the hour-long Zoom session and Q & A, broke out into small groups, and responded to the draft proposal with their affirmations and concerns via an online survey. Key themes and specific concerns were identified, listed below in order of frequency:

- Questions and guidance about recruiting a diverse group of advisors, connecting students with them, and about how broadening or narrowing the job description may impact recruitment and professional development.
- Questions about how advising would fit within existing and changing university structures.
- Concern that the advisors would be adequately equipped to advise for all majors and disciplines.
- Concerns about reduced relational time with professors; ideas for increasing it, noting they need new strategies for reaching out to first-years.
- Advisors should be trained on co-curricular opportunities.
- The transition/hand-off from first-year advisor to faculty advisor needs to go well. There needs to be a good process.
- Concerns about restructuring the Spring Orientation And Registration (SOAR) program.
- Asking how to attend to specific demographics - multicultural, international, first-generation students. How will we connect the students with support through advising and coordinate with other offices? What about students who are very certain about their choice of major, versus undecided?
- Comments on potential locations for advising.

These ideas and concerns were taken into account as the drafting task force developed the QEP.

2.4. Student engagement and support

Student Government

Two members of the Student Government Association (SGA), Philip Krabill and Alyssa Breidigan, both first-year students, served as student representatives on the QEP development task force in Spring 2020 and provided ongoing vision and feedback for the project; they also served as liaisons with SGA, reporting back to student leaders about the work of the task force.

QEP Task Force co-chair and Dean of Student Life Shannon Dycus met with SGA on April 15, 2020 to collect further feedback to help shape the proposed QEP. In a follow-up survey, two-thirds of student leaders agreed that having first-year advisors at EMU would be advantageous for students. The remaining third said that the proposed QEP may be advantageous.

Senators responded that the top three advantages of the proposed model were:

- Support and connection to non-academic areas (Coachlink, counseling, financial aid, etc.)
- Equitable and consistent advising experiences for all students
- Continuity for students who are undeclared or exploring several majors

89% affirmed the use of the title “first-year advisor” for the position.

In qualitative feedback, two important themes emerged alongside other responses: professionalism of advisors and concern about connecting with a home academic program.

Five student responses discussed the importance and advantages of having professional advisors who would be trained, bring intercultural competence to the role, and have a strong understanding of how to navigate student services and the specific requirements of all academic programs. One student responded, “I do really like the idea of cultural competence with first-year advisors since I've heard of some students of color not necessarily feeling supported by their advisors or professors.” These student priorities and concerns related to the professionalism and cultural competence of advisors echoed those expressed by faculty and staff in the topic selection survey.

An additional five responses expressed concern about how students with declared majors might connect with an academic program in their first year if not through advising. One student wrote, “My advisors have always been very invested in me and my holistic health, so I think that as a first year I wouldn't have benefited from having a first-year advisor. I think that advisors in your program of study help students to feel connected to their program.” One suggested that first-year advisors will be particularly beneficial to undeclared/undecided majors, but noted, “I think it is crucial that freshman students are still able to connect to faculty within their department.”

Two students expressed concern about having to change advisors after the initial year, although one noted that the format made sense for the first year, particularly for undecided students, and another one described how she even starting in her home program, she had cycled through three different advisors: “This discontinuity was really hard to navigate as each of them had very different visions for my four year plan.”

Students also noted the importance of developing rapport with the advisor to motivate students to take advantage of the resource, concern about workload for advisors, and suggestions for integrating the Transitions course into advising, creating a technological interface, involving upperclassmen, and making first year advising available to transfer students.

These concerns and ideas were taken into account as the drafting task force developed the QEP.

First Year Students

In the final phase of QEP development, EMU's dean of students and assistant provost for student success--who co-chair the QEP development task force--conducted five focus groups with first-year students. The focus groups built on the earlier input of students and were designed to review the QEP's new model for first year advising, gauge support, and seek specific input to ensure the program's success. The QEP development task force focused these additional conversations specifically within the first-year class since the new advising model is targeted to first-year students, and the advising model for second- through fourth-year students will not change.

In total, the focus group process involved more than 70 students (representing 38 percent of the first-year class) across the following venues:

- Friday, March 26, 2:40-2:55pm, WRIT 130 - College Writing
- Monday, March 29, 8:35-8:50am, WRIT 130 - College Writing
- Monday, March 29, 9:50-10:05am, WRIT 130 - College Writing
- Wednesday, March 31, 12:40-12:55pm, WRIT 120 - Introductory College Writing
- Thursday, April 1, University Student Organizations Meeting (a regular meeting of the leadership of more than 35 student clubs and organizations)

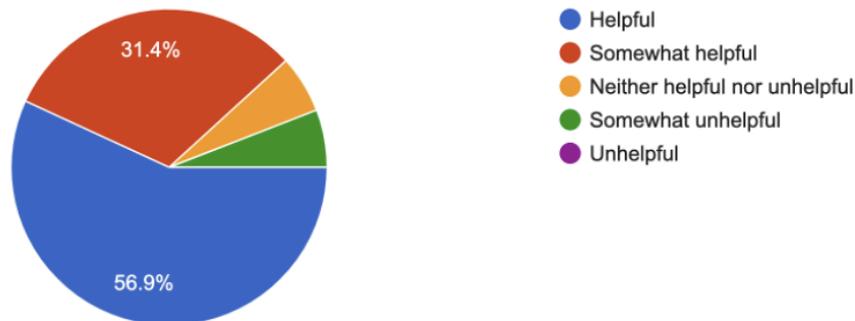
In addition to discussion of the new *Succeed Together* first year advising model during the focus groups, participants also completed a brief survey to capture their thinking about the QEP's changes to first year advising and their suggestions to ensure its success.

Students' Overall Support

Figure 1 below presents the participants' overall evaluation of the new advising model in terms of how helpful they feel it will be for future students. Note that 88 percent of students anticipate the new model being either somewhat helpful or helpful.

Figure 12. Focus group participants’ overall evaluation of QEP helpfulness.

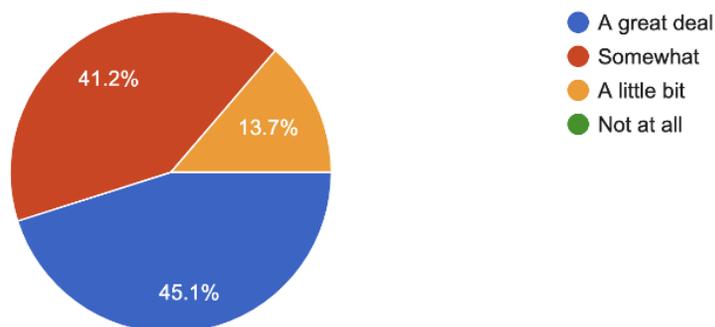
Overall, how helpful or unhelpful do you feel the new first-year advising model will be for future EMU students?



In addition to an evaluation of overall helpfulness, the focus group participants were invited to provide input on the extent to which the QEP’s proposed first year advising model would address existing inequity in the quality of advising among first-year students. Figure 2 summarizes focus group participants’ responses. Note that 87 percent of students feel that the new first year advising model will help a great deal or somewhat. Fully 100 percent of students think the advising model will be helpful (i.e., no students responded that the model would be ‘not at all’ helpful).

Figure 13. Focus group participants’ evaluation of the QEP’s ability to address inequity in the quality of advising.

Overall, how much do you think the new first-year advising model will address existing inequity in the quality of advising for future EMU first-year students?



Student Advice For Success

As a final component of the focus groups, students were provided the opportunity to offer specific advice to ensure that the new advising model serves future students well. Three key themes surfacing in the respondents' open-ended comments centered around (a) regular and meaningful contact between advisors and students; (b) knowledgeable advisors who can resource students well in terms of both academic and non-academic support; and (c) a smooth handoff for students to their major advisor(s) at the conclusion of their first year.

From its earliest stages of development the new advising model has included concrete processes to ensure that both of these areas are both well-connected to students and knowledgeable of the university so as to be able to support. Final revisions to the QEP have incorporated specific strategies to ensure ongoing faculty connection with the first year advising program and a smooth handoff for students at the end of their first year. Each of these strategies are outlined in the implementation timeline in Section 4.11 below.

2.5 Administrative support and board of trustees

Approval of this proposal was given from the President's Cabinet on June 3, 2020, reviewed by the Student Success and Campus Vitality committee then also approved by the EMU Board of Trustees on June 12, 2020.

2.6 Future plans for engaging the campus community in the first year advising initiative

Given the campus-wide consensus on the importance of appropriately training and equipping first-year advisors, the 2020-21 school-year will be considered Year 0 of QEP implementation. During Year 0 we will focus on developing advising handbooks that will include academic advising processes, 4-year plans and program-specific best practices for first year advising from academic programs, and protocols for interfacing with student services. Stakeholders from all academic programs and student services will be involved in developing these training materials and refreshing them on a yearly basis. In this way, members of academic programs, academic support services, and student life services will have ongoing ownership of the first year advising process.

Additionally, some stakeholders will serve on the First Year Advising QEP Committee, providing ongoing oversight of the QEP and support for first-year advisors and an opportunity for faculty and staff from discrete locations on campus to come together to discuss student-centered support.

Student representatives may be involved in the First Year Advising QEP Committee, but many more students will experience involvement in the QEP on a personal level as incoming first-years and transfer students transition from their admissions counselors to their first-year advisors. By the end of Year 5, virtually all undergraduate students will have had their EMU careers impacted by wholistic support, planning assistance, and scaffolding towards self-efficacy from a first-year advisor.

Succeed Together: First Year Advising at EMU QEP Logic Model

Logic model to be inserted here in landscape orientation. [See Page 1 of linked document.](#)

3. Improvement of Specific Student Learning Outcomes and/or Student Success

3.1. Goals of Succeed Together: First Year Advising at EMU

Our new first year advising model is designed to address the opportunities for increasing student sense of belonging and student success identified through the institutional conversations and assessment described in sections 1 & 2. We also seek to reduce disparities in the experiences of different demographic groups of students as they enter the university community. Through this QEP, we plan to increase student sense of belonging and increase student success by providing wholistic, student-centered support and equipping new EMU students to own their college and career plans. We have identified three hoped-for outcomes for the initiative.

1. Student Learning Outcome: *Students will demonstrate an increased sense of belonging.*
2. Student Learning Outcome: *New students will exhibit increased self-efficacy towards managing academic, personal, and vocational responsibilities through development of a 4-year college and career plan.*
3. Student Success Outcome: *Students will demonstrate increased college success, as measured by retention, D/F/W rates, and persistence.*

These benefits will be seen across the student body and also in AHANA students, commuters, and first generation students.

3.2 The links between advising, retention, and belonging: Literature Review

EMU's first year advising QEP is designed to increase students' success and retention, but also to build up their sense of belonging in the EMU community. Even if their personal journeys ultimately lead them elsewhere, we want students to feel that they belonged, grew, and were cared for as individuals in the EMU community. Fortuitously, the literature suggests that belonging, success, and retention are closely linked, and so these separate goals align.

The Potential for Improved Retention Through Wholistic Advising³

The metrics of retention and graduation rates have been used for years as proxies for educational quality, and with lawmakers and the public having instant access to these "quality" measures, institutions are increasingly focused on improving these metrics (Hossler, Ziskin, Gross, Kim, & Cekic, 2009). The efforts of colleges and universities to 1) improve student success (earning a degree) and 2) balance the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion, may be the defining characteristic that this generation of higher education leaders will be evaluated on (Gagliardi & Wilkinson, 2017). For a small,

³ This section of the literature review and the first three paragraphs of the "student-centered advising model" section are adapted from *Influence of remaining unmet financial need on the persistence behaviors of students enrolled at a small, private, liberal arts institution*, by QEP team member Z. Yoder, 2020. [Dissertation, James Madison University.] Copyright 2020 by Zachary Yoder. Adapted with permission.

private, enrollment-driven university like EMU, this obligation to help all of our students persist and graduate is a financial as well as a moral imperative.

Berger and Milem (2000) provided a conceptual model for researching how organizations impact student outcomes like retention. Their model looks beyond the academic and social dimensions of college life, adding a third vector—functional—that accounts for all the non-academic and non-social, but still necessary, aspects of the student experience. The authors wrote:

While functional experiences may seem trivial at first glance, it is through these functional experiences that students interact with the organizational environment of the campus. Moreover, the extent to which students successfully negotiate these functional experiences and the extent to which they perceive that these experiences provide a supportive campus environment, the more likely functional experiences are to influence the quantity and quality of involvement that students have in social and academic aspects of college. (p. 319)

Navigating the admissions process, turning in the required health center paperwork, completing the many steps necessary to receive financial assistance, and figuring out the varied options available to pay their student account are examples of the functional aspects of the student experience on a college campus. Student success has been linked to the extent to which students perceive that organizational decision making and functioning promotes communication, provides support, allows for participation, and is fair (Berger & Braxton 1998; Braxton & Brier, 1989; Milem & Berger, 1997).

Academic advising practices have commonly been highlighted in literature as a way to help increase retention rates. Students who receive proper advising are more likely to retain to future semesters and progress towards graduation, while also enjoying the classes in which they are enrolled in. Traditionally, an academic advisor's main job is to help students determine a major and select courses that will progress them toward meeting the requirements of graduation. While the most common questions that advisors help students with are related to what courses they will take in upcoming semesters, increasingly, advisors are also required to help students deal with personal issues outside the classroom, help resolve conflicts that students have with faculty members, and be knowledgeable about on-campus resources, such as the career center or tutoring (Khalil & Williamson, 2014). Bettinger and Baker (2014) reported on a randomized experiment connecting student coaches from a coaching service to students at eight different institutions. In this coaching model, coaches contacted students proactively to have conversations about how their daily activities connected to their long-term goals, and to help them develop skills in time management, self-advocacy, and study skills. Most of them contacted students over five times across the course of the school year. This model for coaching produced positive effects on retention that persisted for at least two years beyond the coaching experience.

At EMU, we envision a role for first-year advisors that extends beyond assisting students with academic planning. In multiple meetings throughout the year, first-year advisors will invite students to understand how their daily activities connect to long-term goals and empower students to navigate the functional structures of our organization during their first year on campus. This communication about personal goals and support for meeting students' personal needs through the functional aspects of the university should improve student success and retention.

We are not alone in targeting advising as an opportunity to increase the quality of our students' educational experience. As the focus on student retention increases, most colleges and universities have expanded advising services and attempted to increase the quality of these services. The number

of higher education institutions with a dedicated advising center increased from 14% in 1979 to over 73% in 2003 (Habley, 2004).

The Potential Of Advising to Increase Students' Sense of Belonging

Research related to advising and student sense of belonging is still relatively new, but points towards the potential of advising, when done well, intensively, and in a culturally competent way, to increase students' sense of belonging. Hurtado et al. (2007) defined sense of belonging as "A student's own psychological sense of social integration resulting from the intersection of academic and social realms, which are crucial to students' transition in college."

Soria (2012) found that student sense of belonging and retention were both positively associated with student satisfaction with advising. Vianden (2016) found clear links between satisfactory advising encounters and student sense of belonging at and pride for their institutions as they perceived "they mattered" to the institution. The reverse was also true: "Unsatisfactory experiences with unresponsive or unknowledgeable advisors affected respondents' morale and motivation and prompted students to avoid seeking contact or assistance in the future." Scrivener et. al. (2015) found that a retention intervention in 2-year CUNY schools, which involved intensive advising and structural supports, found "impressive" effects on academic success and increased belonging. This intensive advising model included a small student caseload of 90 students, required twice monthly meetings, and included goals beyond academic advising related to navigating transition, career planning, and more.

Belongingness is a particularly important consideration for students of color at a traditionally white institution like EMU with roots in a specific Christian denomination. Eaton (2020) used case studies to show that male students of color, in particular, need assistance in gaining a sense of belonging in college and suggested that a useful function of academic advisors might be to create "mindful spaces where students can unpack their experience." Torres and Hernandez (2009) studied impacts of mentored advising on Latino student sense of belonging and found that students with an advisor or mentor "consistently have higher levels of institutional commitment, satisfaction with faculty, academic integration, cultural affinity, and encouragement." Higgins (2015) supports matching students demographically with appropriate advisors, finding that doing so increases 'relational fit' between students and their advisors.

Cessna et al. (2018) used the analogy of crossing borders to describe the experiences of underrepresented minorities and first-generation students in STEM fields, and posited that students in these categories "are in need of a tour-guide...a facilitator between their home world and that of the academy" (p. 10). Strayhorn (2015) suggested that advisors can fill the roles of cultural navigators who can "help guide students until they arrive at their academic destination or at least until they are comfortable steering." He emphasized that,

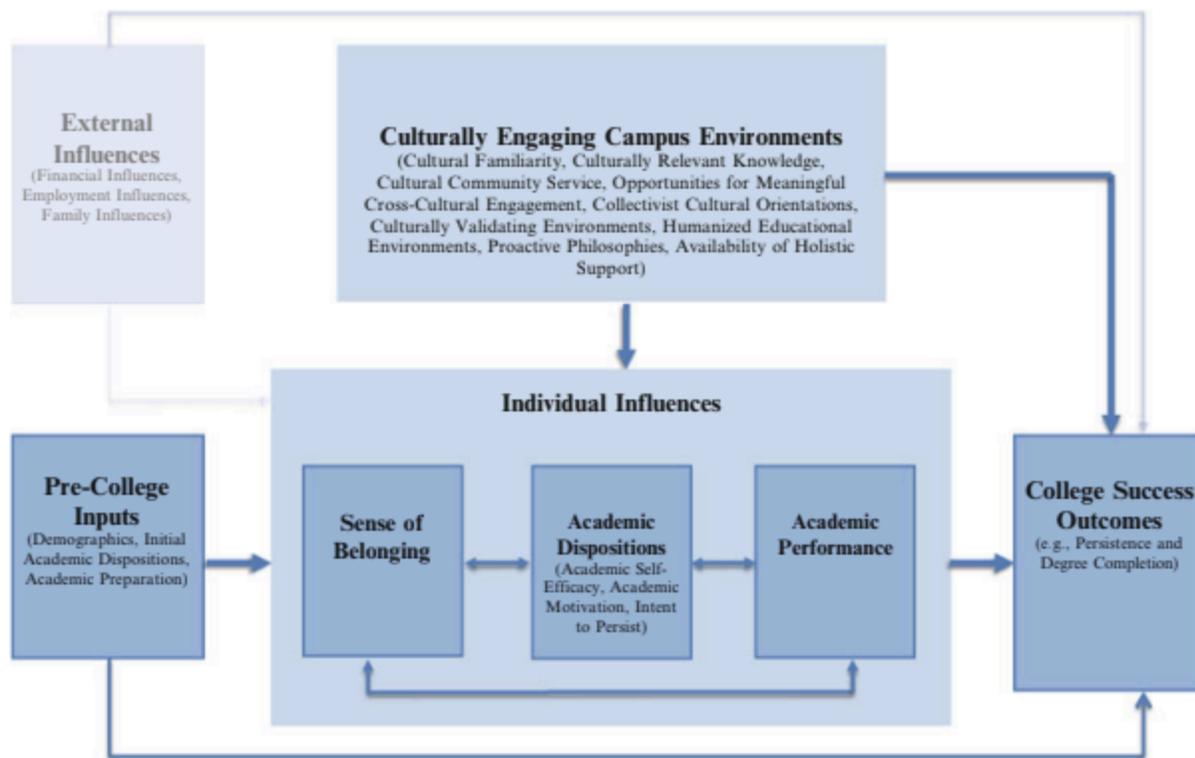
We must see students as actors, agents of their own destiny in this cultural space. Students bring cultural wealth—not deficits—with them. Our job as cultural navigators is to see them as glasses or vessels partly full, not empty. We must help them with a cultural excavation of sorts by working together with them to dig deep into their cultural repertoires and identify the wealth they bring to campus and the ways to deploy it in this setting that may be decidedly new to them. (Cultural Navigators section, para. 3)

Strayhorn's suggestion that advisors serve as cultural navigators aligns with Yosso's (2005) analysis of the forms of community cultural wealth that students of color bring to the classroom, including "aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital" (p. 69), in a call to

institutions to recognize cultural wealth as part of “a commitment to conduct research, teach and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice” (p. 82). This purpose resonates strongly with EMU’s stated values.

The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model of success among diverse populations theorizes that culturally engaging campus environments are associated with improved individual factors including sense of belonging, academic dispositions, and academic performance, leading to greater student success in racially diverse student populations (Museus, 2014).

Figure 14. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model of college success



From Museus, S. D. (2014) The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model: A new theory of college success among racially diverse student populations. Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research (Vol. 29, pp. 229-87). Springer.

Several studies “indicate that sense of belonging is both a valid construct among racially diverse student populations and a significant predictor of success in college” (Museus, 2014, p. 214).

Museus (2014) identified nine indicators of culturally engaging campus environments. The implementation of culturally competent and demographically aligned first year advising for our QEP has the potential to directly improve five of these nine indicators of culturally engaging campus environments on the EMU campus:

- Cultural familiarity (opportunity to connect with community members with similar backgrounds).
- Culturally validating environments (educators validate students’ backgrounds and experiences).

- Humanized educational environments (institutional agents develop meaningful relationships with students).
- Proactive philosophies (support and information is brought to students, rather than waiting for students to seek it out).
- Availability of wholistic support (students have access to one or more faculty or staff members who they are confident can connect them with needed information, resources, or support). (210-214)

3.3 Student-Centered Advising at EMU

In order to provide consistent, proactive, wholistic, culturally responsive advising, EMU's first year advising model will need to diverge from our current academic advising practice, which is centered on selecting a curriculum path through a given major with a faculty member from the relevant department, typically through a single advising meeting each semester. We look to practices of proactive or intrusive advising which have replaced the more passive practice of academic advising for some institutions. New university structures and the construction of an advising hub also seek to place student needs at the center of our advising process.

Proactive advising: At a public, large-sized institution in the Midwest, a PLUSS advising initiative was instituted for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) majors due to low retention and graduation rates. This advising model used extensive advisor training and a low student-advisor ratio to help facilitate numerous one-on-one advising sessions throughout the semester. Furthermore, the advisors would help students navigate the time-management aspect of college life, and the advising structure was linked with a first-year seminar course taught by the PLUSS advisors that helped students succeed within the STEM major (Rodgers, Blunt, & Tribble, 2014). Similarly, EMU's first year advising model will have a relatively low student to advisor ratio of 1:75, multiple advising sessions, a focus that extends beyond the curriculum, and involvement of first-year advisors in teaching the first-year Transitions seminar, a 1-credit course that serves to orient students to the EMU community and academic life.

EMU's academic advisors help students access some type of clearly defined roadmap for the requirements necessary to earn a degree in their field of study, and we will equip first-year advisors for this task. Moreover, advisors become crucial when students change their major, and it is estimated that between a third and a half of all students at four-year colleges will change their major at least once (Tinto, 2012). Under EMU's current advising model, first-year students who wish to change majors must initiate the subject of changing majors with their advisor within the academic program they are leaving, a potentially intimidating prospect. In the future, first-year students will initially receive their academic advising from a first-year advisor. First year advisors will initiate conversations with students about the "fit" of their chosen major and facilitate contacts with program faculty if students wish to have more in-depth conversations about the merits of potential majors. Only at the end of the first year will students transition to academic advisors for curriculum planning, and those who remain undecided will be able to continue receiving academic advising from a first-year advisor.

Some intrusive advising programs have differentiated between high-risk students, particularly those on academic probation, and the more traditional students (Vander Schee, 2007). These intrusive advising models for at-risk student populations focus on personal contact and consider factors other

than just academic variables that influence a student's overall success in college. This model has been shown to have a positive effect on academic achievement as determined by GPA (Vander Schee, 2007). EMU's own first year advising model will allow for more intensive advising for certain at-risk students as needed. The Educational Advisory Board (2014) described how one institution identified at-risk students based on the likelihood of attrition due to academic or engagement risk and tailored interventions for specific issues. EMU's first-year advisors will initiate additional interventions based on specific metrics, assuring that the level of support is tailored to specific students' needs.

EMU's Coachlink service is currently available to a limited number of at-risk students of all class ranks who meet weekly or bi-weekly with coaches who provide coaching and mentoring. First year advisors may refer first-year students with the most intensive needs to our Coachlink coaches even in their first year. As students transition to academic advisors in their respective disciplines in the second year, first-year advisors may recommend certain at-risk students, those who need ongoing support beyond academic advising, to the Coachlink program.

Student-centered university structures: EMU recently re-organized our structures for academic support, retention, and advising. As of fall 2020, EMU's provost meets with a student success team that includes the newly appointed assistant provost for student success and the director of the academic success center, along with representation from career services and key student life offices. The goal of this team is to plan and implement a coordinated effort to support holistic student success.

To more specifically supervise the first year advising initiative, the new First Year Advising QEP Committee, which has significant membership overlap with the student success team, is developing and resourcing a student-centered, wholistic advising process focused on students' first year on campus. The First Year Advising QEP Committee description explains that the committee *provides leadership and oversight for the University's Quality Enhancement Plan First Year Advising team. Specifically, the committee facilitates coordination as outlined in the QEP proposal between academics, student services, and the assistant provost for student success and first-year advisors and evaluates the effectiveness of the project.*

For 2020-21, Year 0 of the QEP project, committee composition includes: Co-chairs: assistant provost for student success and dean of students, a faculty members representing our three schools, the director of the academic success center, EMU Core (general education) director, the director of career services, Registrar, The director of admissions, the director of student programs and Title IX coordinator, and an administrative support professional. During this year, the primary work of the committee is to collaborate with student services and academic programs to create a handbook for advisors and advising. The handbook will include procedures for academic and vocational advising for first years and for handling or accurately referring many student needs (see [Appendix D](#) for Handbook Questionnaires). The committee will also approve and arrange appropriate training for first-year advisors. As we move into implementation of the project in Year 1, we will reassess the composition of the committee for efficiency and effectiveness.

Student-centered location for advising. Advising will include a shared virtual space, with all resources available to students from a single site. Advisors will coordinate scheduling, documentation of advising, and communication about student needs between academic advisors and student success personnel through the Navigate platform, which we currently use for advising and early alerts. Our plan also provides for the construction of an advising hub that serves as a "one-stop shop" for student needs, with a receptionist equipped to answer some questions, direct students to appropriate campus

resources, or set up appointments with advisors for more in-depth concerns. Drop-in hours with an available advisor will also be available in this space throughout the week.

3.4 The role of first-year advisors in delivering learning-centered advising

Hiring and equipping qualified first year advising professionals is critical to the success of EMU's first year advising QEP. The literature provides guidance on the skills and dispositions needed to provide quality advising that is centered on student learning (see [Appendix E](#) for the draft job description for first-year advisors.)

Advisors promote learning through sympathetic characteristics and dispositions: Good advisors, according to Wade and Yoder (1995) are "caring, good listeners, knowledgeable about their content areas, and prepared. Both believe in the human dignity of all their students. Their behaviors reflect clarity, enthusiasm, warmth, flexibility, availability, and businesslike, task-oriented behaviors" (100). NACADA (2017c) articulates seven core values for advisors: caring, commitment, empowerment, inclusivity, integrity, professionalism, and respect. Advisors should set high expectations while providing support, feedback, and facilitating involvement in the learning process (Campbell and Nutt, 2008), and they should understand actionable theories of learning as they apply in college advising - e.g. motivation (autonomy, self-efficacy, metacognition, growth mindedness). NACADA (2006) stated:

Academic advising, as a teaching and learning process, requires a pedagogy that incorporates the preparation, facilitation, documentation, and assessment of advising interactions.

Although the specific methods, strategies, and techniques may vary, the relationship between advisors and students is fundamental and is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and ethical behavior. (para. 7)

Wilcox (2016) put forward the model for what advisors do, how they promote learning in the advisor/advisee diad, and how it varies by student and by season, moving from more prescriptive approaches and interactions (advisor informs students and pushes knowledge in their direction) to more active approaches (the advisor works with student in a 'call and response', pulling information and self-understanding from the student), much like the way good teachers teach.

In order to teach in these ways, advisors must be trained and supported in achieving a particular set of competencies. NACADA (2017b) groups core competencies for advisors under 3 headings: Conceptual, Informational, and Relational.

Conceptual competencies for effective academic advisors include understanding history and role of advising in higher ed, core values/ethical commitments, relevant theories, approaches, and outcomes of advising. The final understanding, "how equitable and inclusive environments are created and maintained" (NACADA 2017b) is particularly relevant to this QEP's focus on belongingness. According to Dreasher (2014, p. 4, cited in NACADA 2017a), "Equitable and inclusive academic advising requires the understanding that 'culture not only influences our behavior, but also colors our interpretation of the behaviors of others [...] Culturally competent advisors know and understand their own cultural values and how they differ from those of other cultures.'"

NACADA's Informational competencies for advisors include knowledge of: institutional history/mission/vision/values, curricula/degree programs and options, policies/procedures/rules,

(including legal guidelines), campus/community/IT resources that are available, and the characteristics, needs and experiences of major and emerging student groups. “Student demographics are changing, as are the motivations for seeking higher education and the mechanisms for financing education” (NACADA 2017a, p.2).

Relational competencies identified by NACADA are the abilities to: develop their own philosophy of advising, create rapport, communicate inclusively and respectfully, plan successful interactions, promote student understanding of the curriculum, and participate in assessment and development.

Our QEP includes the creation of an advising manual and appropriate trainings so that advisors can be fully equipped to provide wholistic, student-centered, learning-centered advising that fosters students’ self-efficacy and sense of belonging, ultimately increasing student success. The following sessions, available through programs that EMU offers or coordinates with in our local community, will be required for new first-year advisors and will be repeated at recommended intervals throughout their time at EMU. The first year advising QEP committee may recommend additional trainings. Additional funding is provided in the QEP budget to enable first-year advisors to attend professional conferences or webinars for further professional development.

- *Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience (STAR)*: A five-day training offered on EMU’s Harrisonburg campus. The STAR framework integrates material from trauma and resilience studies, restorative justice, conflict transformation, human security, and spirituality. These five foundational fields draw upon deep academic and practical knowledge housed within the faculty and staff of EMU’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding; each training draws on both this expertise and the wisdom contained in the experience of each group of STAR participants. Following the STAR I training, advisors will be equipped to bring a trauma and resilience informed perspective to personal and professional life, understand trauma’s impact on body, brain and behavior of individuals and groups, know processes for breaking cycles of violence and building resilience, and share the basic concepts with others. First year advisors will have the option of completing the STAR II training in a subsequent year.
- *Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)*: MHFA is a nationally recognized program that relies on local providers (in our case, the local Community Services Board) to provide training and workshops to teach participants how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges in our community. EMU’s Student Life division sponsors an annual on-campus training which includes opportunities to discuss the unique situations that may be faced in a university setting. After the 8-hour training, first-year advisors will receive a certification that is good for three years.
- *Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)*: Several EMU personnel are certified to administer and interpret the IDI, a widely-used, theory-based, research-supported assessment of intercultural competence. The IDI is a useful step in determining the underlying developmental stage of intercultural competence of the advising team and tailoring further training and leadership development opportunities to build these skills.
- *Title IX Training*: EMU collaborates with The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and two other local colleges, Bridgewater College and James Madison University, to host a 1-day intensive training covering Title IX compliance, relevant Title IX updates, Trauma Informed Responsiveness, the Clery Act and the prevention of campus gender-based violence. This training features presentations from multiple subject matter experts.
- *Developmental Needs of College Students*: a training module to be developed specifically for first-year advisors in collaboration between student life professionals and Education faculty.

- *The Grand Tour*: meeting with personnel from academic programs and student service offices and connecting with them about the needs of incoming students relative to their departments. At EMU, our team of admissions counselors visits academic program meetings on a yearly basis to learn more about the majors they are promoting to prospective students, and we envision a similar tour of academic programs by the first year advising team, adding in relevant offices and student services.

3.5. Learning-centered advising

Advisors will connect with advisees both in the group setting of the Transitions course and individual meetings as students meet specific milestones in their first year (see Advising Milestones, [Appendix F](#)). Advisors will be expected to meet with advisees in the summer prior to plan their schedules and discuss their expectations for college life. During the school year, they will meet individually with each advisee a minimum of twice during the first semester and a minimum of once during the second semester to discuss the significance of and facilitate completion of milestones. These milestones include items from the academic, social, and functional domains.

First-year advisors, in collaboration with the associate provost for student success, will track key metrics to determine whether and what sorts of additional interventions should be initiated for specific students. See the Targeted Interventions document ([Appendix G](#)) for further details.

Additional meetings may also be initiated by the advisee as the need arises--for instance, if they have questions related to success, vocational path, personal issues, or navigating functional aspects of the university. Upon the second unscheduled intervention, the advisor will assess whether it may be appropriate to refer the student for counseling, Coachlink, or other university services for additional support and follow-up.

Best Practices for Learning-centered Advising

As important as facilitating students' journeys past first year milestones is the *manner* in which first-year advisors do this. EMU's QEP envisions that first-year advisors will serve critical roles in student learning and development (Lowenstein, 2005; Wilcox, 2016). According to Wilcox (2016), various models for college advising fit into one of the following three categories:

- Prescriptive advising, or *advising as book-keeping*. At EMU, these tasks are increasingly computerized, and the role of the academic advisor is often the double check that the computer is correct, and that the student fully understands and follows the computer's output.
- Developmental advising, or *advising as counseling*. Crookson (1972) was the early advocate for this model. Some programs or faculty members at EMU engage with advisees from a developmental perspective, but this is not institutionalized in our advising processes.
- The learning-centered paradigm, or *advising as the coaching of learning*. Lowenstein (2005) is the most cited paper on this perspective. In practice, learner-centered advising incorporates the other two.

Wilcox, Lowenstein, and others including the NACADA Professional Development Committee (2006 and 2017), advocated for the learning-centered paradigm, and this QEP likewise conceptualizes the first year advising experience at EMU to be an educational process. What does the literature tell us about

appropriate curriculum, the preferred pedagogy, and most importantly, the student learning outcomes for first year advising?

Common Student Learning Outcomes of First Year Advising

Common learning outcomes for first year advising include institutional awareness, student self-awareness, and meaning making and motivation. Institutional awareness includes an understanding of available resources and opportunities, along with an understanding of what it takes to move through the undergraduate curriculum to *become* a teacher, doctor, accountant, librarian, etc. (Wilcox 2016). Self awareness and discovery were described by Lowenstein (2005) as the ability for students to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and places for growth. This involves finding what interests the student, reflecting, and trying on new academic identities as they explore different subjects of interest.

Various scholars have addressed the outcomes of meaning making and motivation. Motivation involves self-efficacy and self-regulated learning (Ehrlich and Russ-Eft, 2013). Steele (2013) wrote: “the intent is not just to help students reach a decision, but also become aware of how they make decisions . . . to help students develop an awareness of their own learning or thinking process” (para. 4). Motivation for students also springs from an understanding of why involvement in a particular course, co-curricular activity or job, might help them use their college experience toward a professional goal. In addition, para-curricular activities like internships, research, and cross-cultural experiences belong in the list of experiences that good advisors will help advisees connect with curricular learning, helping the student to “create the logic” of their chosen curriculum (Lowenstein 2005). According to Hughey (2011) “Advisees gain in cognitive development when advisors challenge them to critically think about relationships and patterns between academics and their career and academic goals” (p. 27).

NACADA, the Global Community for Academic Advising, articulates the following student learning outcomes (2006). Students will:

- craft a coherent educational plan based on assessment of abilities, aspirations, interests, and values
- use complex information from various sources to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals
- assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements
- articulate the meaning of higher education and the intent of the institution’s curriculum
- cultivate the intellectual habits that lead to a lifetime of learning
- behave as citizens who engage in the wider world around them (para. 8)

The second student learning outcome we have articulated for EMU’s QEP centers self-efficacy as the goal: “New students will show increased self-efficacy and independence towards managing academic, personal, and vocational responsibilities.” The survey instrument we have developed to assess self-efficacy draws on the concepts above.

In order to foster self-efficacy in our new students, first-year advisors must be teachers and facilitators. Rather than completing tasks for students, first-year advisors will serve as guides and resources for students as they complete these tasks for the first time in their college careers. Rather than negotiating with professors or offices on behalf of students, advisors will enable them to connect with the appropriate resource in the appropriate manner and orient them to aspects of a context they may not yet fully understand.

Further extending their pedagogical role, first-year advisors will serve as instructors in the first-year Transitions class, a one-credit course which meets for the first eight weeks of the semester and orients students to various aspects of college life in EMU's learning community (see Transitions course description and objectives, [Appendix H](#)).

3.6 Transitioning to academic advisors

As stated above, the first year advising model is designed to increase student sense of belonging and increase student success by providing wholistic, student-centered support and equipping new EMU students to own their college and career plans. Documentation of these plans will enable students to carry forward their visions for their time at EMU as they transition to academic advisors within their disciplinary areas.

During their first semester on campus, students will begin to draft their own 4-year Career and Academic plans (see Career and Academic Plan template, [Appendix I](#)) and will discuss and refine them in consultation with their first-year advisors. These plans incorporate curriculum guidance from the general education Core courses, 4-year plans for the relevant academic majors, suggested milestones from Career Services, and space to consider co-curricular opportunities that serve to meet career and networking goals. As students confirm or select majors, they will refine the 4-year plans and prepare to graduate to an academic advisor. Some students may be ready to begin work with an academic advisor partway through the spring semester as they prepare for fall registration, and others may continue the discernment process with their first-year advisor and graduate to an academic advisor at some point in their second year. Advisors will continue to work with undecided students. They will also be available on a limited basis to consult with students who are considering switching majors later in their college careers.

As students start meeting with an academic advisor in their major, they will bring the working 4-year plan with them. Academic advisors will be able to efficiently review the draft curriculum plans and, ideally, have more time to work with students on career preparation and considering how co-curricular involvements may support their personal aspirations. In this way, we anticipate that EMU's first year advising QEP will bolster student success, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy through advising far beyond the first year.

4. Commitment of Resources

4.1 Resource Commitments

We recognize the potential positive impacts of wholistic first year advising on our students' college careers, and believe that the returns in increased sense of belongingness and student success are well worth the initial investments of university resources.

The QEP drafting committee developed the draft budget in consultation with Provost Fred Kniss and subsequently consulted with Vice President for Finance Timothy Stutzman about anticipated costs of specific aspects of the project. At a June 3, 2020 meeting, President's Cabinet provided feedback for the proposed QEP budget and approved it in principle.

The primary costs of the project include hiring first-year advisors, preparing a space, and administrative support for the advising center. Additional university resources will be needed to prepare advising materials, processes, and protocols; training for advisors; and oversight of the QEP project.

4.2 Personnel

The first year advising QEP requires appropriate staffing for supervision, implementation, and administrative support. We envision the following roles:

- Three professional first-year advisors, with the possibility of hiring additional advisors if the initiative is successful enough to scale advising beyond the first year.
- Administrative support for the QEP committee and advising reception. This will be added to an existing administrative assistant position, at 10 hours per week.

The assistant provost for student success, a position filled in Summer 2020, will supervise first-year advisors and co-chair the First Year Advising QEP Committee with the dean of students. This position was developed as a result of restructuring existing roles and is not included in the QEP budget below. It should be noted, however, that instead of both a director of retention *and* an assistant dean for student success, we now have a single assistant provost for student success providing leadership for advising and retention efforts.

4.3 Physical Resources and Infrastructure

First year advisors will need appropriate, confidential spaces to meet with their advisees. We envision a "one-stop shop" where students can drop by to sign up for advising, academic support, and make appointments for other campus services. The advising program will find a home on the first floor of

the Campus Center, immediately adjacent to the registrar's office, the financial aid office, the business office (student accounts) and in a shared space with other important student services such as the Career Center and the CoachLink program (an existing student coaching/support program serving second through fourth year students). In total, the space renovations and preparations required to establish a home for the program--which will take place during the 2021-22 academic year--will represent a university capital investment of approximately \$755,000.

Advisors will need a virtual environment for advising, to manage appointments, reminders, record-keeping, early alerts, and communication, as well as appropriate access to relevant student data. EMU currently uses Navigate, a student success management platform from the Educational Advisory Board. The First Year Advising QEP Committee will assess whether any additional IT infrastructure will be necessary (for instance, a myEMU dashboard where advisors might access particular kinds of student data) and if needed will work with Information Systems to develop solutions.

4.4 Academic Resources

The first year advising team will seek ongoing input from EMU undergraduate faculty in order to foster first-year students' curricular planning and academic success. Academic programs will provide updated 4-year plans for majors and other advising information to make available to advisors and first-year students. The advising team will meet with program directors on a yearly basis to update this material and discuss the unique needs of first-year students in each program. Additionally, faculty will be involved in developing protocols for the handover from the first-year advisor to the academic program advisor as students move into their majors.

The advising team will also coordinate closely with the directors of the EMU Core general education program, Intercultural Programming, and the Writing program to coordinate advising for Core requirements, including cross-cultural and communication courses. The EMU Core director will also work with the advising team to integrate the first-year Transitions course with advising requirements.

4.5 Campus Offices and Student Services

The first year advising team will also seek ongoing input from various offices on campus in order to understand how to help students navigate available services. Together, they will develop protocols for empowering students to access needed resources and complete tasks related to these offices. They will meet at least yearly with these offices to update this material. These services include:

- Academic Success Center
- Academic Access
- Admissions
- Athletics

- Business Office
- Campus Ministries
- Coachlink
- Counseling Center
- Financial Assistance/Student Employment
- Health Services
- Multicultural Student Services
- Registrar's Office
- Residence Life
- Student Programs
- Title IX

4.6 The First Year Advising QEP Committee

The First Year Advising QEP Committee (also known as the QEP Implementation Team, or QEPIT) will provide leadership and oversight for the QEP and the First Year Advising team. Specifically, the team will facilitate coordination between academics, student services, the assistant provost for student success, and first-year advisors, and evaluate the effectiveness of the QEP initiative. This group will be responsible for the development of student-centered advising resources and protocols during Year 0 of the QEP. They will collect and review relevant assessment data annually during the five-year QEP implementation cycle, producing yearly reports that can be compiled into the fifth-year QEP report.

The committee will include

- Co-chairs: assistant provost for student success and the dean of students
- Faculty members
- Director of the Academic Success Center
- EMU Core director
- Registrar
- Representative from admissions
- Director of student programs and Title IX coordinator
- Director of career services
- Administrative assistant

The composition of the committee will be reevaluated on a yearly basis to determine whether the appropriate personnel are involved.

4.7 Other Resource Implications

QEP leadership: The assistant provost for student success and the dean of students will serve as co-chairs of the QEP implementation team. Their responsibilities specific to implementation of the *Succeed Together* first year advising program are expected to represent 25 percent of the workload for the assistant provost, and five percent of the workload for the dean of students.

Existing positions: We anticipate that the work of advising conditionally admitted and undecided students, currently handled by academic support center staff, will be shifted to first-year advisors. In addition, we anticipate that first-year advisors will teach 9 out of 15 yearly sections of the Transitions course (which are currently taught by various qualified administrators).

Coachlink: A quarter to one third of students who access the resources and support of Coachlink coaches are first-year students. Although we anticipate that first year advising may meet some of the needs that are currently met by Coachlink, Coachlink coaches remain better positioned to provide the intensive follow-up that certain students need. In addition, we may see an increase in referrals of

first-year students to Coachlink when first-year advisors provide consistent assessments of student need across the first-year student body and identify students who need additional support.

Faculty advisors: Undergraduate faculty do not receive load hours for their advising duties, so shifting their load of first-year advisees to the first-year advisors will help to meet institutional goals related to reducing faculty workload. The reductions in advisors' load of advisees will provide additional time for in-depth advising to upper-level students and to foster informal contacts with first-year students in their courses, whether or not those first-years have declared a major in the discipline. Faculty members will be encouraged to invite interested first-year students to program-specific events (e.g. student/faculty gatherings, guest lectures, etc.) where they can begin to build relationships with both faculty and students in the program.

Campus offices and student services: Advising will also streamline the work of various campus offices and student services as students will be more likely to identify the appropriate office for their situation, have some questions answered, and even complete some tasks with the help of their first-year advisors.

4.8 In-Kind support

Several of the resources needed to support the first year advising initiative are embedded in EMU's institutional processes. Information Systems will provide technological support, and Institutional Research will support the ongoing assessment processes that feed into QEP assessment, as well as helping the first year advising team analyze their findings.

In addition to financial resources in the QEP budget to support professional development for the first-year advisors, the team will have access--at no cost to the first year advising program--to a rich set of best-practice resources (including research, conferences, webinars and consultation) through its partnership with the Education Advisory Board (EAB) for the *Navigate* advising and student support web platform and service.

We will draw on a rich variety of internal and community resources to provide training for first-year advisors:

- Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience trainings through our STAR program.
- Intercultural Development Inventory and interpretation through certified EMU personnel.
- EMU provides annual Mental Health First Aid trainings from the community services board for interested employees.
- EMU collaborates with local universities to provide Title IX trainings.
- Education faculty and Student Life personnel will pool their expertise to present on the developmental needs of new college students.

4.9 Six-year budget

Description	Year 0 (20-21)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Personnel						
QEP Leadership: Assistant Provost for Student Success @ 25 percent; Dean of students @ 5 percent	26,300	26,300	26,300	26,300	26,300	26,300
1 First-Year Advisor, Masters level; \$37,000 salary + benefits. Hired April 2021 to start advising at Spring Orientation and Registration		57,800	57,800	57,800	57,800	57,800
2 First-Year Advisors, Masters level; \$37,000 salary + benefits. Hired in April 2021 to start advising at Spring Orientation and Registration		20,000	115,000	115,000	115,000	115,000
Advising center reception and administrative assistance. .25 FTE; includes benefits. Added to existing position.			10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Program Costs						
Equipment - Office furniture and computers		1,000	5,000			
Office & Materials Supplies	500	500	500	500	500	500
Copy/Print/Telephone	500	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Meals & Entertainment (events, trainings, etc.)	200	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
Professional Development, Conferences, Memberships		3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Yearly Operating Budget Total	1,200	84,300	193,300	188,300	188,300	188,300
Cost Savings						
9 Transitions course instructors (3 in pilot year)		3,630	10,890	10,890	10,890	10,890
Conditionally admitted student advisor		20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
Total		23,630	30,890	30,890	30,890	30,890
Adjusted Operating Budget Total	1,200	60,670	162,410	157,410	157,410	157,410
Total Operating Budget for QEP, Years 0-5:					696,510	
Capital Expenses						
Renovations to establish "one-stop shop" for student support (construction in 21-22)						750,000
Total Operating Budget & Capital Expenditure for QEP, Years 0-5:					\$ 1,446,510	

4.10 Anticipated retention benefits of first year advising

EMU's retention rate is near the median for a liberal arts schools of our level of selectivity, which allows some room for improvement. Initiatives designed to improve retention should have a positive impact.

[J. Cuseo \(2019\)](#), a leading expert in the field of academic advising, documented and synthesized the empirical connections between advising and retention. He further cites research showing that universities can anticipate a greater return on investment when dedicating resources to retention efforts rather than to recruitment.

Although there are few purely randomized trials of the impacts of quality wholistic advising on retention, one large, randomized trial by Stanford researchers ([Bettinger and Baker, 2014](#)) of an intensive coaching model (InsideTrack) across eight different schools found:

Students who were randomly assigned to a coach were more likely to persist during the treatment period and were more likely to be attending the university 1 year after the coaching had ended. *Coaching also proved a more cost-effective method of achieving retention and completion gains when compared with previously studied interventions such as increased financial aid.* (p. 3, my emphasis)

Students who were in the coaching group in their first year were 5% more likely to retain to the following year, and the effect persisted through graduation, with 4% greater likelihood of graduating. Not all of the students assigned to the coaching group chose to take advantage of the coaching services offered. This study also described a stronger return for funds invested in retention than in recruitment.

EMU's retention rates are better than the average rates in the study (study retention rates were around 60%), and we would like to believe that EMU students are already receiving responsive academic advising, so we may not be able to expect such a dramatic impact of a similar intervention.

However, our first-year advisors will be working within the institution, not for an external coaching service, and will be equipped to help students in a broader range of areas than the academic motivation and career planning provided through the InsideTrack telephone coaching sessions. These additional areas of support include navigating functional aspects of the university, campus engagement, and general well-being.

The estimate for cumulative enrollment gains below is based on several assumptions:

- A first year class enrollment of 195
- Otherwise steady retention, based on 2016, the most recent entry year for which we have 4 years of retention data. (The rates for this year closely align with the 6-year averages.)
- 3% increase in retention from first to second year as a result of first year advising
- 2% increase in retention for the following two years.

Estimated Enrollment & Revenue Increases					
Expected increase in enrollment for...	Year of Implementation				
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Students entering Year 1	-	5.85	3.9	3.9	
Students entering Year 2			5.85	3.9	3.9
Students entering Year 3				5.85	3.9
Students entering Year 4					5.85
Cumulative Enrollment Increase		5.85	9.75	13.65	13.65
Average net revenue per student		\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Revenue secured through increased retention		\$87,750	\$146,250	\$204,750	\$204,750

Under this model, after the initial investment, increased tuition revenues from retention would exceed the additional annual costs of the program by Year 3 of the QEP and provide revenues in excess of \$70,000 per year in the following years, for a yearly return on investment of 54%: $(\$204,750 - \$132,800) / \$132,800$.

Because retention is impacted by multiple, sometimes unanticipated, variables ranging from tuition to public health, we may have some difficulty teasing out the true retention impacts of this advising intervention. By also tracking students' academic success and sense of belongingness throughout the QEP period, we will be well positioned to understand the impacts of first year advising on factors that impact retention.

4.11 Implementation timeline

Date	Action	Responsible party	Output
QEP Year 0 (2020-21)			
Fall 2020	Finalize QEP details based on campus feedback and budget	First Year Advising QEP Implementation Team (QEPIT)	Quality Enhancement Plan, final draft
Fall 2020	Collect remaining baseline data	Institutional Research, collaborating with QEPIT	Baseline data collected
Spring, Summer 2021	Develop handbook and procedures for first year advising, including four-year	QEPIT	First year advising handbook

	curriculum plans for all majors		
Spring 2020-21	Develop training expectations and modules for first year advising	QEPIT	Training expectations and modules
Spring 2021	Revise QEP to take into account recommendations from SACSCOC reviewers	QEPIT	QEP revision complete
Spring 2021, by April	Post position and hire one first-year advisor, who will serve as the initial advisor during year 1, the pilot year	Assistant Provost for Student Success (APSS), in consultation with QEPIT	Diverse team of qualified advisors considered and one is hired
Spring 2021	Continue conversations about construction plans for advising hub	QEPIT and Facilities Management	Advising hub construction plans
By May 2021	First year advisor oriented to academic advising for the first year	APSS, using training handbook and coordinating with academic programs	First year advisors understand academic advising
Summer 2021, Student Orientation and Registration and beyond	A selected group (pilot group) of incoming students receive academic advising from first-year advisor and have academic/career discernment discussions	First Year Advisor in collaboration with Admissions and academic programs	New students are registered for courses and have begun to articulate a vision for their time at EMU
Summer 2021	First year advisor receives additional trainings and orientation to the university	APSS, coordinating with various trainers and student services offices	First year advisors are oriented to appropriate dispositions, policies, procedures, and resources for their work with students
Summer 2021	Review and finalize all four-year curriculum plans with program faculty input and sign-off	APSS and first-year advisors	Approved four-year curriculum plans in place to support advising
QEP Year 1 (2021-2022)			
By Fall 2021	Make provisions for ongoing administrative and reception support for first year advising	Assistant Provost for Student Success, in consultation with Provost	FYA administrative support added onto an existing role
Fall 2021	First year advising hub/office space construction ongoing	Facilities management, in consultation with QEPIT	First year advising hub open to students for walk-ins by Fall 2022

Fall 2021	First year advisor is prepared and supported in teaching first-year Transitions course	APSS, coordinating with EMU Core director	3-4 Transitions courses taught by first-year advisor
Fall 2021	Students in pilot group meet periodically for advising about academic and career plans, are contacted for follow-up when they exhibit at-risk behaviors, and can access assistance for navigating functional aspects of the university	First year advisor	Students develop a draft academic and career plan, register for spring classes, receive interventions as needed, receive assistance navigating functional aspects of the university as needed
December 2021/ January 2022	Contacts made with pilot students who failed courses or have incomplete enrollment issues for spring semester	First year advisor	Students register in appropriate courses and receive needed assistance
Spring 2022 and beyond, as appropriate	Students in pilot group transition to academic program advising when ready to join an academic program; faculty advisors are briefed on all case notes for each advisee	First year advisors, coordinating with faculty advisors in academic programs	Students move into advising with an academic program, taking a complete draft of their Academic and Career plan with them
Spring 2022	First year advisor position is evaluated, including survey of students and program faculty stakeholders	APSS, coordinating with first-year advisors	Recommendations for revisions to structure and approaches to first year advising made
Spring 2022	Post position and hire two additional first-year advisors	Assistant Provost for Student Success (APSS), in consultation with QEPIT	Diverse team of qualified advisors considered and two more are hired
Spring 2022	QEP assessment data collected and reviewed	APSS with QEPIT, collaborating with Institutional Research	Year 1 QEP report, including recommendations for improvement made
Summer 2022, Student Orientation and Registration	All incoming students receive academic advising from first-year advisor and have academic/career discernment discussions; program faculty provide information and informal opportunities for students to connect with majors of interest	First Year Advisor in collaboration with Admissions and academic programs	New students are registered for courses, have begun to articulate a vision for their time at EMU, and begin to establish relationships with faculty in their major(s) of interest
By Fall 2022	First year advising hub construction/composition completed	Facilities management, in consultation with QEPIT	First year advising hub ready for start of year 2.

QEP Years 2-5			
Yearly	All first-year students receive instruction and advising as described under Year 1	First year advisors	Students supported as described under Year 1
Yearly	Returning students may access advising hub on a drop-in basis for access to university resources; undecided students receive ongoing advising from first-year advisors until they are ready to transition to an academic program	Advising team (first-year advisors and receptionist)	Returning students have a one-stop shop for accessing help when needed; undecided students receive ongoing advising
Yearly	Oversight and professional development provided for first-year advisors	APSS, in collaboration with QEPIT	First year advisors supported as professionals
Yearly	First year advisors meet with program faculty to review and revise four year curriculum plans as needed	Advising team and academic program faculty	Accurate curriculum plans are in place for advising
Yearly	QEP assessment data collected and reviewed	APSS with QEPIT, collaborating with Institutional Research	Yearly QEP reports and recommendations completed, culminating in a 5-year report

4.12 Completion of the QEP

At the end of the 5-year QEP implementation period, we hope to have fully implemented our first year advising initiative and to be able to trace the impacts of first year advising across the full college careers of our first cohort of first-year advisees. Responding to experience, evaluation, and assessment data, we will have adjusted and improved our advising practices where necessary. We will provide recommendations for how wholistic advising may be scaled to serve other populations in our university community, including upper-level students, graduate students, and students in our accelerated degree programs. Moreover, we hope out of our experience to be able to contribute to the literature relating student sense of belongingness and self-efficacy to student success, and also to contribute to the field's understanding of best practices for wholistic, student-centered first year advising.

Any initiative that adds to our knowledge of best practices in supporting students might be considered a success. However, we will consider this QEP an unqualified success if, at the end of the 5-year implementation period, we can demonstrate that first year advising coincided with an increase in student sense of belonging and student success, and that EMU students were equipped to own their college and career plans as they were empowered to navigate through our university community. These benefits will be seen across the student body, particularly for AHANA students, commuters, and first generation students. With this, we should see gains in retention, but that is not the most critical

mission of this initiative. Ultimately, even if the personal journeys of individual students lead them to transfer to other schools or pursue opportunities outside of college before they reach graduation, we want them to feel that they belonged, grew, and were cared for as individuals in the EMU community.

5. Plan to Assess Achievement

We believe that the new first year advising model will increase student sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and student success by providing wholistic, student-centered support and equipping new EMU students to own their college and career plans.



In order to assess the success of our first year advising QEP, we must track progress towards completing the planned intervention in addition to meeting the desired outcomes through the intervention. Our assessment plan includes information collected through ongoing institutional research practices as well as a survey instrument developed for this QEP.

5.1 Outcomes

We are tracking three outcomes for the first year advising initiative:

1. *Student Learning Outcome: Students will report an increased sense of belonging in comparison to earlier cohorts of students and from the beginning of their first year to the end of their first year on campus.*
2. *Student Learning Outcome: Students will exhibit increased self-efficacy towards managing academic, personal, and vocational responsibilities in comparison to earlier cohorts of students and from the beginning of their first year to the end of their first year on campus. Completion of a 4-year career and academic plan will serve as additional evidence of their preparation to manage these responsibilities.*
3. *Student Success Outcome: Students will demonstrate increased college success as measured by earned credits, retention, satisfactory academic progress, and 4-year graduation rate.*

We will track these items across academic subgroups with the goal of seeing improvements across the student body but particularly for AHANA students, commuters, and first generation students.

5.2 Process Outputs

As part of our efforts to monitor the “fidelity” of our interventions, we will track two outputs of first year advising:

1. *Students regularly attend their first year advising sessions* as recorded in the advising log.
2. *Advising handbook contains up-to-date information* about programs and offices and is reviewed annually by stakeholders.

5.3 Assessment Plan

Assessment of the first year advising model *outcomes* will draw upon a combination of administrative data for the student success outcome and student work products + student self-report (via pre- and post-test surveys) for the student learning outcomes. In addition, we will track program *outputs* to monitor fidelity of implementation. Assessment for each outcome and output is discussed in greater detail below. The Assessment Plan ([Appendix J](#)) provides further details about these measures, data collection methods, timelines, and baseline data.

Much of the data required to assess the outcomes above is available through our current institutional assessment processes and planned surveys. We will develop an additional survey instrument including key questions related to belongingness and self-efficacy that can be administered to students at the beginning of their time at EMU and again at their final first year advising session in the spring.

Outcome 1 (Student Learning Outcome) - Students will demonstrate an increased sense of belonging

- Research Question - Do students who received first year advising (FYA) report greater sense of belonging than those who did not? Does their sense of belonging increase over the course of their first year?
- Data Collection Methods - First year advising survey pre- and post- surveys; Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE)(Museus, 2014) belongingness items.

Outcome 2 (Student Learning Outcome) - New students will exhibit increased self- efficacy towards managing academic, personal, and vocational responsibilities

- Research Questions - What percentage of students report an increased sense of self-efficacy? How does this compare to students who entered EMU prior to the FYA intervention? What percentage of students who transitioned to an academic advisor fully completed a 4-year academics and career plan?
- Data Collection Methods - First year advising survey pre- and post- surveys. Student career and academic plans.

Outcome 3 (Student Success Outcome) - Students will demonstrate increased college success

- Research Questions - What % of first-time, full-time cohort (FTFT) students have ≥ 30 SH at the end of their first year (fall+spring+summer)? What % of FTFT students retain the fall semester of 2nd year? What % of FTFT students meet "satisfactory academic progress" at the end of first semester, second semester? What % of FTFT students graduate in 4 years?

- Data Collection Methods - Queries of administrative database (student information system).

Output 1 - Students attend advising sessions

- Monitoring Questions - What percentage of students attended the required number of advising sessions? What percentage of students attended more sessions than required?
- Data Collection Methods - Advising log data (Navigate platform utilized by advisors)

Output 2 - Advising Handbook is up to date

- Monitoring Questions - Have the relevant programs and offices reviewed and approved their handbook sections annually?
- Data Collection Methods - Annual review of handbook.

In order to monitor equity in outcomes and program effectiveness, all results for outcomes #1-3 and output #1 will be disaggregated according to the following student subgroups: (1) Race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Other); (2) Conditional admission status (Yes/No); (3) High school GPA (in bands); (4) Student residence (On-campus/Commuter). These subgroups are identified and constructed based on historic patterns in EMU metrics such as retention and graduation rates and take into consideration group size (in order to avoid identification of students due to small report cell sizes).

Assessment activities will take place within the broader rhythms of EMU's institutional effectiveness processes known on campus as PACE (planning and assessment cycle at EMU). Operating within the PACE framework will ensure the data collection, analysis and reporting take place at regularly scheduled times each academic year. Further, the PACE framework provides a mechanism, through *assessment follow-up planning objectives*, for the First Year Advising QEP Committee to review assessment data and develop action plans for improvement changes. The First Year Advising QEP Committee, as noted in section 4.6, will also prepare and share with campus stakeholders yearly reports on implementation of the new first year advising model.

5.4 Survey Instrument

A custom survey instrument will be assembled, drawing upon externally validated measures of belonging and academic self-efficacy:

- Belongingness measure: Bollen, Kenneth A. and Rick. H. Hoyle. 1990. "Perceived Cohesion: A Conceptual and Empirical Examination." *Social Forces* 69:479-504. And as implemented in Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of education*, 324-345.
 - I see myself as a part of the campus community.
 - I feel that I am a member of the campus community.
 - I feel a sense of belonging to the campus community.
 - *Response scale: eleven-point scale, from "strongly disagree" = 0 to "strongly agree" = 10*
- Belongingness measure (2nd measure): Museus, S. D. (2014). The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model: A new theory of college success among racially diverse student populations. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. New York: Springer.
 - I feel like I am part of the community at this institution.

- I feel like I belong at this institution.
- I feel a strong connection to the community at this institution.
- *Response scale: five-point scale, from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 5*
- Academic self-efficacy measure: developed locally to align with EMU context. Measure was developed and piloted in fall 2020 ahead of QEP implementation in order to establish baseline data and, if needed, allow for revisions to the instrument to strengthen psychometric properties prior to launch of the QEP. The instrument is adapted from two existing, validated measures:
 - Sander, P. & Sanders, L. (2009). Measuring academic behavioural confidence: the ABC scale revisited, *Studies in Higher Education*, 34:1, 19-35, DOI: 10.1080/03075070802457058
 - Zajacova, A., Lynch, S., & Espenshade, T. (2005). Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Academic Success in College. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(6), 677-706. Retrieved July 1, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40197441>

Appendices

- Appendix A: [Strategic Direction Document \(page 6\)](#)
- Appendix B: [Proposal for Undergraduate Academics-Student Life Collaboration](#)
- Appendix C: [Open Space Reports](#)
- Appendix D: [Handbook Questionnaires: Academic Programs, Student Services](#)
- Appendix E: [Advisor Job Description](#)
- Appendix F: [Advising Milestones](#)
- Appendix G: [Targeted Interventions](#)
- Appendix H: [Transitions Course Description and Objectives](#)
- Appendix I: [4-year Career and Academic Plan](#)
- Appendix J: [Assessment Plan](#)
- Appendix K: [References](#)