

Summary Report: UNC HLC Quality Improvement Initiative

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Overview

In 2020, UNC adopted a 10-year strategic plan, [Rowing, Not Drifting 2030](#), that guides and establishes a broad foundation for bringing UNC's vision to life through five vision elements: Students First, Empower Inclusivity, Enhance and Invest, Innovate and Create, and Connect and Celebrate. The plan is being implemented in five two-year phases to ensure an agile process for responding to changing conditions. UNC's Quality Improvement Initiative (QII) was embedded in Phase 2 of Rowing, Not Drifting 2030, with a specific focus on improving undergraduate retention and graduation rates. UNC's QII was implemented over a two-year period beginning in July 2022 and ending in June 2024. The initiative was designed to examine and improve students' academic experience and included the following goals: (1) identify barriers to academic success, (2) improve curricular design and the use of inclusive and high impact pedagogy, and (3) increase students' sense of belonging and connection to their academic major and college. Much of UNC's previous student success efforts focused on out-of-class experiences and student support services. UNC's QII expanded on past efforts by considering the impact of the classroom experience, interactions with the faculty, and connection to the academic discipline as important components of student retention and completion.

UNC was largely successful in accomplishing the goals of the QII, including identifying sustainable strategies and organizational structures necessary for continued progress. Major accomplishments include the following: (1) established student success committees in each of the five colleges and the library; (2) developed, implemented, and funded a new structure for supporting Culturally & Linguistically Diverse/English Language Learner (CLD/ELL) students; (3) completed an evaluation of transfer student services and implemented recommendations for supporting these students; (4) expanded student success data through new dashboards and institutional surveys; (5) funded 13 promising practices projects relevant to the QII goals; and (6) completed formative and summative evaluations to determine the impact of the initiative and areas for ongoing investment.

Scope

Much of the national conversation about student success focuses on extracurricular support, primarily provided by student services professionals. In looking for student success models that explicitly include faculty members, we found few examples. Because the classroom is the common denominator of student experience, UNC developed the QII to test strategies focused on curriculum design, teaching, and student/faculty interactions. UNC's QII also included improving the availability and use of student success data, establishing college committees focused on student success, and shoring up academic support for students UNC had previously identified as benefitting from additional services.

In reviewing UNC's QII activities, **what stands out is how much of the work has already been or is in the process of being institutionalized.** For example, UNC's Office of Global Engagement worked with faculty and staff to develop the CLD/ELL Support Framework, which creates a structure for supporting CLD/ELL students. The framework describes a process for identifying students who may benefit from additional support, establishes referral networks that faculty and staff can use to direct students to the appropriate services, and provides support services from the Intensive English Program (noncollege credit courses) and tutoring centers. Year one of the project focused on developing the framework and creating a

comprehensive CLD/ELL Manual. The manual provides information to tutors about common issues experienced by CLD/ELL students and provides guidance on how to support these students. UNC allocated permanent base funding to support this initiative in the form of scholarships for domestic ELL students enrolled in Intensive English courses. This funding meets a critical need because these courses are not eligible for federal financial aid.

Also, in year one of the project a working group was convened to examine barriers to transfer student success and make recommendations for improving support. Based on recommendations from the working group, UNC created a new Coordinator of Transfer Transition and Success position, housed in Student Academic Success. This position started in the second year of the project. Based on additional data analysis, the coordinator will prioritize providing support to students who are placed on academic probation after their first semester and developing proactive strategies to reduce the number of students on academic probation. In the first year on staff, the transfer coordinator supported 60 transfer students and began working with other campus offices (Admissions, College Advising Centers, New Student Orientation, etc.) to improve coordination and services.

The college student success committees have been largely successful. In two short years, these committees have become focal points for expanding data literacy, developing new tools and resources that support faculty work, increasing college-based student belonging initiatives, and, in some instances, expanding resources through external grants and philanthropy. Because UNC's QII was embedded within the university's strategic plan, these committees align their work to broader institutional priorities including strategic enrollment management and diversity, equity, and inclusion. **UNC intends to maintain these committees** as an integral component of its student success work.

During UNC's two-year QII, the university funded small grants for faculty members to pilot promising practices projects. In year one, UNC funded seven projects, and in year two, UNC funded six. Six grants supported curriculum revisions, including four that focused on improving outcomes in gateway courses, one that created a new field experience course for Geography majors, and one that supported integrating career readiness in humanities and social sciences courses. Two projects expanded faculty professional development related to teaching, three grants focused on strengthening sense of community within the college and/or major, and two piloted peer-mentoring models. Of the thirteen projects, all but one have been completed. Of the completed projects, eleven will continue through permanent curriculum changes, integration into regular operations, and, where applicable, institutional and/or external funding, including an American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)/ Lumina Foundation grant on embedding career readiness into the curriculum.

Finally, expanding the availability and use of student success data was one of the QII goals. UNC's Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness and Office of Business Intelligence and Data Engineering collaboratively developed and expanded UNC's [student success dashboards](#), which are accessible to members of the university community who have login credentials. QII leaders regularly met with the college student success committee chairs to examine available data and share ideas on how to use the data to shape college priorities and initiatives. These meetings will continue. One college's committee, Natural and Health Sciences, developed a [website resource](#) for faculty members that directs them to the data dashboards and provides suggestions for actions they can take to improve student outcomes. UNC also conducted a campus-wide climate study using the Higher Education Research Institute's Diverse Learning Environments Survey, administered the National Survey of Student Engagement, and collected additional data from an internally-designed Student Experience Survey. Results from the latter are disaggregated by degree level and college, providing additional information to inform college student

success efforts. UNC will continue investing in data analytics and data literacy moving forward, for example, by providing faculty workshops on accessing and using institutional data.

Impact

UNC has or is in the process of institutionalizing many of the strategies, curricula, and resources developed through the QII. This initiative provided an opportunity to address longstanding needs, develop new frameworks for supporting students, and investigate promising practices for future investment. For example, through past program reviews and other analyses, the university identified a growing need for supporting domestic CLD/ELL students, yet UNC lacked the infrastructure to expand services. Through the QII, UNC faculty and staff developed a framework for supporting these students, and the university established permanent funding in the form of scholarships to domestic students enrolled in ELL courses. Similarly, prior strategic enrollment planning surfaced a need for improving transfer student support. In year two of the QII, UNC hired a new transfer coordinator, and in his first year, he supported 60 transfer students and completed a needs assessment to shape future transfer student services.

UNC's investments to improve the university's data infrastructure began prior to the launch of the QII; however, the initiative provided opportunities to expand the use of available data, primarily by integrating student success data into the work of the college student success committees. This has resulted in three promising outcomes: (1) increased awareness of available data; (2) increased understanding about how to use data to inform improvement practices; and (3) more data-informed strategies for supporting students. In comparing the annual committee reports between years one and two of the project, it is clear that all of the committees made improvements in their use of data. For example, in year two, the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences provided training to academic unit leaders on using the student success dashboards, and the College of Performing and Visual Arts used data from the campus climate survey to begin developing new strategies for supporting students who must work while attending college.

In many ways, the college student success committees have had the greatest impact. By establishing committees in each college and the library, as opposed to a campus-wide student success committee, those involved were able to tailor their priorities and activities to meet the unique needs of students within each college. This is reflected in the broad range of goals and actions taken across the colleges. This approach helped to keep the faculty engaged because the issues and strategies were viewed as meaningful and relevant to their experiences working with students. Some examples of activities with lasting impact include:

- College of Education and Behavioral Sciences – led a successful campaign to increase the number of faculty members completing early alert student progress reports; expanded resources to improve student outcomes on teacher licensure examinations; and provided training to academic unit leaders on how to use UNC's student success dashboards.
- College of Humanities and Social Sciences – implemented a new co-advising model; received a gift from State Farm to provide scholarships to students completing unpaid internships; hosted an inaugural Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Symposium with nearly 100% faculty/staff participation; and used a promising practices project as the basis for securing an AAC&U/Lumina Foundation grant to support 40 faculty members in incorporating career readiness assignments into courses.

- Monfort College of Business – revised transfer policies to provide more flexibility and access to students interested in business majors; hosted multiple events, including an Innovation Talk and opportunities for students to connect with faculty and alumni; and piloted a mentoring program that matches faculty mentors with first generation students.
- College of Natural and Health Sciences – Created a communication campaign based on new topics of interest to students each week; set quantitative student success benchmarks for reducing DFW rates; and created two web-based toolkits for faculty: the [33 Simple Strategies Project](#) and the [DFW Project](#).
- College of Performing and Visual Arts – created resources for part-time faculty members and graduate teaching assistants assigned to teach high DFW courses; hosted multiple college connection events; began work on revising scholarship requirements to provide more support for working students; and began working on two initiatives to support doctoral students.
- University Libraries – redesigned the libraries’ website to be more user-friendly; expanded collections and resources to better integrate DEI throughout all areas of the libraries (e.g., archives, instruction, open educational resources, user services, etc.); and completed an accessibility study of the physical space in the main library building.

The promising practices grants also produced several lasting changes that will benefit students. Examples include:

- English 123: College Research Paper (year two project) – this project evaluated the impact of three strategies to improve student outcomes: (1) reducing course caps from 25 to 20; (2) comparing outcomes by course modality; and (3) rollout of revised course curriculum. Passing ENG 123, required for all undergraduates, is highly predictive of student retention. The English Department intends to use this model to assess and improve course outcomes in all three courses in the writing composition program, assessing one course each year on a rolling basis.
- Be KiND (year one project) – this project was designed to create connections between students and faculty within a large, multi-disciplinary department, the School of Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Dietetics (KiND). It included social events and a new, proactive strategy for increasing undergraduate engagement in faculty-led research. Results showed high interest among students and identified lack of time as a major barrier to participation. The department intends to continue hosting the social activities and expand opportunities for undergraduate research by integrating it into courses and leveraging existing scholarships to reduce students’ need to work.
- Liberal Arts Curriculum Course Alignment (year two project) – this was a guided curriculum revision project led by UNC’s assessment director, who worked with seven faculty members teaching general education STEM courses to improve alignment between assessments and general education outcomes. Based on feedback from faculty participants, UNC will continue funding a second cohort in academic year 2024-2025 and may support additional cohorts if similar outcomes are achieved with the second cohort.
- Teaching Academy for Gateway Courses (year one project) – this project included a monthly series of faculty-led conversations to improve teaching practices and student outcomes in large enrollment STEM gateway courses. Key components included a focus on a narrow topic of interest, no structured program curriculum or expert leads, and opportunities to share and learn from colleagues in a safe environment. Based on faculty response to this project, UNC decided to continue providing this type of faculty development in 2023-2024, renaming it “Faculty Teaching Conversations.” Topics were suggested by individual faculty, who received a small stipend for facilitating discussions. 2023-2024 topics included (1) active learning in large classes; (2) climate

change across the curriculum; (3) artificial intelligence (AI) in education; and (4) mentoring and teaching graduate students. Faculty Teaching Conversations will continue as part of UNC’s faculty development portfolio moving forward.

Campus Engagement

The development of UNC’s QII was led by a team that included the university’s interim provost, the Dean of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, the Assistant Provost for Academic Effectiveness, and the Assistant Vice President for Student Academic Success. The latter two individuals served as the QII project leaders. The initial design assigned responsibility for oversight to a Graduation and Retention Taskforce (GART), which was co-chaired by the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences Dean and Assistant Vice President for Student Academic Success. The Assistant Provost for Academic Effectiveness, who is also UNC’s HLC Accreditation Liaison Officer, administered the project budget, including the promising practices grants, and the project evaluation. The Assistant Vice President for Student Academic Success worked with Deans to convene the college student success committees and continued to meet regularly with the committee chairs. As the Students First Framework evolved to the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, GART was disbanded. The QII leaders continued to ensure that the project was implemented and provided regular updates to campus leaders.

Several committees and individuals were involved with UNC’s QII at various stages of the initiative. Table 1 provides a brief description.

Table 1: Committees and Individuals

Committee/ Individual	Composition	Role in Project
QII Leaders	Assistant Provost of Academic Effectiveness; Assistant Vice President of Student Academic Success	Develop project proposal; administer project budget; coordinate and facilitate major project activities; communicate with project participants and campus leadership groups; conduct evaluation; write final report for submission to HLC
Academic Affairs Leadership Team (AALT)	Provost; Vice Provost; Associate Provost; Assistant Provost; Deans; Associate Vice President of Research/Graduate School Dean; Assistant Vice President of Student Academic Success; Extended Campus Executive Director; Global Engagement Executive Director; Director Institutional Research & Effectiveness	Receive updates on QII implementation and outcomes; provide guidance on modifications based on formative evaluation Deans – convene and charge College Student Success Committees
College Student Success Committees	Associate Deans of the College of Education & Behavioral Sciences, the College of Humanities & Social Sciences, the Monfort College of Business, the College of Natural & Health Sciences, the College of	Support student success initiatives within each college/libraries; encourage faculty and student input on improving retention and

Committee/ Individual	Composition	Role in Project
	Performing & Visual Arts, and University Libraries; faculty and staff members	graduation rates; identify barriers and recommend improvement activities; participate in QII evaluation
CLD/ELL Working Group	Director of Intensive English Program; Director of Cumbres Program; Associate Dean of College of Education & Behavioral Sciences; Tutoring Coordinator; Director of César Chávez Cultural Center; Extended Campus Student Services & Persistence Specialist; 2 faculty members	Develop recommendations for improving support of CLD/ELL students; create CLD/ELL Support Framework and CLD/ELL Manual
Evaluation Research Center (ERC)	ERC Director/Associate Professor; 3 graduate students	Develop evaluation plan; collect evaluation data via focus groups and individual interviews; provide reports of findings
Graduation and Retention Taskforce (disbanded after year one of project)	College of Education & Behavioral Sciences Dean; Assistant Vice President of Student Academic Success; Tutoring Coordinator; College of Performing & Visual Arts Academic Advisor; Associate Director of Alumni Relations; Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs; Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness; Associate Dean of College of Natural & Health Sciences; Director of Institutional Systems & Architecture; Assistant Director of College of Education & Behavioral Sciences Advising; 2 faculty; 3 undergraduate students; 2 graduate students	Develop RFP for year one promising practices grants; receive updates and reports on project implementation and outcomes; plan Graduation and Retention Summit 2022
Institutional Planning Group (IPG)	Provost; Vice Provost; Assistant Provost; Professional Administrative Staff Council Representative; Director of Athletics; Assistant Vice President of Marketing & Communications; Associate Vice President of Student Affairs; Vice President of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Vice President of Student Affairs & Enrollment Services; Assistant Vice President of Facilities Management; Classified Staff Council Chair; Vice President of Finance & Administration; Faculty Senate Chair; Assistant Vice President of Development; Vice President of University Advancement; Senior Associate Athletic Director; Chief Information Officer; Chief of Staff; 1 faculty	Receive updates on project implementation and outcomes; provide guidance on project modifications based on formative evaluation
Promising Practices Grant Awardees	57 faculty members, 2 Associate Deans, Assessment Director, Director Marcus Garvey Cultural Center, 2 graduate students, 8 staff members, student peer mentors	Develop and implement promising practices projects; provide final reports; participate in QII evaluations

Committee/ Individual	Composition	Role in Project
Strategic Enrollment Management	Associate Vice President of Enrollment Services; Assistant Vice President of Student Academic Success; Assistant Vice President of Marketing and Communications; Associate Vice President of Research & Dean of Graduate School; Associate Dean College of Performing & Visual Arts; Associate Dean College of Humanities & Social Sciences; Director of Admissions; Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness; Dean of Student Development; Director of Enrollment Extended Campus; Chief Information Officer	Receive updates on project implementation and outcomes
Transfer Student Support Working Group	Assistant Vice President of Student Academic Success; Advising & Success Strategist; Student Academic Success Operations Specialist; Assistant Director of Transfer Recruitment; Interim Director Career Readiness Center	Evaluate existing support services for transfer students and develop recommendations for improvement

As can be seen from the table, UNC’s QII had broad involvement and support from university leaders, faculty, and staff. Campus leaders provided constructive feedback and discussed opportunities to use the strategies and results from the QII to inform other activities. Both the AALT and IPG committees provided input that shaped revisions to the year two promising practices grants. The results of interviews and focus groups with grant recipients found common themes related to positive experiences with the QII. These include (1) perceptions that projects were well received and supported by student and faculty participants; (2) excitement about the potential of their projects to positively impact student outcomes; and (3) recognition of the intersection between their projects and UNC’s goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Faculty also appreciated the funding that allowed them to conduct their projects. Grant recipients provided useful feedback that can inform similar initiatives moving forward including concerns about the short duration of the projects, challenges to conducting evaluations of short term projects, and concerns about how to sustain activities without ongoing funding.

People serving on the college student success committees appreciated:

- The data-driven approach to student success;
- Opportunities to implement innovative approaches such as reorganizing advising practices and expanding open educational resources;
- Increased faculty engagement in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, data exploration, and developing strategies to create a sense of belonging; and
- The opportunity to raise awareness about retention issues while also providing tools to contribute to success initiatives.

Some committees also emphasized how their work aligns with college and university priorities and strategic planning. Concerns were expressed about a lack of clarity about goals and outcome measures and a desire for dedicated funds to support committee-led initiatives. UNC has and will continue to use this feedback for future improvements.

QII Evaluation

Supporting student success is a top priority for the university as evidenced by the level of involvement, range of projects and initiatives, and intentions to continue many of the strategies UNC piloted during the QII implementation. Based on evaluation results, UNC has identified promising practices to be continued, developed infrastructure for supporting vulnerable populations, and expanded faculty engagement in student success activities. UNC learned important lessons about what works and what doesn't work.

What works

The college student success committees will be an important component of UNC's student success work moving forward. Through the QII, UNC gained important insights into how to structure and support these committees so they can achieve their purposes. As the QII ends, UNC recognizes that although there is value in providing flexibility for how each committee operates, there is also a need for greater clarity around the purpose of the committees, clearer guidance about college priorities, and more structured support for the committee chairs, especially in the areas of how to find, understand, and use student success data. The QII leaders plan to convene a summit in academic year 2024-25 for the six committees to come together and share successes and challenges and to talk about how they might collaborate and support each other's work. While there is room for improvement, the college student success committees have quickly established themselves as hubs for promoting faculty engagement in student success activities and will be maintained in the future.

Some of the promising practices projects provided models for expanded support of faculty. After year one, UNC used results from one project as a model for creating Faculty Teaching Conversations, which are now part of the university's regular portfolio of faculty development programs. The same project also contributed to the College of Natural and Health Sciences DFW Project (discussed above as a college initiative and resource). Faculty members who participated in the Liberal Arts Curriculum Course Alignment project found the support extremely valuable and recommended that UNC continue offering this program to general education instructors. While they also provided constructive feedback on how UNC might improve future iterations, the results were strong enough that the university has decided to fund a second cohort in academic year 2024-2025.

The number of promising practices grants that led to larger projects was an unexpected positive outcome. This report already described the career-readiness AAC&U/Lumina grant that emerged from the QII. A faculty member who received funding to pilot course-embedded peer mentoring further developed this project as a member of the first cohort of UNC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fellows. A project to provide support for faculty to integrate learning assistants into STEM courses is connected to a larger initiative within the college that has received external funding to continue. Finally, a year one project focused on establishing a peer mentoring program in the College of Performing and Visual Arts will continue. The peer mentor project leads used evaluation results to create stronger infrastructure and re-envision some aspects of the program, which will be supported by college resources moving forward.

What doesn't work

Results of UNC's QII evaluation identified several challenges experienced by those involved in the initiative. For example, UNC learned that simply convening college student success committees without clear guidance and expectations was challenging for some of the colleges. In year one, some committees struggled to understand their purpose, and this jeopardized their ability to retain members. Flexibility on

the issues a college focuses on and the strategies employed is important; however, it is also important to provide guidance about general purposes and goals and a structure for organizing meetings and documenting the committees' work and achievements.

The promising practices grants provided multiple insights with implications for the broader campus. These include the following:

- Schedule conflicts and lack of time are barriers to both student and faculty participation. It is critical when designing programs and interventions that UNC consider opportunities for embedding activities into courses as much as possible. For example, project evaluations emphasized the importance of integrating critical skills building and research opportunities into courses to improve access and participation.
- Students are not interested in attending events promoted as workshops. Evaluations showed that the idea of attending a workshop was viewed as simply adding more work to students who were already feeling overburdened and stressed. Faculty and staff members planning cocurricular and extracurricular activities should consider offering fewer, well-designed events that focus on community building rather than skills development.
- One curriculum redesign project was unsuccessful. Factors that contributed to this outcome included the following: the project focused on a cluster of courses taught by many faculty members, not all of whom were supportive of the redesign activity; and the project relied primarily on a summer workshop without ongoing structural support to assist participants in implementing the course revisions or keeping instructors engaged in the process. UNC used the evaluation of this project to influence the design of the Liberal Arts Curriculum Alignment project, which focused on individual or pairs of faculty members revising a single course through a structured process that included milestone requirements and expert and peer support. This project was successful enough that UNC will fund a second cohort next year.

Financial Commitment

The human resources that supported the initiative are described in Table 1 above. UNC established a budget for the QII that included the following financial resources:

Budget Category	Year One	Year Two	Total
Promising Practices Project Grants	\$27,540	\$35,000	\$62,540
CLD/ELL Support		\$10,000	\$10,000
Retention & Graduation Summit 2022	\$5,000		\$5,000
QII Kickoff Event	\$1,200		\$1,200
Transfer Coordinator Position		\$60,790	\$60,790
Project Evaluation	\$6,000	\$12,000	\$18,000
	\$39,740	\$117,790	\$157,530

Based on the results of the QII, UNC identified the following project components to receive continuing investment: CLD/ELL Support (\$10,000 annually), the Transfer Coordinator position (\$60,780 annually), and the Liberal Arts Curriculum Course Alignment project (\$10,000 fiscal year 2025, with the option of continued funding if warranted). In addition to these investments, several colleges plan to continue allocating funding for ongoing initiatives emerging from the college student success committees (e.g., annual college-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion events; community-building events; scholarship support; peer mentor support; learning assistant pilot, etc.). The HLC QII provided UNC an opportunity to

try new strategies the university may not have otherwise pursued, and UNC is committed to continuing investment in those that produced positive outcomes.

Future Plans

UNC has identified several components of the QII initiative that will continue. Some of these are the natural continuation of curriculum revisions emerging from funded activities (gateway STEM courses, English composition courses, etc.). UNC plans to continue the following activities related to the QII:

- College student success committees – these will continue to be convened by college Deans, chaired by Associate Deans, and supported by the Assistant Vice President for Student Academic Success and the Assistant Provost for Academic Effectiveness.
- Career readiness course integration – supported by the AAC&U/Lumina Grant, UNC will initiate a Career Readiness Faculty Fellows program beginning fall 2024. A [career readiness toolkit](#) developed as part of the QII will continue to be maintained as a resource for all faculty.
- Support for CLD/ELL students – UNC will maintain the resources developed during the QII project and continue to provide scholarship support to domestic students enrolled in ELL courses.
- Transfer student support – UNC will maintain the new transfer coordinator position and continue to develop and improve support services for transfer students.
- Liberal Arts Curriculum Course Alignment project – UNC will fund a second cohort of faculty in academic year 2024-2025 and evaluate outcomes to determine whether future iterations will be offered.
- Faculty Teaching Conversations – UNC will continue to support this low-cost faculty development as long as interest from faculty remains strong.
- College of Performing and Visual Arts peer mentor program – the college intends to continue the peer mentoring program it piloted with a promising practices grant.
- Learning Assistant program – the College of Natural and Health Sciences intends to continue supporting the Learning Assistant pilot for further development and expansion.