

## Narrative

The Adams State University (ASU) Student Support Services (SSS) TRiO program assists students in their cognitive and non-cognitive skill development and offers some financial support to its participants. Students are screened, per federal guidelines, as to whether they fit into one of three categories: Low-income (based on family size and taxable income), whether they are within the first generation of their families to potentially earn a college degree (4 year), and if they have documented disabilities.

Cognitive support comes in the form of tutoring, classes, and workshops offered through SSS and the ASU Summer Scholars program. Non-cognitive support is offered through frequent check-ins throughout the semester, a mentoring program for freshman participants and in other cultural based programming. Financial support is offered through participation and merit based scholarships as well as wages through employment opportunities.

## Mission Critical and Essential

The Adams State University (ASU) Student Support Services (SSS) program is far from essential or mission critical to the existence of this institution. As the Director of the ASU SSS program I humbly make the following assertions:

1. The only “essential” components of a university are teachers and students.
2. “Mission critical” components of this campus are those programs or offices which allow students to learn from their professors as efficiently as possible by supporting a student’s most basic needs. Shelter, food, and basic financial support should be counted among those as truly essential. Everything else should be considered well intentioned, but non-essential.

The ASU SSS program does not fit into those categories and so must be labeled as non-essential and non-mission critical. The ASU SSS program does, however, provide an relatively high return on investment (ROI) from multiple, data supported, perspectives. In addition, because the mission of the TRIO programs and ASU are so closely aligned in who they attempt to serve, the ASU SSS program could be viewed as a living lab that can offer this campus a small sample of “what works” (and doesn’t) template.

## Cost and Benefit Analysis

The total “In-Kind” contribution offered to the United States Department of Education in the Adams State University (ASU) Student Support Services (SSS) grant proposal is listed as \$106,306. Of this amount, approximately \$40,000 or 40% could be categorized as “hard” costs to the university which pays primarily for costs associated with the “Summer Scholars” summer bridge program. These fixed expenses are comprised mostly of salaries and benefits of instructors and food, shelter, and activities for incoming Summer Scholars participants. The remaining 60% of funds is contributed in the form of office space, tech support, and student scholarships. The net vs. gross cost to ASU of these categories is difficult to estimate but for these purposes I will off-the-cuff estimate a 50% cost meaning a net cost to ASU of approximately \$30,000, for an estimated total cost to ASU of \$70,000.

In exchange for these annual “In-kind” contributions (thank you), ASU receives funds currently totaling \$261,385 annually. I take the the fact that these funds and ASU contributions are taxpayer dollars very seriously, and therefore strive to be as efficient as possible in all respects of the operation of this office. A raw calculation would give an ROI of around +375% in monetary terms. However, there is a much greater cost/benefit for ASU if you consider how the funds are used and who the funds help. The ASU SSS program serves students who data shows have the lowest chance to earn a Bachelor’s degree based on their socio-economic/disability status. In addition, the program targets students admitted to ASU with the lowest standardized test scores who face the highest need for remediation to come to the Summer Scholars program and subsequently makes up the majority of the program’s freshman class. The program is intentionally targeting the most vulnerable students at ASU and trying to make a difference through offering various means of support as allowed by federal rules and regulations.

The program tries to maximize the amount of funds going to directly supporting participants by minimizing administrative overhead. This is achieved primarily by hiring only two full time professional which allows for approximately \$130,000 of federal funds to flow to ASU students in the form of employment and grant aid. In addition, the super-majority of indirect funds returned to the program by the university (thank you) goes to funding additional student scholarships which currently is being matched on a 1:1 basis by a State of Colorado grant. This allows for roughly an additional \$17,000 to go to ASU’s poorest students at no cost to the university on an annual basis. This brings the total ROI of the ASU SSS program close to 400%.

## Quality of Outcomes

The ASU SSS program is evaluated by the U.S. Department of Education on an annual basis in four basic ways: The number of students served, 6-year graduation rates, year-to-year persistence rates, and the percentage of participants in academic good standing (2.0 GPA or above).

	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14 (past grant cycle)	ASU*
# Served	175	175	166	n/a
Persistence Rates	85%	85%	76%	53%
Academic Good Standing	88%	83%	86%	?
6-yr Grad Rate	35%	30%	30%	24%

\*From US Dept of Ed- College Scorecard

This data shows to a significant degree that, despite serving the students whose data suggests they be the least likely to succeed, the program participants are outperforming the main campus student body.

### Summer Scholars Data

For the past three academic years the ASU SSS program has been providing incoming ASU freshman with an opportunity to participate in an academically rigorous summer bridge program. Students facing remedial coursework in the area of mathematics is the top prerequisite considered for being selected to participate in the “Summer Scholars” program. The decision to target students who are facing math remediation is based on national, state, and campus data showing extremely low graduation rates among students who are initially placed in developmental math education level courses. During the summer scholars program each student initially takes a proctored “Accuplacer” test. Based on these and other standardized test results (ACT or SAT) students are placed into one of 2 or 3 (depending on availability of instructors) levels of instruction. These classes follow the Math 095, 097, and 099 ASU campus curricula in

an accelerated fashion. Each student sits for approximately 40 hrs of instruction over three weeks. On the final day of class students retake a proctored Accuplacer exam. The results of the final test are the following:

2015 (2 instructors) - Pass rate\* of 50% (10/20) with 2 students testing into college level math.

2016 (3 instructors) - Pass rate\* of 81% (21/26) with 3 students testing into college level math and 7 students moving up 2 classes.

2017 (2 instructors) - Pass rate\* of 69% (18/26) with 6 students testing into college level math and 3 students moving up 2 full classes and 1 moving from 095 to college level math (3 classes).

Again, all of this is being done in just 3 weeks compared to a 16 week semester and each time a student is able to pass\* a class they save themselves over \$1,000 and an entire semester of math which can greatly increase both the retention and graduation rates of these students.

English classes (096, 101, and 102) are also offered during the Summer Scholars program and pass rates are in line with ASU English Departmental data at >80%.

\*Pass rate indicates that a student successfully tested high enough on the second Accuplacer test to be placed in at least one class above that in which they were placed initially.

## Conclusion

While there still remains significant room for improvement, the ASU SSS program is running at near full participation levels and delivering student outcomes that are significantly higher than the general campus despite serving students whose socioeconomic backgrounds deem them less likely to succeed when compared to the general populace. This program is run with high levels of efficiency. I firmly believe and have data to suggest that additional resources directed to the participants of this program in the form of scholarships or other financial supports would provide ASU excellent returns on investment in the form of retention and graduation rates.