

# Boosting Retention:

How a Change in Advising  
Led to Retention Gains  
(and How We Know it was  
Advising)

---

# Presenters

- Reuben Ternes  
Research Associate  
Office of Institutional Research and  
Assessment
- Sara Webb  
Director  
First Year Advising Center



# **First Year Advising**

**Then and Now**

---

# Philosophy of First Year Advising

## **Then:**

- Student-initiated
- Reactive
- Optional
- Unit-specific

## **Now:**

- Proactive, intrusive, holistic
- Mandatory
- In conjunction with campus partners

# Structure

## Then:

- All undergraduates advised in school/college advising units reporting to Dean/Associate Dean
- Advising unit for undecided students reporting to Student Affairs
- No designated advising unit for first-year students

## Now:

- All FTIACs advised in First Year Advising Center (FYAC) reporting to Student Affairs
- Advising from second year to graduation in school/college advising units

# Advising Caseloads

## Then:

- Vary in each advising unit\*
  - 1:1246 (highest)
  - 1:594 (average)
  - 1:192 (lowest)

*\*Ratios include all undergraduate students, including FTIACs*

## Now:

- Caseloads based on position
  - 1:360 (adviser)
  - 1:280 (senior adviser)
  - 1:130 (assistant director)
- Key partnerships with other Student Affairs areas provide additional support

# Frequency of Advising

## **Then:**

- Required orientation advising
- Student-initiated appointments thereafter

## **Now:**

- Three required appointments during first year
  - Summer orientation
  - Fall semester
  - Winter semester
- Accessibility of advisers at student demand

# Advising Locations

## Then:

- Spread throughout campus in various buildings
- Not typically connected to student “hubs”
- May be difficult to find for new students

## Now:

- Advising located in “student service” building
  - Admissions
  - Career Services
  - Center for Multicultural Initiatives
  - Disability Support Services
  - Financial Aid
  - The Tutoring Center
  - Veteran Support Services

# New Student Orientation

## **Then:**

- Advisers did not play a key role in the development of the program
- Advising units provided time to advise students
- No cohesion of advising and orientation outcomes for program

## **Now:**

- Orientation staff report to First Year Advising Center director
- Orientation focused on first year success

# Major/Career Exploration

## Then:

- Assumed student had “decided” since advising done in academic unit
- Incumbent on student to ask for major/career exploration

## Now:

- Embedded exploration in all interactions with adviser
- MBTI/SII available to all students
- Parallel Plans

# Student Transitions

## Then:

- Summer orientation only university-wide support for transition from high school
- Students could opt-in to smaller programs if desired
- No formal process for transition to second year

## Now:

- Focus on transition from high school and navigating first year of college
- Collaboration with advising units to create successful transition to second year
  - Co-sponsored programming
  - Hand-off documents
  - Second Year Experience (SYE)

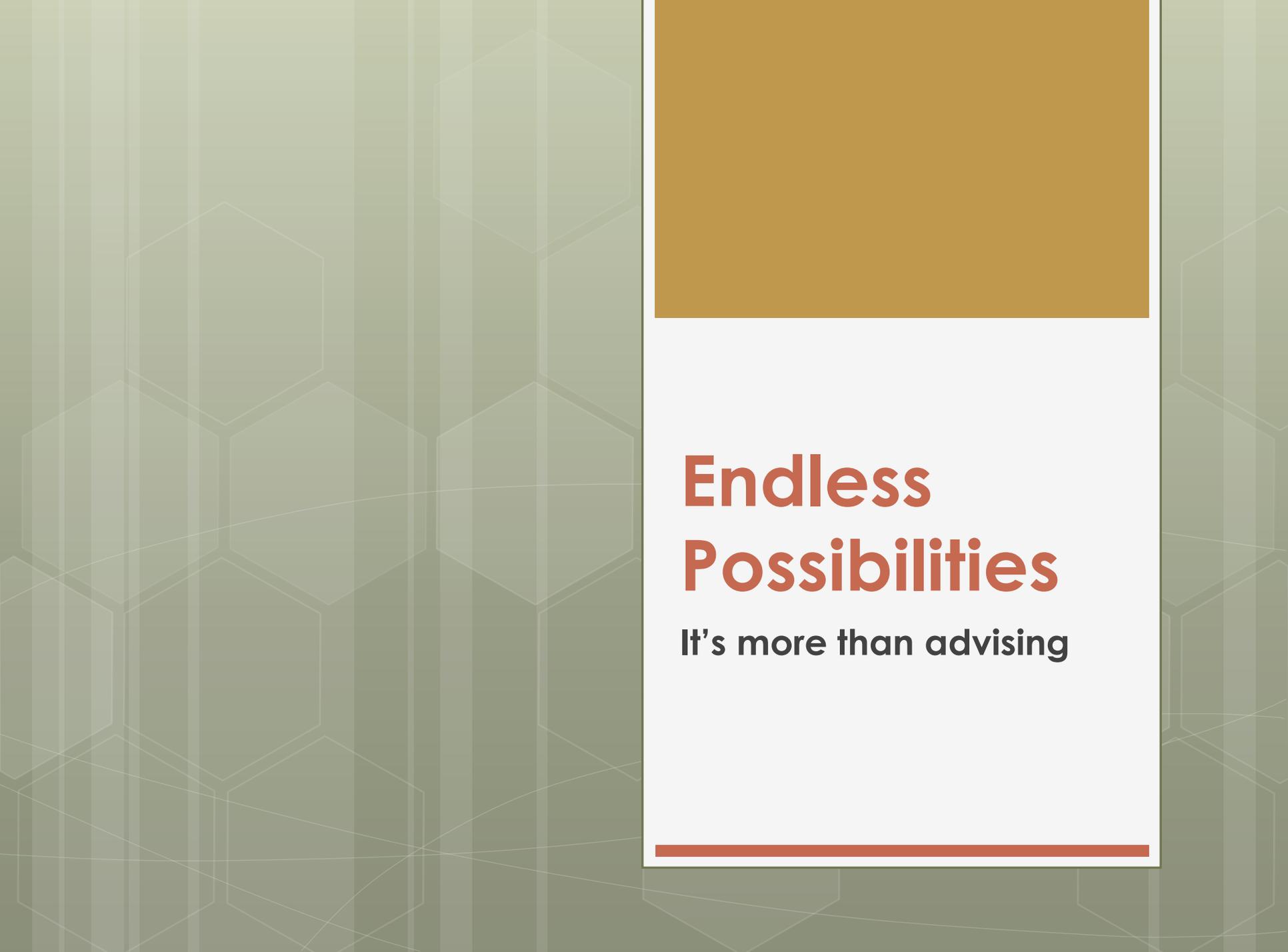
# Communication to Students

## **Then:**

- Communication messages and frequency varied for all FTIACs
- Dependent on advising unit

## **Now:**

- Full-time Communications Coordinator
- Greater incorporation of university-wide expectations and messages
- Robust communication plan includes various mediums



# Endless Possibilities

It's more than advising

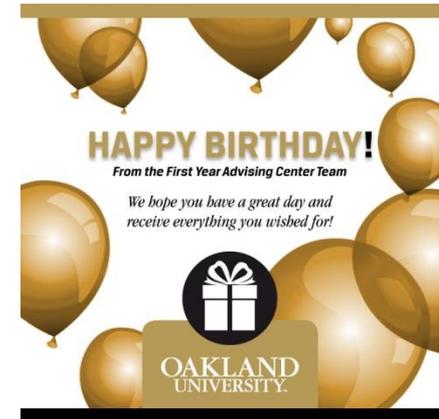
# Personal Connection

- Students are given direct contact information for adviser
- Front desk staffed to personally answer all walk-in, phone and email inquiries
- Most email communications come directly from adviser; video messages too!
- Students regularly receive phone calls from FYAC staff
- FYAC adviser in cafeteria every week



# Paying Attention

- Birthday greeting
- Dean's list congratulatory letter with hand-written note from adviser
- Appointment no show follow-up
- "We haven't seen you" reach-out
- Reach-out to those below full-time status or not registered

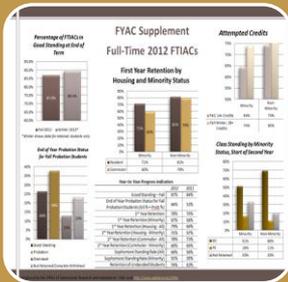


# Support for At-Risk/Struggling Students

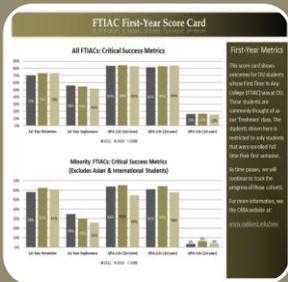
- Conditional admits
  - Required success course, success coaches
- Low ACT/HSGPA
  - Five touch-points in fall semester in collaboration with Housing and Center for Multicultural Initiatives
- Students on academic probation
  - Academic Recovery Workshop, probation tutorial, success coaches



# What Are We Doing with Data?



Created scorecards to display trend data to track progress.



Aggressively displayed minority/majority differences in student outcomes

# What kinds of metrics are we looking at?

- Retention Rates
  - Spliced by: Minority Status, Housing Status, Undecided Status
- Probation Rates
- Success of students formerly on probation
- By Minority Status:
  - GPAs (% getting 2.0, % getting 3.6)
  - Credits Attempted
  - Class Standing (i.e. credits earned)

# What Did We Find?

**Full-Time FTIAC Retention Rates by School & College**

<b>School/College</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Total</b>	70.3%	78.1%
<b>CAS</b>	75.9%	79.5%
<b>SBA</b>	66.4%	75.7%
<b>SEHS</b>	74.3%	85.9%
<b>SECS</b>	70.6%	78.9%
<b>SHS</b>	73.0%	78.7%
<b>SON</b>	63.8%	78.2%
<b>UP</b>	62.3%	74.0%

# Before & After Highlights

- Retention up almost 8%!
- Retention up for every group of students!
  - Up for every school and the college.
  - Minority retention up 9%
- % of Students achieving Sophomore Status up!
- GPAs are up!

# Measuring Impact

- Is the FYAC responsible for the increase in retention rates?
  - We think so, but how can we be sure?
  - Is it responsible for all of the increase?
- Correlation  $\neq$  Causation

# Accounting for Other Explanations

- When examining non-experimental data, like most educational interventions, one of the techniques researchers can use is to show that alternative hypotheses are unlikely.
- By dismissing all plausible alternative explanations, your own hypothesis is strengthened.

# Alternative Explanations

- Regression towards the mean
- Quality of the FTIAC population has improved – causing an increase in retention rates
- Random Chance
- Other University Intervention

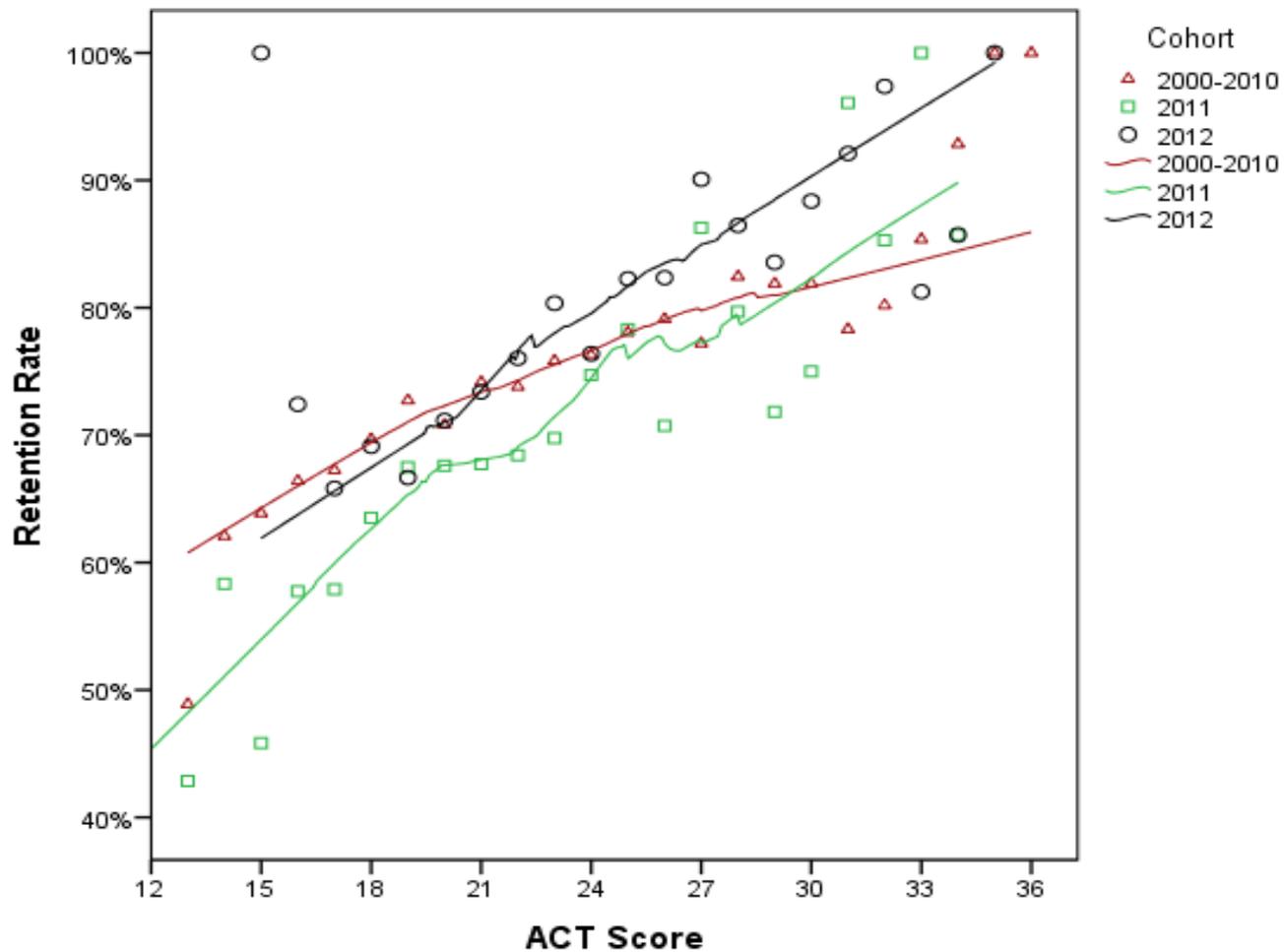
# 2011 vs. 2012

- 2011 was a particularly poor year for retention rates.
- So how much of the gain in 2012 is really just a return to 'normal'
  - i.e. known as 'regression towards the mean' in statistical parlance.
- Answer: Some.

# What About the Quality?

- 2012 had the best FTIAC class in recent history
  - How might this have contributed to improvements in retention rates?
- Answer: Some.
- But even combining the quality of the class, and the return to normal, not all of the increased is explained.

# Retention Rates by ACT Scores



# What About Chance?

- Very unlikely.
- Since 1992, retention rates have never topped 76%.
- Retention rates have also never changed from year to year more than 3.1%.
- The typical change is only 1.2%.
- The change from 2011 to 2012 was 6 times higher than normal.

# What About All Three of These Things in Combination?

- Can the combination of regression towards the mean, incoming FTIAC quality, and random chance explain the increase in retention rates?
- Traditional statistics useful here! (Regression)
- Answer: No! The 2012 cohort lies outside of the 95% confidence of past retention rates, even after controlling for academic preparation.

# Recap

- While it's true that some of the variation in retention rate is explained by the quality of the FTIAC class, a return to normal rates, and chance, there is still a significant amount of unexplained increase.
  - After accounting for all of this, about 3 to 4 percent of the improvement in retention rates is left unexplained.
  - This is OIRA's best estimate of the current impact of the FYAC center on retention rates.

# What About Other University Initiatives?

- Could other university initiatives explain the improvement in retention rates?
  - No one has identified a university initiative that could have impacted so many students so evenly.
    - Improvements in all groups of FTIACs
    - Almost all other university initiatives target small pockets of students.
- We saw improvements only in first year FTIACs, not in second year FTIACs.
  - Only FYAC Students saw an increase in retention.

# Other Improvements

- Retention Improvements:
  - Undecided student retention up 12%
  - Retention for housing students up 13%
  - Retention commuting students up 5%
  - Minority Retention up 9%
- Non Retention Improvements:
  - NSSE satisfaction w/advisers up 16% in one year!
  - Fall probation student end-of-year-success up 12%
  - Sophomore standing percent up 10%
  - Minority Sophomore Standing up 16%
  - Students with good standing up 3%