



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of the activities, accomplishments, and impact of the Quality Initiative (QI) undertaken by Fort Lewis College in fulfillment of the requirements for Open Pathways accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission.

The QI, which implemented three action items related to student success in the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, sought to transform a *loosely coupled* system of course offering and course taking into a *tightly coupled* system as a strategy to improve future freshman cohorts' four-year completion rates.

The three action items' 11 objectives were organized into seven activities in the institution's QI proposal submitted in Fall 2012. All seven of the activities were fully or partially accomplished by Spring 2015:

1. There is increasing acceptance of the importance of four-year curriculum completion by students;
2. Four-year curriculum completion maps have been published in each of the last three *Catalog of Courses*;
3. Four-year instructional plans, initially developed for 2014-2018, have been updated for 2016-2020;
4. The student-friendly u.achieve degree planning and tracking technology has been implemented;
5. A policy framework for degree progression and completion has been approved by faculty and administration and published on the college's policy website;
6. Roles of professional and faculty advisors are being clarified through the Student Success Center Demonstration Project, which is leveraging an insight/action analytics technology called the EAB Student Success Collaborative Platform; and
7. Data needed to monitor the effectiveness of, and support the continuous improvement of, QI activities 1-6 have been specified.

At the conclusion of the project, we can say that a four-year mindset has taken hold in an institution long characterized by a *laissez-faire* attitude toward degree progression and completion. Students are responding to incentives and policies, and department chairs are attending to the four-



Table 1

Relationship of Objectives in Strategic Plan Action Items 1.a.i.-iii. to Quality Initiative Activities

<i>Strategic Plan Action Item Objectives</i>	<i>QI Activity Number</i>	<i>QI Activity Description</i>
n/a	1	Raise awareness of importance of four-year curriculum completion
1.a.iii. objectives - create maps to graduation for each major and make them available to students on the web	2	Develop degree maps
1.a.i. objective - utilize technology more effectively to improve degree tracking for both students and advisors	3	Implement a degree planning and tracking technology
1.a.iii. objective - develop and implement a detailed four-year plan of instruction that includes annual course offerings and faculty teaching and sabbatical schedules 1.a.i. objective - create trigger points to ensure students are monitoring progress towards degree completion and 1.a.ii. objectives - require students to declare major	4	Develop four-year instructional plans



Normalization. One normalization initiative focused on developing an incoming freshman's identity as a member of a graduating class four years hence. This identity was established in recruiting publications, in orientation, in freshman swag, in the unfurling of the class banner at Fall Convocation, in the décor of the Student Union, and in social media.

A 15-credit registration campaign backed up the class identity initiative. Enrollment in 15 credits each semester became established as the norm in academic advising, and if students enrolled in fewer credits, advising messaging emphasized the need to “make up” the credits by taking a heavier load the following semester or by attending summer school.

Leverage Student Financing. Three financing initiatives backed up the 15-credit registration campaign. Beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year, students receiving institutional merit scholarships were required to earn 30 credits during the Fall, Spring, or subsequent Summer semesters in order to have their scholarships renewed.

Additionally, a scholarship incentive was introduced in 2013-2014 for students who joined the Finish in Four! Program. In this program, students developed four-year graduation plans. If they completed all of the courses on their plans each semester with grades sufficient to progress to the next courses on their plans, they received priority registration for the following semester and a \$500 bonus scholarship.

Lastly, the Fort Lewis College Foundation implemented a policy that required students receiving privately funded scholarships to enroll in a minimum of 15 credits each semester.

*Detail on Activity 2 Accomplishments – Develop Degree Maps*

My greatest challenge was figuring out which classes I was going to need to finish my degree on time.”

--Abby L. Jackson, Business Administration–Marketing major, Class of 2011

Maps to graduation tiradua

*Detail on Activity 3 Accomplishments – Implement a Degree Planning and Tracking Technology*

It has definitely been an organizational feat keeping track of what classes I had taken, and what ones I still needed to take.

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*Detail on Activity 4 Accomplishments – Develop Four-Year Instructional Plans*

How can we finish in four years when



*Detail on Activity 5 Accomplishments – Create a Policy Framework to Ensure Timely Degree Progression and Completion*

*Detail on Activity 6 Accomplishments – Clarify Roles and Responsibilities of Faculty and Professional Advisors*

Why have professional advisors assigned to us if they just refer us back to our faculty advisor?

--Comment at a student group meeting, Fall 2012

Without a doubt, advising reform was the most protean activity in the Quality Initiative. The word count for this report prevents a full telling of the zigs and zags, twists and turns, and trial and error that have led to where we are today, which is imminent implementation of a large-scale, multi-year pilot of a new advising system.

There were two game-changers in this activity. The first was the decision that professional advising would be hardwired to specific majors to repair the mistrust that had developed between some faculty and a centralized advising center. By having professional advisors assigned to specific majors, strong relationships could be fostered between the professional advisors, the chairs, and the faculty.

The second game-changer was the EAB Student Success Collaborative Platform. The platform is an insight/action analytics tool that:

- Assesses each student's risk for not completing, based on 10 years' of Fort Lewis College student data;
- Tags students who have missed milestones;
- Assesses each student's skills and their applicability to different

Provide “every day” assistance through drop-in hours and individual appointments. The Student Success Collaborative Platform gives them efficient access to students’ academic records and identifies students who are part of a group of institutional interest.

Teach students how to interpret the maps to graduation and utilize the u.achieve degree planning and tracking technology.

Follow up on early alerts provided by the faculty in their instructional roles.

Identify, via the Student Success Collaborative Platform, opportunities for improved student success and pursue those opportunities with targeted campaigns with measurable outcomes.

Keep records on all student interactions through the Student Success Collaborative Platform’s note-taking function.

The faculty, conceptualized as mentors, provide guidance to students on how to maximize the value of their degrees. Drawing on their disciplinary and professional expertise, faculty members help students identify and evaluate curricular and co-curricular opportunities vis-à-vis students’ post-baccalaureate goals. Mentoring is available throughout the academic year, through faculty office hours and by appointment.

The Student Success Center concept was presented to the majority of academic departments in Spring 2015, resulting in 13 requests to be included in the expanded pilot that will be implemented in Fall 2015. One benefit of this expansion is that a broad group of faculty will begin to consider how to fully realize the role of faculty mentor, what faculty expectations in this role should be, and how to measure effectiveness in that role.

*Detail on Activity 7 Accomplishments – Create New Reporting and Data Collection Systems Related to Institutionalization of Quality Initiative*

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Table 4

Data Collection Systems to Monitor and Continuously Improve Quality Initiative Activities 1-6

QI Activity Number	Activity Description	Metrics of Effectiveness	Data Collection
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## Evaluation of Impact of Initiative

On August 31, 2020, the four-year graduation deadline for the Fall 2016 cohort, we will be able to evaluate the overall impact of the initiative. On September 11, 2017, the Census Date for the Fall 2017 semester, we will be able to evaluate the impact of the initiative on freshman retention. At this time, we can report the following positive indicators of the initiative's impact:

### *Student Intent to Graduate in Four Years*

An institution-specific question on the first-time freshman Map-Works survey asked, "How important is it to you to complete your degree in four years or fewer?" Table 5 summarizes the findings from Fall 2014.

Table 5

Fall 2014 Freshmen Responses to Question About Importance of Four-Year Graduation, Seven-Point Scale (78% response rate)

Response	
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A more objective metric of student monitoring of curriculum completion can be found in the u.achieve usage data. Overall, 29% of students (1,111 students) have at least one u.achieve degree plan created by the student herself and/or a plan created by an advisor. Among students with plans, a third (376, 34%) have plan updates. Table 7 summarizes degree planning and tracking activity by students and advisors in the current academic year.

Table 7  
u.achieve Usage Between Aug. 15, 2014-March 31, 2015  
N=3,850 unique students

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	Initial Degree Plans Created (% of student population)	Degree Plans Updated at Least Once (% of students with plans)
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### Involved Individuals' and Groups' Perceptions of the QI's Worth and Impact

A focus group of nine faculty and staff directly involved in one or more of the Quality Initiative activities was conducted in mid-April to make a “big picture” assessment of the QI's worth and impact. These were the major themes that emerged, illustrated by participant quotes.

#### *Four-Year Mindset*

Through the QI, “we've started to instill -- from students, to faculty, to parents -- the four-year mindset.”

#### *Critical Role of Degree Maps*

“Maps completely dictate how we advise new students. It horrifies me to think what we used to do. Now, we pull up that map and tell the student, ‘this is what the faculty expect.’”

#### *Weak Link of Course Offerings*

The maps highlight the vulnerability of our course supply. “There are some courses on our map that only one professor can teach and if that professor is not there, we've got a real issue.”

#### *The Measure of the Value is the Student Experience*

“If, because of the QI, more students are able to get through in four, and more students are able to do it without roadblocks, that's huge for me.”

### Most Important Points That Have Been Learned

Some of the most important take-aways from the Quality Initiative include:

1. A realization that we can manage student degree completion. Our institution was laissez faire about student progression and outcomes until the late 1990s. Because we had no institutional retention, progression, or completion goals, we assimilated the federal government's “12-credits is full-time” concept. As late as 1998,

Degree planning -- the development of degree plans and assistance with the implementation of those plans through each semester's registration;

Career counseling – the implementation of post-baccalaureate goals through the graduate school application process and the job search;

Grade monitoring and management – assistance in identifying course grade goals to meet academic achievement requirements, habits for monitoring grades, and assistance in developing action plans when grades are not at the target level.

Financial planning and management -- the identification of sources of financing for a student's college career based on an understanding that debt should be taken on judiciously, the development of financial management skills such as budgeting, and assistance in identifying the best loan repayment program for a student's post-baccalaureate circumstances;

Personal counseling – support in self-

Table 10  
 Financial Investments in Quality Initiative

Purpose of Funding	Approximate Amount of One-Time Funding
Temporary job enlargement stipends for two part-time employees to serve as project managers for Activities 1, 2 and 3	\$100,000
u.achieve degree planning and tracking technology for Activity 3	\$175,000

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