

**Request for Applications:  
Evaluation and Assessment of Existing Programs**

With funding from the John M. Belk Endowment and the ECMC Foundation, the UNC System Office has launched a Student Success Innovation Lab (SSIL). The SSIL will make competitive grants to UNC institutions to implement and evaluate initiatives that are designed to improve student success. A hallmark of the SSIL will be a commitment to rigorous, third-party evaluation that can produce high-quality evidence of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of particular student success interventions.

A subset of SSIL grants will enable institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of *existing* initiatives that institutions have had in place for at least one semester. This RFA outlines the process by which institutions can apply to receive in-kind evaluation services from external researchers to conduct a detailed study of a student success initiative that is already in place on their campus. The goal of these awards is to inform institutional and System-level decision-making about “what works” to improve student success.

These evaluation awards will cover the cost of third-party evaluation services delivered during the 2018-19 academic year. These awards will not cover the direct cost of delivering the student success initiative itself. For those institutions interested in funding to implement and evaluate a new initiative (or take an existing initiative to greater scale and evaluate it), see the companion RFP “Implementation and Evaluation Grants.”

The goal of these evaluations is to inform institutional and System-level efforts to improve student success rates so as to achieve the goals outlined in the UNC System Strategic Plan (<http://northcarolina.edu/strategic-planning>).

Grants will cover the cost of a quantitative study of student outcomes conducted by faculty or staff from another UNC System institution that have been selected to serve as Research Affiliates with the SSIL. Research Affiliates will serve as evaluators on SSIL-funded projects and were selected on the basis of their expertise and experience in program evaluation. The System Office will work with institutions that pursue evaluation services to “match” Research Affiliates to proposed evaluation projects based on common interests and other factors. Note that Research Affiliates will not be from the same institution as the student success initiative being studied.

**FOCUS AND SCOPE**

To be eligible for an evaluation award, a postsecondary institution in the UNC System must propose to study the effectiveness of a student success initiative that has been active for at least one semester.

Student success initiatives in the following broad topic areas will be eligible for an evaluation award:

1. *Innovations in teaching and learning*: Projects in this category harness new approaches to instruction to improve student learning and completion in key courses. Examples include: course redesign, integration of adaptive courseware, tutoring and academic support.

2. *Student advising and support services*: Projects in this category will develop and test integrated approaches to keeping students on track to degree completion. Examples include: success coaching, case management approaches to student advising, financial aid counseling and application assistance.
3. *Innovative financial supports*: Projects in this category will aim to reduce financial barriers that may hinder student completion, create incentives for students to accumulate credits and complete a degree in a timely fashion, and/or combine financial aid and other student supports. Examples include: micro-grants/emergency aid, performance-based scholarships, summer grants.

The evaluation grant is designed to enable more independent and rigorous analysis of effectiveness than has been possible in the past with an eye toward continuous improvement.

### **AWARD INFORMATION**

A limited number of student success initiatives will be selected for a fully-funded evaluation through a competitive process. Evaluation of initiatives will be completed during the 2018-19 academic year.

### **GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATION**

Each institution may submit up to two applications focused on one student success initiative in response to this RFA cycle. Applications should be submitted by an institution's Office of the Chancellor or Chief Academic Officer. The attached rubric details how applications will be evaluated.

Applications should be no more than 1000 words and should include the following:

- **Project Description**: Provide a general description of the program or intervention. Based on existing literature, how does the program address or remove barriers to student success? When, how often, and over what time period has the initiative been deployed? If the initiative has changed over time, what modifications have been made?
- **Students Served**: Describe the target population for this program in detail. How many people are in this population at your institution? How many were served or affected by this program? How did students become eligible for the program (e.g.; did students self-select into the program, were they recruited into it, was it first-come, first-served)? If the program has multiple levels of effects (e.g. the program trains faculty that then apply their new skills with students), please describe all levels of potential effects (faculty, staff, students, peers of those in the program, etc).
- **Available Data**: Please list all relevant data sources and data elements about the target group(s) served by the program that are available. What data has the institution collected that can be used to analyze and evaluate effectiveness? Please specify types of data, years for which data are available, and how (or in what form) data are managed and stored. Please include information about the relevant administrative data that may be available through your Institutional Research Office (e.g. GPAs, majors, courses taken) as well as any data that was collected specifically for the purpose of this program (e.g. surveys, tests results, transcribed interviews of participants). Is each data element available for all participants? What is the format and quality of the data?
- **Impact**: For the group(s) targeted by this initiative, what does the institution know thus far about the impact of this initiative on their success?
- **Initiative Leadership and Personnel**: Who leads the initiative in question? Who actually implements the initiative? Please list the personnel involved and their roles.

The attached rubric details how applications will be evaluated.

**Upload your application to:**

[https://northcarolina.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_ewZGPNxcsqTgGyx](https://northcarolina.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ewZGPNxcsqTgGyx).

**TIMELINE**

Applications must be submitted by 5:00 PM on November 5, 2018. Notification of awards will be made no later than December 3, 2018. Evaluation efforts may begin immediately after that notification is made.

**INQUIRIES**

Questions regarding the Student Success Innovation Lab should be addressed to Shun Robertson, Assistant Vice President for Policy Development and Analysis, at [srobertson@northcarolina.edu](mailto:srobertson@northcarolina.edu).

**Evaluation and Assessment of Existing Programs  
Rubric**

CATEGORY	HIGH RATING (2 points)	AVERAGE RATING (1 point)	LOW RATING (0 point)	Weight
<b>Description of Initiative</b>	The proposal provides a clear, concise description of the initiative and includes all relevant information.	The proposal describes the initiative, but is missing some relevant information.	The proposal does not clearly describe the initiative and include all relevant information.	2.5
<b>Data quality and availability</b>	The application lists all relevant data sources and elements and those data sources are comprehensive and high-quality.	The application includes a description of the data sources that are available to evaluate the initiative, but the quality and comprehensiveness of those data sources is somewhat limited and/or unclear.	There is little administrative or project-related data available to evaluate the initiative.	5
<b>Scale</b>	The initiative impacts a large population of students or other members of the university community (faculty and staff).	The initiative focuses on a specific group of students or university community (faculty and staff).	The initiative is limited to a small number of students or individuals.	5
<b>Research design</b>	The proposal presents an opportunity for rigorous evaluation using a quasi-experimental design or a statistical model with a rich set of covariates.	The proposal presents an opportunity for evaluation using primarily descriptive research methods with a limited set of covariates.	It is not clear whether the proposal presents an opportunity for evaluation using rigorous research methods.	5
<b>Program Maturity</b>	The initiative has been active for multiple program cycles.	The initiative is a newly launched program with limited project data.	The initiative is in its early stages of implementation and has no existing data.	2.5
<b>Research contribution</b>	The proposed evaluation represents an opportunity to make a significant contribution to student success research.	The proposed evaluation will contribute some new information to student success research.	The proposed evaluation will make a minor contribution to student success research.	2.5
<b>Existing evidence</b>	The proposal points to promising evidence in support of the initiative and clearly outlines the initiative's expected effect on student success.	The proposal includes some suggestive evidence in support of the initiative and provides a basic description of expected effects.	The proposal includes no existing evidence for the initiative and does not describe an expected effect on student success.	2.5