

## **Counseling, Career/Civic Engagement, and Accessibility Services ~Financial Plan of Action~**

### **Introduction**

This document will include the offices of Counseling, Career/Civic Engagement, and Accessibility Services.

At this time, we carry about 15,000 in our operating budget. This is spread among Counseling, Career, and health promotion events and departments. Accessibility services has a separate budget, which is communicated in the appropriate section of this document. We use this for supplies, continuing education, conference attendance, and training and educational materials. Because we have not always been able to approve funding conference attendance for staff who are actually presenting at conferences, those employees have resorted to using their own money to attend. We will often utilize grants and other funding sources to help fund the health promotion and support of our students. We are diligent about coming in at or below budget each year, and we maximize our resources as best we can.

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### **THE ASU COUNSELING CENTER**

#### **Mission Criticality & Essentiality**

One in ten students will visit their college counseling center each year

(<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/04/07/college-students-flood-counseling-offices/7411333/>). In 2016-17, there were 1,262 clinical sessions provided with a spread of 149 clients. This is about 8.8% of the student body. If we consider that approximately 1,700 students attend face-to-face classes at ASU, this is on par with the national average of 1/10 college students seeking counseling. In addition, we also serve students who are local but attend online classes. The needs of our students have increased exponentially over the years, from 2006 until the present day. From 2006, we can see that our student attendance has almost tripled (See Figure below).

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Sessions Provided</b>
2006 - 07	462
2007 - 08	828
2008 - 09	496
2009 - 10	810
2010 - 11	829
2011 - 12	895
2012 - 13	1042
2013 - 14	1196
2014 - 15	1013
2015 - 16	1308
2016 - 17	1262

Counseling services are critical because we are assisting students face some of the most difficult challenges of their worlds, at a developmentally transitional time. A therapist provides nonjudgmental and compassionate support and facilitation. This may be an avenue a student has in no other aspect of their life. We contribute to retention by working with students to create their best selves while here, and finding ways for them to invest in their campus and surrounding community.

The community mental health resources in the SLV are scant. The most well-utilized agency would be the San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group (SLVBHG). Not only does the agency have a long wait list for counseling and medication management, they are located a few miles away from campus. This could preclude a student from being able to attend sessions, if personal transportation is unavailable. In addition, a fee or co-pay is usually expected which could be a hardship for ASU students.

#### **ASU 2020: Goal 2:**

*Initiative 2.4: Provide all students practical and hands-on experience supporting their learning and professional development.*

- Counseling Services supports the growth and professional development of graduate students by providing practical and experiential internships for students in the Counselor Education program.
- Everything we do with counseling clients is with the underlying goal of their academic and collegiate success. This also includes targeted methods such as focus on test-taking anxiety relief, anxiety relief, and practical skills in discussing difficult topics with instructors.

*Initiative 2.5: Promote and increase early student engagement as a means to graduate students with a strong sense of connection to Adams State University.*

- Counseling Services participates in New Student Orientation, and creates a high level of visibility from their entrance into the campus setting.
- We hold workshops in AAA classes, first year courses in different majors, CAMP orientation week, SSS orientation, and Gear Up/ Colorado Challenge Orientation to encourage students to start thinking about maintaining their emotional fitness and well-being.

*Initiative 2.6: Identify and systematically remove obstacles to student success.*

- We utilize mental health counseling to assist students in making decisions that enhance their success, however they define that. Finding these fits (scholastic, athletic, relational) increase student success and retention of students.
- We assist students in finding resources to get their basic needs met (food, housing, etc), in addition to helping them build skills to cope with difficult situations in their past and present.

*ASU 2020 Goal 3: Personal and Professional Development Adams State University will provide educational and professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.*

- Counseling Services provides workshops to faculty and staff and students (safeTALK, ASIST, SafeZone, Threat Assessment).
- The intern and practicum students who serve as staff to the Counseling Center are able to attend unique and tailored workshops throughout their tenure

*ASU 2020 Goal 5:*

*Initiative 5.3: Partner with community and business groups to foster strong unifying campus connections, and build understanding of the larger San Luis Valley.*

- Much of our work is carried out with partnerships from SLVBHG, SLV Health, the SLV Food Bank, La Puente, and others.

### **Cost & Benefit**

We employ up to 4 graduate assistants (counseling interns) at a time. These graduate students are in the ASU Counselor Education MA program. Thus, we also provide a unique training opportunity for these ASU graduate students. We hire these students every year, and every semester. Thus, we put a large effort into their training in a short period of time. They are paid 2,500/semester and a tuition waiver for 1/2 of in-state tuition up to 12 hours. The waiver depends on the amount of hours they are taking. Thus, 4 GAs cost about \$20,000 each year. Their pay does not come out of our budget, so it is not our money to make decisions about. We could have the option of not offering unpaid internships, or reducing the stipend to \$1,500/semester (or lower). While I believe an unpaid counselor position reduces our competitiveness and possibly the caliber of counselor, there are other sites in the valley who offer unpaid internships. I could also take away one of the interns, resulting in 3 counselors-in-training; although this gives us less ability to see students immediately, without resorting to a wait list, it is something that we could manage. We are certainly willing to consider this possibility, however with the need for counseling services rising, it does not seem prudent to reduce our staff or resources.

Please also note that we have not increased our staff size even with our mounting demand for services. We have been able to sustain the high quality and accessibility of our services even as numbers have increased substantially. This has led us to utilize a waitlist at certain times, however. This has occurred twice in the last 2.5 years. When this occurs, our staff must assess the emergent need of each referral.

We employ 3 work study students, and a PT administrative assistant who works 9-12:45 each day. The work study employees manage our reception area during afternoon hours.

We do not bring in any notable income for the institution. Student counseling is “free” for them, because it is included in the student fees they pay. While we do charge a fee for participants to attend our Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) workshops, we generally place that money back into a club account, which is used to fund the purchase of materials for ASIST, as well as other ASIST training needs (food, etc). Therefore, that account is self-sustaining and we try to continue a steady increase of savings within this. The participant training materials necessary to facilitate ASIST are quite expensive.

There are several other informative areas of note around consent, alcohol and drug use, and sexual behavior. Again, all of these areas of health promotion are ones that the ASU Counseling Center address through both counseling (group, individual, and couples) and prevention/awareness campus events. Some of the trainings and health promotion efforts provided by the ASU Counseling Center are listed below:

- Suicide Intervention (ASIST and safeTALK)
- Safe Zone (LGBTQ+ and ally training)
- Safe Spring Break activities
- Harm Reduction substance abuse prevention
- Disordered eating and eating disorder prevention
- Wellness and stress relief
- Animal-assisted activities (Paws and Relax)
- Consent and sexual assault prevention
- Healthy relationships
- Acudetox (auricular acupuncture)
- Emotional Freedom Techniques (tapping)

We offer other workshops as needs emerge within the campus and surrounding community.

### **Quality of Outcomes**

As mentioned above, needs of our students have increased exponentially over the years, from 2006 until the present day. From 2006-2017, our student attendance has almost tripled.

We collect data in several ways. The ASU Counseling Center utilizes a confidential database to track clients. This database, in addition to monthly statistics sheets completed by each therapist, comprise the information used to create group data and run reports. To assess our effectiveness, the ASU Counseling Center utilizes the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) and Session Rating Scale (SRS). The former is a scaling tool completed by the client, which assess their satisfaction in four categories of their life: individual, interpersonal, social, and overall. This is paired with the SRS, which measures the relationship between client and therapist. Research has shown that the SRS and ORS have a direct relationship. The higher the SRS scores, the higher SRS scores tend to be. This assists each therapist with being able to chart progress of their client and build on relational aspects necessary for success. After each semester, we survey all clients to assess their satisfaction. While our response rate is never very high (only about 10% response rate), scores have consistency been very positive, indicating high satisfaction with our services.

We have also just begun tracking student clients’ retention. While we do not have substantial data on this currently, we hope to have this by May 2018.

The National College Health Assessment (NCHA) was distributed to all on-campus students in the Fall 2017. There were 155 respondents, and we were able to gain information about various areas of student health. I will highlight some of the key statistics, which shall demonstrate the high need for counseling services on campus.

In this survey, 60% students endorsed that they had received a diagnosis in the last year. Of these diagnoses, 6.5% were for ADHD, 8.7% were for Learning Disabilities, and 10.5% were for psychiatric conditions. These were the highest percentages of diagnoses, and all issues we address within the counseling setting. When asked what factors impact their academic achievement in the last year, 28.9% students endorsed Anxiety, 19.5% endorsed Depression, 31.4% endorsed Sleep Difficulties, and 37.3% endorsed Stress. These 4/5 top rated

reasons are all areas that can be addressed through psychoeducational and therapeutic counseling at the ASU Counseling Center. It is also indicative of the needs are students have, and how this relates to their academic confidence, and most possibly, retention.

## **Conclusion**

Our ASU mission is to “educate, serve, and inspire our diverse populations in the pursuit of their lifelong dreams and ambitions.” Our office and the services we provide for our students is integral to the mission of the university. Not only are we advocating for our students, we are inviting them to advocate for themselves and invest in the happiness and generativity that they define for their college career and long after. We have been intentional and committed to a robust celebration of diversity and inclusion in our office, and through our presence on campus. We have the enormous and awesome responsibility of being both a highly visible department on campus, while also maintaining a superlative degree of confidentiality and safety for our students. It is one we take great pride in, and hope to continue in providing excellent dedication to our campus constituents.

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## **THE ASU CAREER & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER**

### **Mission Criticality & Essentiality**

In the **Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) 2016 Freshman Survey**, incoming students ranked their most important reasons for coming to college. The top reason, with 84.8% of students ranking it as Very Important was, “To be able to get a better job”. (see table, page 50). The top two reasons that students ranked for choosing to attend a specific college were “The college has a very good academic reputation “ at 64.6%, and “This college graduate’s get good jobs” at 54.9%. (see table, page 52)

While academic rigor and specific skill training is important; gaining practical experiences, being able to recognize transferable skills, and being able to market oneself are also necessary when preparing to enter the workforce.

Findings of **NACE’s Job Outlook 2018** survey indicate that employers are increasingly looking to hire students with Internship and Industry experience. While past surveys consistently found the student’s major to be the deciding factor between two otherwise equally qualified candidates, this year the most influential factors are whether the candidate completed an internship with the hiring organization and whether the candidate has internship experience within the hiring organization’s industry.

Additionally, general work experience and no work experience are found to be more of a deciding factor than a candidate’s high GPA (3.0 or above), involvement in extracurricular activities, school attended, and volunteer work. The only other attribute that held its ground with the addition of the new attributes is leadership. It continues to follow immediately after the student’s major in terms of influence (see table below).

ATTRIBUTE	2018 AVERAGE INFLUENCE RATING*	2017 AVERAGE INFLUENCE RATING*	2016 AVERAGE INFLUENCE RATING*
Has completed an internship with your organization	4.6	N/A	N/A
Has internship experience in your industry	4.4	N/A	N/A
Major	3.8	4.0	4.0
Has held a leadership position	3.7	3.9	3.9

Has general work experience	3.7	N/A	N/A
Has no work experience	3.4	N/A	N/A
High GPA (3.0 or above)	3.4	3.6	3.5
Has been involved in extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, student government, etc.)	3.3	3.6	3.6
School attended	2.8	2.9	2.9
Has done volunteer work	2.7	2.6	2.8
Is fluent in a foreign language	2.2	2.1	2.2
Has studied abroad	2.2	2.0	2.0

Source: *Job Outlook 2018*, National Association of Colleges and Employers. \*5-point scale where 1=No influence at all; 2=Not much influence; 3=Somewhat of an influence; 4=Very much influence; 5=Extreme influence.

The Civic Engagement & Career Services program is an essential piece of the puzzle when preparing students for next steps after graduation. We assist students in planning their career early on so that they are able to take advantage of internships, practicums, research, and volunteering experiences. We hold workshops and individual student meetings to teach students how to assess their experiences, recognize and develop transferable skills, and highlight these skills in resumes, cover letters, graduate school applications, and interviews.

When we compare our student employment rates upon graduation to the national average, we fall significantly behind. We are making progress, but need to continue to increase our connections with employers and internship sites to best support our students.

***National First Destination Survey results:***

	<b><i>National 2016</i></b>	<b><i>ASU 2016</i></b>	<b><i>National 2015</i></b>	<b><i>ASU 2015</i></b>	<b><i>National 2014</i></b>	<b><i>ASU 2014</i></b>
<b><i>Employed</i></b>	<b><i>63.5%</i></b>	<b><i>—</i></b>	<b><i>64.6%</i></b>	<b><i>36%</i></b>	<b><i>62.0%</i></b>	<b><i>28%</i></b>
<b><i>Continuing Education</i></b>	<b><i>17.5%</i></b>	<b><i>—</i></b>	<b><i>17.7%</i></b>	<b><i>25%</i></b>	<b><i>16.4%</i></b>	<b><i>35%</i></b>
<b><i>Still seeking</i></b>	<b><i>16.1%</i></b>	<b><i>—</i></b>	<b><i>14.3%</i></b>	<b><i>39%</i></b>	<b><i>17.5%</i></b>	<b><i>39%</i></b>

***ASU 2020: Goal 2:***

***Initiative 2.3: Enhance student advising to ensure it is accurate, timely, and supportive of the attainment of student goals.***

- Career and Advising services have been working directly together to support students who are undecided or are thinking about changing their major. We work together to make sure students have the classes they need and choose majors, minors, and electives that will help them to reach their career goals.
- We have tough conversations with students who are not successful in their current courses, talking about realistic expectations for career options and helping students to explore new possibilities when their current trajectory is not working.

***Initiative 2.4: Provide all students practical and hands-on experience supporting their learning and professional development.***

- Civic Engagement & Career services work to match students up with internships, ongoing volunteering & service learning experiences, and different research opportunities. We post deadlines on facebook and the campus announcement page, go into classrooms to discuss the importance of internships, host

workshops on how to look for and apply to internships & Research fellowships, and forward any new openings to professors in each department to help spread the word about experiences.

- We have worked with faculty individually to assist with planning service learning projects; sharing best practices around learning outcomes and student reflection, creating reciprocity with community partners, as well as assisting with grading rubrics, etc.

*Initiative 2.5: Promote and increase early student engagement as a means to graduate students with a strong sense of connection to Adams State University.*

- Career Services participates in New Student Orientation, and this year facilitated a major decision making session for all incoming undecided students in attendance.
- We hold workshops in AAA classes, first year courses in different majors, CAMP orientation week, SSS orientation, and Gear Up/ Colorado Challenge Orientation to encourage students to start thinking about career planning and purposefully gaining experiences that increase career readiness- specifically becoming involved leaders on campus and gaining practical experience in their field early in their academic careers.

*Initiative 2.6: Identify and systematically remove obstacles to student success.*

- We utilize values, skills, personality, and interests assessments as well as personal counseling/coaching to assist students in choosing a major that matches their interests and abilities. Finding these fits increase student success and retention of undecided students.
- We highlight internship and summer research experiences that are paid and provide housing & travel whenever possible, specifically keeping in mind the needs of our student population.
- With the help of advising services, we are able to talk with students whose major does not fit with their abilities- catching them as early as possible and coaching them toward areas where they can persist and have success.

*ASU 2020 Goal 3: Personal and Professional Development Adams State University will provide educational and professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.*

- All Career Related workshops are open to staff
- The new Civic Engagement position is focusing on developing Service Learning workshops for faculty who want to develop new projects/ coursework- focused on moving service projects to true service learning experiences.

*ASU 2020 Goal 5:*

*Initiative 5.3: Partner with community and business groups to foster strong unifying campus connections, and build understanding of the larger San Luis Valley.*

*Initiative 5.5: Draw upon the natural resources and extensive outdoor recreation options of the San Luis Valley to provide experiential learning opportunities for campus, community, and regional visitors.*

- Civic Engagement program is working to create a clearinghouse of community partners. We will share this with faculty and staff to assist in make connections for service learning experiences, internship opportunities in the San Luis Valley, and finding new ways to partner with businesses, organizations, etc. in the creation of place based learning experiences.
- Career Services has been hosting workshops within the community- reaching youth programs and schools to initiate conversations around career planning as well as college and career readiness.

### **Cost & Benefit**

Most of our funding currently comes from the Title V Conexiones grant. Through them, we pay for the following:

Grizzly Career Job board: (\$1,738.00) GradLeaders, Inc. provides us with our online job and internship board for undergraduate students. Students can upload resumes, access career support information, and search available internship and job opportunities. Anyone with an Adams email can also access this program.

Vault.com membership (\$1,050): Vault.com provides in-depth intelligence on what it's really like to work within an industry, company, or profession-and how to position yourself to launch and build the career you want. ASU students entering the workforce and professionals considering a job or career change can research background information about companies, schools, internships, and industries. They can search



for current job openings, and they can find essential advice on resumes, interviews, networking, and more to help them launch or build their careers.

Adams.mymajors.com subscription (\$6,750): Townsend Communications Hosts our subscription for MyMajors.com. MyMajors is a major exploration software that assesses a student's interests, skills, and abilities and recommends their top ten majors here at Adams State. It is an Adams State Specific subscription that can be utilized by Career Services in work with undecided students, as well as students who have chosen a major that is not a good fit for their skills and abilities. It is also used by Admissions counselors when recruiting students and assisting them in signing up for their first semester of classes.

SkillsOne Membership: Annual License REnewal: Annual License Agreement Renewal (\$195)  
SkillsOne.com is CPP's online assessment system. It gives the administrator the ability to purchase, generate, print, and organize, student reports. The assessments that have been purchased in the past have been MBTI (16.95 per assessment) and Strong Interest Inventory (\$9.95 per assessment)

We utilize one work study student. The budget of \$5,000 from the general fund is used for large scale events- Career Fair, Etiquette Dinner, Job Fair, etc. We also use this budget from printing, office materials, marketing materials, transportation for students to job fairs hosted in other areas, etc. We hope to use some of this money for civic engagement related programming in the upcoming year- with possible speakers and marketing to increase civic awareness, community involvement and civic action; within Adams State, the San Luis Valley, and State and at national levels.

We do charge employers \$40 for a table at the Career Fair and \$100 for a table at the etiquette dinner, which goes into our funds. This amount does cover the majority of the expense for both of these events. We do not currently charge recruiters who attend the fall Local Job Fair.

### **Quality of Outcomes**

We continue to provide quality resources, even with the drop in the number of professional staff members working in the Career Services Area. Despite the increase in Career Services usage (see below), the number of staff supporting the program has actually decreased to one full time and one half time professional staff member. We also have the additional responsibility of building a new Civic Engagement program from the ground up. In the last few years, there has been a fluctuation in usage due to multiple changes in staff, but overall our services are being utilized more often and earlier in students' academic careers. We are on track to more than double the workshops offered to campus, having hosted between 30-60 in the last 5 years. This year, we held 49 workshops in the first semester alone. (see chart below)

<b>Civic Engagement &amp; Career Services Usage</b>						
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Student Intakes</b>	<b>Total individual student career advising sessions</b>	<b>Resume/cover letter reviews</b>	<b>Career Assessments</b>	<b>Job/internship search</b>	<b>Classroom/campus workshops</b>
2006-2007	83	--	137	119	--	43
2007-2008	30	--	63	33	--	4
2008-2009	24	--	42	43	33	--
2009-2010	28	--	45	54	25	--
2010-2011	38	--	72	95	23	--
2011-2012	199	257	84	169	62	98
2012-2013	311	400	101	147	41	59
2013-2014	161	239	64	106	15	34

2014-2015	142	169	61	68	9	48	Total student contacts made (including workshop attendance-some overlap)	Additional notes:
2015-2016	163			99		48	1,459	
2016-2017	215	270	79	100	29	38	1,264	Career Services position was unfilled for most of Fall semester
Fall 2017 to date		134	48	18	28	49	1,046	This count is only Adams State Students reached. Outside/ Community workshop attendance has not been added do this total.

We have been working to create relationships with new employers and recruiters- for full time employment, as well as paid and unpaid internship offerings. We have completed a document highlighting the procedure for the creation of new internships on campus. Once approved by faculty (chairs of each department) it will go live on our website and we will market it to local, regional, and state organizations in the hops of increasing student internship participation. According recent NSSE reports, the number of Adams State students who completed internships, co-ps, field experience, student teaching or clinical placement has increased from 47% of students in 2014 -falling below Rocky Mountain and National averages, to 51% in 2016- just above the aforementioned averages. We are steadily increasing these offerings as well as student awareness of them.

### **Conclusion**

Career Services has begun to offer workshops to schools in the community in the hopes of increase career interest and readiness in students. We hosted career exploration sessions for middle school students from Del Norte, Centauri, Sanford, and Alamosa. This is a great way to get students to start thinking about and preparing for college during their upcoming high school years, as well as a good way to outreach/ market the majors and resources that Adams State University has to offer. We have started to increase online resources, adding sections if for our diverse population of students. We will be utilizing our Vault subscription in new ways, highlighting career exploration videos and blogs on our website once the new system is up and running. We will also be linking to internships by major, and working to offer video career exploration resources.

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## **THE ASU ACCESSIBILITY CENTER**

### **Mission Criticality & Essentiality**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, nearly 1 in 5 Americans have been diagnosed with a disability.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2013 it was estimated that students with disabilities accounted for 13-percent of the nation's students in K-12 settings. Because of the inconsistent nature of self-reporting, it is difficult to ascertain the true enrollment ratio of students with disabilities. However, in 2010, the NCES had determined that about 3.5-percent of all students enrolled in undergraduate courses had received services through their campus's disability/accessibility services offices. Furthermore, the NCES in 2013 also asserted that there was evidence that an increasing number of students with disabilities are entering college, and that more undergraduate students with disabilities are accessing accommodations via the disability/accessibility offices on campus.

These statistics are relevant because they emphasize the prominence of this minority population, as well as a University's responsibility to be inclusive and to address the needs of this population. In fact, the federal government—through the mandates of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and through Title II of the



Americans with Disabilities Act—requires that all publically funded universities, community college and vocational schools make their programs accessible to students with disabilities.

The Office of Accessibility Services plays an integral role in helping Adams State meet the federal mandates. Through this office, students with disabilities have a resource to turn to, not only for requesting and receiving accommodations, but also for problem-solving and trouble-shooting various complications as they arise. The OAS also provides an outlet for students with disabilities to communicate their challenges and successes, and for the OAS Coordinator to refer and connect students to appropriate resources on and off campus.

ASU 2020, Goal 2:

*Strategic Initiative 2.1: Provide flexible avenues and entry points from which to be engaged in and to progress toward their educational, personal, and career goals.*

--One of the main purposes of the OAS's existence is to provide an entry point for students with disabilities to engage in and to be engaged by in order to receive proper access to their academic pursuits.

--The number of students accessing the OAS as an entry point has maintained a constant over the past seven semesters—even increasing to its highest level during the Fall 2017 semester—even while overall student enrollment has decreased.

--Satisfaction surveys completed by OAS students at the end of each semester has shown that the services provided by the OAS are effective and address the concerns/needs of OAS students. Of the 11 students who responded to the survey, ten stated that the OAS was “Extremely Helpful” and one stated that the OAS was “Moderately Helpful.” No respondents stated that the OAS was “Not at all helpful.” Such results suggest that the OAS is providing flexible avenues and entry points for students to pursue their academic goals.

*Strategic Initiative 2.5: Promote and increase early student engagement as a means to graduate students with a strong sense of connection to ASU.*

--The OAS provides an outlet for students with disabilities to express their needs, goals, frustrations and successes as they relate to their disabilities. The OAS provides a resource that helps these students recognize that they are not alone in their academic pursuits and have a resource to help them connect with other departments of the University.

--Because of the nature of providing accommodations, the OAS often works as an opportunity for students to have meaningful, impactful conversations with their professors. Professors and students come away from such conversations with a better understanding of where the other is coming from, why certain accommodations are requested and why the professor may have concerns about those accommodations. Such conversations can and do increase the connection and understanding between students and staff.

*Strategic Initiative 2.6: Identify and systematically remove obstacles to student success.*

--The crux of the OAS's existence is to identify and systematically remove obstacles to student success, specifically for students with disabilities. The office does this by providing classroom and course accommodations for students, providing trainings and consultations to staff and faculty re: ADA law and the accommodation process, and by being available to communicate student concerns for building and infrastructure accommodations.

ASU 2020, Goal 4:

*Strategic Initiative 4.1: Develop strategies and incentives to improve persistence and completion.*

--Because classroom and course accommodations for students are not always cure-alls in and of themselves, the OAS works with students to problem-solve and trouble-shoot the various challenges that can arise during their time at ASU. Problem-solving and trouble-shooting strategies help the student learn self-advocacy, self-reliance and to be creative and preemptive when dealing with obstacles. Such activities can only help to improve persistence and completion.

--To reiterate, the presence of the OAS helps to ensure that students with disabilities are aware that they do not have to confront challenges on their own. They have a resource on campus that will hear their stories and help them to find ways to overcome those challenges. The presence of the OAS cannot help but improve student persistence and completion.

### **Cost & Benefit**

The operating budget for the OAS for the Fall '17/Spring '18 academic year is \$80,000. Admittedly this is a substantial cost to the institution, particularly as it is derived from the general fund. But approval of said budget was made with input from the Director of Counseling/Career/Accessibility, Vice-President of Student Services, the Chief Financial Officer and ASU's attorney. The budget was deemed legally necessary by all involved and is an unavoidable cost at this point in time. Most of the \$80,000 has been allocated to pay for out-of-town, on-site ASL interpreters who must travel to Alamosa to provide their services. Finding local ASL interpreters would provide for significant financial relief for the institution and for the OAS, and has long been a goal for the Office. The search for local ASL interpreters will not cease. With that said, the aforementioned contribution to student retention that the office provides perhaps more than makes up for the cost of maintaining and providing services through the OAS. A more thorough and detailed assessment would have to be completed to determine.

### **Quality of Outcomes**

Since the Fall 2014 semester, the OAS has served, consistently, between 60-83 on-campus, undergraduate students each fall and spring semester, and between 17-20 for each summer semester. The Fall 2017 semester had the highest number of on-campus, undergraduate students receiving accommodations with 83. Because the number of students seeking services through OAS has remained constant (and perhaps is increasing), these numbers would seem to confirm the NCE's supposition that an increasing number of students with disabilities are enrolling in college, and/or that an increasing number of undergraduate students with disabilities are choosing to access their accommodation rights. In fact, with the fall undergraduate student enrollment for ASU being 1,572, the OAS serves 5-percent of the institution's population, meaning it serves a higher percentage of its students than the majority of other disability/accessibility departments throughout the nation.

The percentage of students receiving accommodations through the OAS is still less than 20-percent, which is the percentage of the general population diagnosed with a disability. And it is still less than the 13-percent of students identified with disabilities in the K-12 setting. Therefore, it seems plausible that, even with the relatively high number of students with disabilities it does service, ASU is still under-serving its population of students with disabilities, and the OAS would/will play a fundamental role in continuing to ensure all of ASU's students with disabilities have access to the education they are pursuing.

Of the 26 freshman students served by the OAS for the Fall 2016 semester, 21 had enrolled for classes at ASU during the Fall 2017 semester. That's an 84-percent retention rate, which, although only correlative, is higher than ASU's freshman retention rate in general, and which would seem to lend some credence to Rigler's and Lichiello's assertions (see below) that accessibility/disability services are a significant factor in student retention.

### **Conclusion**

According to studies by Michelle Rigler at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and Paula Lichiello at Lynchburg College, the services provided by an institution's disability/accessibility office have a tangible, significant and quantifiable impact on student retention. If students with disabilities feel they are valued, that their concerns are addressed and that the school has an overarching philosophy of inclusiveness toward students with disabilities, students with disabilities are significantly more likely to be successful in their academic pursuits, to feel a connection to their academic institution and to remain in that school until they graduate. According to such studies, students with disabilities often choose to remain at their school if they choose to pursue post-graduate work. In short, the OAS is a multi-purpose hub for a minority population on

campus that is large, active and in need of extra resources that other departments on campus are not as prepared to provide.

## ***References***

Lichiello, Paula C. (2012) *Retention of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.lynchburg.edu/wp-content/uploads/volume-7-2012/>

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