

Student Support Services

Division or Department: Student Affairs

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Northwestern Mission. Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, state, and nation.

The Student Experience Mission Statement:

The Student Experience provides the University community with programs and services to support the academic mission of creating, disseminating, and acquiring knowledge through teaching, research and service while empowering a diverse student population to achieve their highest educational potential. The Student Experience creates a stimulating and inclusive educational environment conducive to holistic personal growth. The commitment to students initiates prior to entrance, sustains throughout the college experience, and continues beyond graduation. Enrollment Services provide equal access for education to potential students throughout the state and region and promote economic stability and financial access to citizens. Student Affairs enhances student development and broadens intellectual, social, cultural, ethical, and occupational growth. The Student Experience works closely with faculty, staff, students, and the community to ensure graduates have the capability to promote economic development and improvements in the region.

Student Affairs Mission:

The Division of Student Affairs prepares students to be productive members of society and to improve the quality of life of students. Student Affairs provides support services in career development and placement, advocacy and accountability, academic support, mental and physical health, disability accommodations, student activities and organizations, student union life, and opportunities in leadership, community service, and programs for new students. Through hands on involvement in programs and services, Student Affairs promotes personal development in a student-centered environment, which delivers innovative practices in an environment of respect. Student Affairs encourages integrity, diversity, and collaboration with all members of the university community.

TRIO Student Support Services Mission:

TRIO Student Support Services (TRIO SSS) empowers first-generation, modest income students, and students with disabilities to develop the skills, knowledge, and attributes to overcome the cultural, academic, economic, and social barriers to success in higher education. TRIO Student Support Services provides resources to enhance students' maximum academic achievement and career readiness to become contributing members of the global community.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Methodology: The assessment process includes:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (both direct – indirect, quantitative, and qualitative) will be collected and returned to the director.
- (2) The director will analyze the data to determine whether the applicable outcomes were met.
- (3) Results from the assessment will be discussed with the appropriate staff.
- (4) Individual meetings will be held with staff as required to determine actions necessary.
- (5) The director, in consultation with the staff, will propose changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period and, where needed, service changes.
- (6) The director, along with the staff, will use quantitative data to formulate an Annual Performance Report for the US Department of Education to determine if SLOs have been achieved, and for modifying, as needed, services offered by TRIO SSS Department.

Service Outcomes

SO 1. TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will demonstrate growth in leadership skills through active participation in hands-on program training and event facilitation. Trailblazers will act as liaison for the department and will represent TRIO at events across the campus and in the community. Trailblazers will facilitate and execute activities and events independently and through collaboration.

Measure 1.1 75% of Trailblazers will report having developed at least one workshop per semester to demonstrate their ability to lead, organize and execute. Staff evaluations of the Trailblazers will be used to measure their level of success. Success will be defined as meeting the level of “satisfactory” through an evaluation designed and conducted by the staff.

Finding. Target was not met

Analysis:

In AC 2024-2025 the target was met. Bi-weekly course/subject specific study sessions were re-introduced. This time tutors were utilized to assist mentors facilitating the sessions. A new incentive was introduced to “spotlight” the mentor/mentee team that most improves academically each month. Analysis of core class test scores was used to determine improvement. The Mentor Program started the AC 2024-2025 with twenty-two (22) mentees, recruited from the three TRIO SSS taught sections of ACSI 1010. Another TRIO SSS participant became a mentor mid fall semester, with one more coming onboard at the beginning of the spring semester. This made a total of twenty-four (24) mentees. Three mentees were removed from the Mentor Program because they no longer met the criteria due to changing their major from a four-year degree to a two-year degree. Additionally, at the end of the fall semester, three (3) mentees expressed that they were no longer interested in being a part of the Mentor Program, bringing the total number of mentees to eighteen (18). The two new changes were discussed but never implemented. The Mentor Program Coordinator resigned due to relocating to another part of the state. A new Mentor Program

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Coordinator was not hired until September 2024. The SSS Staff hosted a retreat for the mentors prior to the start of the academic year. Mentors were very engaged with their mentees and most of the mentors accompanied their mentees to the Academic Success Center to either study together or receive tutoring. This, along with the oversight of our TRIO SSS Staff contributed to 83% of the mentees successfully completing their first year in college with a GPA of 2.0 or above, and 90% registered for the 2025-2026 academic year.

Stated Objectives	AC 2022-2023	AC 2023-2024	AC 2024-2025
82% or more mentees will persist from one AC to the next (Based upon registration for Fall)	87%	83%	90%
80% of mentees will successfully complete their first year in college with a GPA of 2.0 or above	87%	87%	83%

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the staff made the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement. TRIO Student Support Services is a program funded by a 5- year grant from the U. S. Department of Education. The current grant cycle will end on August 31, 2025, ushering in a new 5-year cycle, 2025-2030. Under this new grant, the Peer Mentoring Program will no longer be supported. The new initiative to be utilized for this assessment is the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program. The new service outcome includes two measures and has been re-written to state:

“TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will demonstrate growth in leadership skills through active participation in hands-on program training and event facilitation. Trailblazers will act as liaison for the department and will represent TRIO at events across the campus and in the community. Trailblazers will facilitate and execute activities and events independently and through collaboration.”

The new measure 1.1 reads:

“75% of Trailblazers will report having developed at least one workshop per semester to demonstrate their ability to lead, organize and execute. Staff evaluations of the Trailblazers will be used to measure their level of success. Success will be defined as meeting the level of “satisfactory” through an evaluation designed and conducted by the staff.”

The second measure 1.2 reads:

“The Trailblazers will collaborate with at least two (2) departments across campus to plan and execute activities or events. This will demonstrate their level of collaboration and increase engagement. Activities and events will be evaluated through surveys and reports from the collaborating departments”.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was not met. 0% Fall; 60% Spring. The TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program kicked off in August 2025. The Program started out with twelve hand selected Ambassadors. Within the first month, one Ambassador withdrew from the Program due to a busy schedule, leaving eleven remaining active. Due to the possibility of meeting spaces being fully booked up, activities for the fall semester were planned and placed on the Student Affairs calendar during the summer. Also, the Ambassadors did not meet regularly throughout the academic year where they could meet and plan calendar activities. Therefore, Ambassadors did not plan any activities in the fall but were able to assist in facilitating an activity. However, during the spring semester, the Ambassadors assisted in planning and facilitating two activities, and planned completely, from start to finish, one activity.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Decision:

In AC 2025-2026 the target was not met.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the staff will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement.

- The number of Ambassadors will decrease from twelve to five or six. By downsizing the number of Ambassadors, it is believed that it will be easier to coordinate with members when scheduling meetings.
- Meetings will take place more often and be more structured, where Ambassadors will not only offer suggestions for activities and events, but these activities/events will be planned at the meetings, rather than via text or email.
- When scheduling activities and reserving rooms for both the fall and spring semesters, TRIO staff will make more open dates available to accommodate Ambassador activities.

These changes will improve the students' growth in leadership, organizational, and execution skills, thus enabling their ability to act as liaison for the TRIO department, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

Measure 1.2 The Trailblazers will collaborate with at least two (2) departments across campus to plan and execute activities or events. This will demonstrate their level of collaboration and increase engagement. Activities and events will be evaluated through surveys and reports from the collaborating departments.

Finding. Target was met.

Analysis:

In AC 2024-2025 the target was not implemented.

Based on the lack of analysis of the AC 2024–2025 results, there is no AC 2024–2025 data available for this measure.

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was met. With this being the initial year of the TRIO Trailblazer Ambassadors Program, most of the AC activities and collaborations had already been planned by TRIO staff prior to the beginning of the fall semester. The Trailblazers were, however, able to successfully plan, secure collaborations, and lead an activity in the spring. Due to not having pre-established meeting times at the beginning of the AC and working around the schedule of twelve Ambassadors, it was difficult to find dates where all Ambassadors were available to meet. This made planning difficult because it was accomplished via text messages and emails, rather than meeting in person and hashing out details within the meeting.

Decision:

In AC 2025-2026 the target was met.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the staff will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement.

- The TRIO staff will establish earlier timelines and benchmarks for event planning to ensure collaborations and activities are organized well in advance of implementation.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

- Regular check-in meetings will be implemented throughout the AC to monitor progress on collaborations, address challenges early, and provide guidance.
- A shared communication and planning platform (such as GroupMe, Microsoft Teams, or Google Drive) will be utilized to streamline communication, document planning details, and improve participation among Ambassadors.
- Trailblazers will be encouraged to identify and initiate additional partnerships independently in order to strengthen their leadership and networking skills.
- Surveys distributed after collaborative activities will include more specific questions regarding communication, organization, leadership effectiveness, and student engagement to provide more meaningful assessment data.
- Returning Trailblazers, if applicable, will mentor new Trailblazers to improve continuity, confidence, and knowledge of program expectations

These changes will improve the students' growth in leadership, organizational, communication, and collaboration skills, thus enabling their ability to act as liaison for the TRIO department, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

SO 2. TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will articulate personal growth, professionalism and career readiness gained through program involvement.

Measure 2.1 100% of Trailblazers will complete a reflective portfolio, paper or presentation at the end of the academic year. The portfolio, paper or presentation will demonstrate and be the Trailblazer's first-hand account of the personal and professional growth they have experienced.

Finding. Target was not met.

Analysis:

In AC 2024-2025 the target was met. During the fall retreat, mentees, along with mentors, developed and planned activities for the semester, thereby fostering ownership and accountability. An off-campus teambuilding activity or outing was planned for the beginning of the semester to promote rapport. Mentees were not identified until the third week of the fall semester due to the PMP Coordinator not being hired until September. Therefore, the fall retreat was attended by mentors only. It was successful in that it motivated the mentors, created a sense of cohesion, and allowed them to plan for the fall semester. During the retreat, mentors reviewed the TRIO SSS and Demon Days calendars and selected activities that they would invite their mentees to accompany them. A fall outing was planned to take place early in the semester. It was decided that the LASSI would not be utilized in this academic cycle, based upon previous feedback from students who indicated their reluctance in completing assessments because they received so many. The TRIO Staff decided to use formative data comprised of feedback from tutors, advisors, and mentors' interaction with the mentees. Based on the feedback obtained, it was determined that the majority of mentees were able to cope with the challenges of college life. They expressed questions and concerns about their academics (tutoring, grades, time management, etc.), financial aid, mental health, and housing. Three exceptions were noted and documented where mentees did not act upon recommendations to utilize the available free resources, but they did freely and frequently ask questions. Thus, 90% of mentees had an enhanced ability to cope with challenges of college life and were comfortable asking questions.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Stated Objectives	AC 2022-2023	AC 2023-2024	AC 2024-2025
90% of mentees will have an enhanced ability to cope with challenges of college life (non-cognitive attributes) and will be comfortable in expressing questions and concerns in a safe environment.	90%	78%	90%

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the staff made the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement. TRIO Student Support Services is a program funded by a 5- year grant from the U. S. Department of Education. The current grant cycle ended on August 31, 2025, ushering in a new 5-year cycle, 2025-2030. Under this new grant, the Peer Mentoring Program is no longer supported. The new initiative to be utilized for this assessment is the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program. The new service outcome was re-written to state:

“TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will articulate personal growth, and professionalism and career readiness gained through program involvement.

The new measure 2.1 reads:

“100% of Trailblazers will complete a reflective portfolio, paper or presentation at the end of the academic year. The portfolio, paper or presentation will demonstrate and be the Trailblazer’s first-hand account of the personal and professional growth they have experienced.”

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was not met. With this being the first year for the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program, the first semester was spent selecting and having Trailblazers assist TRIO staff with setting up and facilitating activities/events that were already on the calendar. During the second semester, Trailblazers worked together to find on campus partners to collaborate with them on a Women’s Wellness event. Due to a vacancy in the TRIO department, and staff taking on the additional responsibilities of the position, attention was not focused on Trailblazers creating a portfolio, paper, or presentation that would demonstrate their personal and professional growth during the AC.

Decision:

In AC 2025-2026 the target was not met.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the staff will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement.

- Portfolio specific meetings will be scheduled for AC 2026-2027
- During scheduled and individual meetings with Program Coordinator or a member of the TRIO staff, Trailblazers will begin building their portfolios. At each meeting, portfolios will be reviewed to ensure completion by end of academic cycle.

These changes will improve the students’ personal growth, professionalism and career readiness, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

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SO. 3.0 TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will contribute to recruitment and retention efforts by positively influencing prospective and current student experiences, as evidenced by new recruit's participation in TRIO, campus activities and/or student organizations

Measure 3.1 Prospective student feedback, and Trailblazer contribution reports will be utilized to evaluate Trailblazers' positive influence on prospective and current student experiences. Success will be defined as 75% of the Trailblazers recruiting at least two (2) new participants each semester.

Finding. Target was not met.

Analysis:

In AC 2024-2025 the target was met. RSO representatives were invited to Mentor Mentee meetings or activities to pitch their organization and answer questions. Mentors took their mentees to the RSO Browse held each semester. This was done so mentees could meet officers and members of the respective RSOs to hear their reasons for joining said RSO. Mentors regularly invited and accompanied mentees to TRIO SSS and campus sponsored activities. Mentors encouraged mentees to join an RSO. The PMP Coordinator utilized the exit survey to receive feedback from mentees on their extracurricular involvement. SSS Staff also received feedback on involvement from mentees during individual meetings.

Stated Objectives	AC 2022-2023	AC 2023-2024	AC 2024-2025
90% of mentees will regularly participate in campus activities and/or join at least one student organization.	91%	85%	94%

Based on the analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, the staff made the following changes in AC 2025-2026 to drive the cycle of improvement. TRIO Student Support Services is a program funded by a 5- year grant from the U. S. Department of Education. The current grant cycle ended on August 31, 2025, ushering in a new 5-year cycle, 2025-2030. Under this new grant, the Peer Mentoring Program is no longer supported. The new initiative to be utilized for this assessment is the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program. The new service outcome was re-written to state:

“TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will contribute to recruitment and retention efforts by positively influencing prospective and current student experiences, as evidenced by new recruit's participation in TRIO, campus activities and/or student organizations/”

The new measure 3.1 reads:

“Prospective student feedback, and Trailblazer contribution reports will be utilized to evaluate Trailblazers positive influence on prospective and current student experiences. Success will be defined as 75% of the Trailblazers recruiting at least two (2) new participants each semester.”

As a result of these changes, in AC 2025-2026 the target was not met. Fall: 36% of Ambassadors recruited new students. Spring:10% of Ambassadors recruited new participants for the TRIO Program.

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Decision:

In AC 2025-2026 the target was not met.

Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the staff will implement the following changes in AC 2026-2027 to drive the cycle of improvement.

- Ambassadors will be taught how to make an elevator pitch to be used in recruiting new students.
- Regular check-in meetings will be implemented throughout the AC to monitor progress on collaborations, address challenges early, and provide guidance.
- Pop-up informational sessions for the purpose of recruiting students for the TRIO Program will be scheduled throughout the AC.

These changes will improve the students' ability to contribute to recruitment and retention efforts, thereby continuing to push the cycle of improvement forward.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvements based on analysis of results.

The following reflects all the changes implemented to drive the continuous process of seeking improvement in AC 2025-2026. These changes are based on the knowledge gained through the AC 2024-2025 results analysis.

SO 1:

1.1: TRIO Student Support Services is a program funded by a 5- year grant from the U. S. Department of Education. The current grant cycle will end on August 31, 2025, ushering in a new 5-year cycle, 2025-2030. Under this new grant, the Peer Mentoring Program is no longer supported. The new initiative to be utilized for this assessment is the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program. The new service outcome includes two measures and were re-written:

“TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will demonstrate growth in leadership skills through active participation in hands-on program training and event facilitation. Trailblazers will act as liaison for the department and will represent TRIO at events across the campus and in the community. Trailblazers will facilitate and execute activities and events independently and through collaboration.”

The new measure 1.1 reads:

“75% of Trailblazers will report having developed at least one workshop per semester to demonstrate their ability to lead, organize and execute. Staff evaluations of the Trailblazers will be used to measure their level of success. Success will be defined as meeting the level of “satisfactory” through an evaluation designed and conducted by the staff.”

The second measure 1.2 reads:

“The Trailblazers will collaborate with at least two (2) departments across campus to plan and execute activities or events. This will demonstrate their level of collaboration and increase engagement. Activities and events will be evaluated through surveys and reports from the collaborating departments”.

1.2: Based on the lack of analysis of the AC 2024–2025 results, there is no AC 2024–2025 data available for this measure.

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SO 2:

2.1 TRIO Student Support Services is a program funded by a 5- year grant from the U. S. Department of Education. The current grant cycle will end on August 31, 2025, ushering in a new 5- year cycle, 2025-2030. Under this new grant, the Peer Mentoring Program is no longer supported. The new initiative to be utilized for this assessment is the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program. The new service outcome was re-written:

“TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, will articulate personal growth, and professionalism and career readiness gained through program involvement.

The new measure 2.1 will read:

“100% of Trailblazers will complete a reflective portfolio, paper or presentation at the end of the academic year. The portfolio, paper or presentation will demonstrate and be the Trailblazer’s first-hand account of the personal and professional growth they have experienced.”

SO 3:

3.1 TRIO Student Support Services is a program funded by a 5- year grant from the U. S. Department of Education. The current grant cycle will end on August 31, 2025, ushering in a new 5- year cycle, 2025-2030. Under this new grant, the Peer Mentoring Program will no longer be supported. The new initiative to be utilized for this assessment is the TRIO Trailblazers Ambassador Program. The new service outcome was re-written:

“TRIO Trailblazers, the TRIO Student Support Services Ambassadors Program, which will contribute to recruitment and retention efforts by positively influencing prospective and current student experiences, as evidenced by new recruit’s participation in campus activities and/or student organizations/”

The new measure 3.1 reads:

“Prospective student feedback, and Trailblazer contribution reports will be utilized to evaluate Trailblazers positive influence on prospective and current student experiences. Success will be defined as 75% of the Trailblazers recruiting at least two (2) new participants each semester.”

Plan of Action Moving Forward:

SO 1:

1.1: The number of Ambassadors will decrease from twelve to five or six. By downsizing the number of Ambassadors, it is believed that it will be easier to coordinate with members when scheduling meetings. Meetings will take place more often and be more structured, where Ambassadors will not only offer suggestions for activities and events, but these activities/events will be planned at the meetings, rather than via text or email. When scheduling activities and reserving rooms for both the fall and spring semesters, TRIO staff will make more open dates available to accommodate Ambassador activities.

1.2: The TRIO staff will establish earlier timelines and benchmarks for event planning to ensure collaborations and activities are organized well in advance of implementation. Regular check-in meetings will be implemented throughout the AC to monitor progress on collaborations, address challenges early, and provide guidance. A shared communication and planning platform (such as GroupMe, Microsoft Teams, or Google Drive) will be utilized to streamline communication, document planning details, and improve participation among Ambassadors. Trailblazers will be encouraged to identify and initiate additional partnerships independently in order to strengthen their leadership and networking skills.

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Surveys distributed after collaborative activities will include more specific questions regarding communication, organization, leadership effectiveness, and student engagement to provide more meaningful assessment data. Returning Trailblazers, if applicable, will mentor new Trailblazers to improve continuity, confidence, and knowledge of program expectations

SO 2:

2.1 Portfolio specific meetings will be scheduled for AC 2026-2027. During scheduled and individual meetings with Program Coordinator or a member of the TRIO Staff, Trailblazers will begin building their portfolios. At each meeting, portfolios will be reviewed to ensure completion by end of academic cycle.

SO 3:

3.1 Ambassadors will be taught how to make an elevator pitch to be used in recruiting new students. Regular check-in meetings will be implemented throughout the AC to monitor progress on collaborations, address challenges early, and provide guidance.

Pop-up informational sessions for the purpose of recruiting students for the TRIO Program will be scheduled throughout the AC.