

**SPECIAL REPORT  
OF THE  
RESEARCH AND  
PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCILS**

**concerning**

**CREATION OF A CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS RESEARCH  
(#6758)**

**Presented at the  
804<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate  
April 1, 2021**

**COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP**

**RESEARCH COUNCIL**

**Dominique Alfandari, Amir Arbabi, MJ Alhabeeb, Ian Barron, Casey Brown, Leslie Button, Lisa Chasan-Taber, Carey Clouse, E. Bryan Coughlin, Robert DeConto, Jennifer Donais, Janet Fink, Lori Goldner, Krista Harper, Michelle Hosp, Paul Katz, James Kitts, Kathryn Lachman, Jason Moralee, Simon Neame, Jennifer Normanly, MJ Peterson, Ashwin Ramasubramaniam, Peter Reinhart, Alexander Ribbe, Brian Shelburne, Hava Siegelman, Laurel Smith-Doerr, Carol Sprague, Maria Tymoczko, Rachel Walker, Annette Wysocki**

**RESEARCH COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**The Research Council recommends approval of this proposal.**

**PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL**

**Zlatan Aksamija, Joseph Bartolomeo, Jeremiah Bentley, William Brown, D. Anthony Butterfield, Elizabeth Chang, Nancy Cohen, Patricia Galvis-Assmus, Sarah Goff, Steve Goodwin, Deborah Gould, Moira Inghilleri, Yoon Ju Kang, Andrew Mangels, Ernest May, Lynn McKenna, Anthony Paik, MJ Peterson, Alexander Phillips, Anurag Sharma, Lisa Wegiel**

**PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**The Program and Budget Council recommends approval of this proposal.**

- 1. *Is this proposal for a Center or an Institute ?***

**Center**

2. *Proposed Title of Institute/Center*

**Center for Student Success Research**  
(currently has interim approval, expiring at the end of 2020 academic year)

3. *What is the School/College or other major budgetary unit that this center or institute will be a part of?*

**College of Education**

4. *What are the names of the Center/Institute directors or other responsible persons ?*

**Director - Ryan Wells**  
**Associate Director - Ezekiel Kimball**

5. *What is the mailing address, telephone number of director(s) or responsible persons ?*

**Ryan Wells**  
**N172 Furcolo Hall**  
**UMass Amherst**  
**Amherst, MA 01003**  
**413 545 0871**

6. *What is the proposed starting date ?*

**Feb 1, 2021**

**Description**

*1. Please provide a brief description (60 words or less) of the proposed enterprise (name, basic mission, activity scope, clientele).*

**The Center for Student Success Research (CSSR) conducts and disseminates research related to the success of college students. The Center pursues grant funding from state and federal agencies, private foundations, and institutional partners. It also supports the development of best practices on the UMass Amherst campus and shares knowledge with other institutions through consulting and dissemination of scholarship.**

*2. What are the rationale and justification (mission, goals, objectives, relation to campus goals, needs addressed, population served, resources obtained) ?*

**The goal of the Center for Student Success Research (CSSR) is to conduct research that informs students, faculty members, administrators, and institutions in creating the conditions necessary for student success. We define student success to include preparation, admission, attendance, learning, development, achievement, persistence, and graduation**

experiences that are beneficial to both students and institutions. Through the pursuit of these aims, CSSR creates a virtuous cycle wherein high quality empirical research focused on, and in partnership with, marginalized student populations (both on this campus and elsewhere) leads to grant and consulting revenue. One example of this would be the Provost-funded research about First Generation college students, which led to a UMass Amherst campus report, as well a peer-reviewed publication. Another example is Chrystal George Mwangi's research in partnership with Holyoke public schools and students, focused on students of color and college access. Projects such as these inform administrative and academic practices and policies, on campus and beyond, as well as provide financial support for the research agendas of faculty members and the training of graduate students.

CCSR activities are consistent with goals articulated by the University of Massachusetts Amherst and the College of Education. Specifically, the campus' strategic plan has a subgoal to "Support Student Success" which is exactly what our Center does. This section of the plan also contains an action step to "identify and address obstacles to retention and timely graduation, and provide appropriate access to courses, curricula, and advising, within a supportive climate that promotes student well-being." Our Center's research empirically examines many of these issues for our campus, but also using national and international data and addressing these issues in a much broader sense. Goal 2 of the strategic plan has a subgoal to "Expand Research and Scholarly Impact" with an action step that states: "Leverage external resources at the state, national, and global levels by investing in research areas that align UMass Amherst strengths with current and emerging external needs in ways that contribute to enhancing the human experience." This is a very good description of the work we are currently doing and will continue to do in the future.

The College of Education has a vision of "Education for a socially just world" and a mission "To conduct forward-thinking research that promotes policies, practices, and partnerships that support diverse, just, meaningful, and impactful educational communities." CSSR's research aims to promote more equitable and just practices through research-based evidence, thereby directly supporting this mission. Goal 1 of the plan states: "To engage and collaborate with local, state, national, and global communities to co-create high quality research that will improve education." Again, that is precisely what the Center does, thereby advancing the College's mission.

CSSR's work also complements recent planning activities undertaken by the Division of Student Affairs & Campus Life. The CSSR is uniquely well-positioned to help achieve these goals and implement these plans due to the existing strength of the higher education program and the College of Education's longtime commitment to social justice praxis, and the national and international reputation of other research centers in the College, such as the Centers for International Education and Educational Assessment. We aim to build stronger partnerships with these Centers, building on collaborative work that already spans multiple Centers, such as Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi's project "Researching Diversity, Inclusion, and Student Success: Towards a Global Campus Climate" funded by the Worldwide Universities Network. As a key hub of expertise and resources, the CSSR will bring together researchers across a variety of projects centered within the College of

Education and greater university. Current examples of such partnerships include a) NSF-funded research between Center affiliates and Psychology (Dr. Nilanjana “Buju” Dasgupta) and Sociology (Dr. Mark Pachucki) and b) Massachusetts Department of Higher Education-funded research that brought together faculty from multiple College of Education departments (EPRA & Student Development) as well as Psychology (Dr. Ashley Woodman). The outcomes of the CSSR will be increased prestige, grant funding, and collaboration on the UMass campus in combination with scholarship that benefits a wide-range of participants, faculty, and practitioners.

*3. What are the specific activities planned as an on-going part of the enterprise (types, quantities of activities, meetings, publications, seminars, research) ?*

The CSSR plans three main activities as part of its ongoing work: 1) the continuing development of a grants-supported research agenda; 2) support for projects originating from campus partners; and 3) consulting and evaluation activities.

A Grants-Supported Research Agenda will be developed based on the work of the faculty affiliated with CSSR. Topics of active or planned research include: students with disabilities in higher education; international students of color; access to STEM fields; the transitional needs of first generation college students; and barriers and strategies to support low-income students. CSSR provides a mechanism to catalyze further collaborations and research between Center affiliates and in collaboration with others across campus. While it is difficult to quantify the extent to which the Center increases productivity relative to what individual faculty would produce without a Center (i.e., how the whole is greater than the sum of the parts) there are three ways that we assume this occurs: a) formal and informal meetings whereby brainstorming, ideas, or works in progress are discussed and strategized collectively, b) utilizing the Center’s name and promotional materials when seeking funding to provide a “home” and legitimacy to the efforts, and c) assistance from Center leadership to affiliates on idea development, grant writing, and logistical coordination of grants. Continuing a trend from our time as in interim center, we estimate that in the next five years affiliated faculty will produce 25 grant proposals, 35 publications, and 40 presentations. (These estimates are based on information that can be accessed via our websites below, as well as from the specific grant-funded project information that is provided as part of this submission.)

- <https://www.umass.edu/education/center/student-success/research>
- [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cfssr\\_publishedwork/](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cfssr_publishedwork/)

Support for Campus Partners will include the provision of technical expertise, research design, and scholarly writing for key campus initiatives. For example, during our interim period, we partnered with the Provost’s Office and the Office of Undergraduate Student Success to study First Generation students on campus, culminating in a report that has informed campus partners. Specifically, part of this report was used at a workshop to facilitate a conversation with key personnel across the University who provide support to undergraduates, showing the ongoing benefits of such work. Our synergy with these partners is continuing, as we embark on a study of college student financial insecurity in the year 2020, funded by the Provost and coordinated with the Carol Barr, Senior Vice

**Provost for Academic Affairs, and Carolyn Bassett, Associate Provost for Student Success (who has provided an included letter of support).**

**We will continue such activities with various campus partners. Additionally, a number of administrative offices (e.g., Division of Student Affairs and Campus Life) either receive or hope to obtain external funding for student success initiatives. However, grant makers are insisting on increasingly rigorous research and evaluation designs as well as complex theories of action as part of the funding process. For example, the Department of Education has recently indicated a clear preference for research designs leading to causal conclusions in its grant competitions. Other funders—including but not limited to the Gates Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation—have followed suit. Faculty affiliated with the CSSR possess expertise in experimental and quasi-experimental designs, quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis, evaluation, and theory-building that will help to address these emergent needs. One example of quasi-experimental research that fits this model is a current partnership between the Integrated Concentration in Science (iCons) program on campus and CSSR (see letter of support from iCons director included). Results of a three-year longitudinal study will not only serve as evidence for program improvement locally but will serve as the preliminary results needed for an NSF grant to expand and scale up this unique approach to STEM education on this campus and beyond.**

**Overall, institutions that possess the ability to marshal these interdisciplinary teams in an expeditious manner have an inherent advantage in the pursuit, awarding, and management of these grants due to the aptitude-resource correlation—that is an accrued, recursive advantage gained by the increases in the skillsets of and resources available to students, faculty, and administrators.**

**Consulting and evaluation activities are a smaller but important part of the CSSR. In addition to large, grant-funded projects, the CSSR will house ongoing survey research projects focused on potential gaps between higher education-wide best practices, an institution's espoused practices, and the lived experiences of current and prospective students, faculty, staff, and community members. These are key foci for student success research since these are directly changeable by a higher education institution whereas outcomes measures such as satisfaction and engagement are more diffuse. Consulting activities offer the potential for a secondary external revenue source moving forward and will support the University's work by improving understanding of the connection between institutional behavior and student outcomes. Since CSSR represents an important repository of information about best practices related to student success, it will share that expertise through a consulting practice driven by the rigorous empirical research generated by CSSR personnel. Consulting will include a) on-campus trainings and evaluations; b) guided implementation of survey research results; and c) off-campus data analysis support. The two best examples of conversations currently happening regarding such consulting efforts are an outgrowth of our Massachusetts Department of Higher Education-funded project focused on college students with disabilities and possible consulting or evaluation work with Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and the Office of Disability Services here at UMass Amherst. Information about best practices will also be**

provided through the dissemination of research results via briefs, whitepapers, and videos (see examples here - <https://www.umass.edu/education/center/student-success/reports>). While some of these works will target standard scholarly presentation and publication vehicles, CSSR will also deliberately target more practitioner-oriented venues. We will also continue to occasionally serve as evaluators on submitted grants as we have in the past. Examples include an NSF-proposal in partnership with the College of Public Health here at UMass, an NSF-proposal with STEM faculty at Amherst College, and a current seed-grant proposal with personnel from 5 other universities and community colleges in Massachusetts.

*4. How does this enterprise differ from other offices or activities on campus with similar names, missions, interests?*

This center is focused exclusively on student success in a higher education space; as a result, it has a natural affinity with other centers and institutes on campus (Center for International Education, Center for Educational Assessment, Center for Educational Policy, Institute for Social Science Research). However, none of these centers or institutes share the CSSR's primary focus on college student success processes and outcomes in higher education. As a result, none are as well-positioned to respond to the complexities of funding for educational research focused on colleges and universities.

We also have a name that is similar to the Undergraduate Student Success Office. However, that office focuses on programs, best practices, and directly serving students. Our center, in contrast, focuses on research, evaluation, and assessment. In fact, the partnership of these offices that has been occurring during our interim period is evidence that the collaboration of these two entities is very productive, rather than being duplicative in any way.

### **Institutional Relationships and Governance**

*1. List all University units involved and describe administrative arrangements with them, if any.*

The CSSR operates under the administrative auspices of the College of Education and involves personnel from all three departments within the college, as well as other colleges and other institutions. There are no administrative arrangements with any other units. The center has, however, coordinated efforts in various ways with campus partners from the Division of Student Affairs & Campus Life, the Office of the Provost, the Office of Academic Planning & Assessment, the Office of Institutional Research, and the office of Undergraduate Students Success. We either have partnered, or are partnering, with faculty from a number of other colleges and departments on external grant proposals. A partial list of people (and departments) we have collaborated with includes:

- Rick Peltier (School of Public Health)
- Charlie Schweik (Environmental Conservation)
- Paula Rees (Engineering)

- **Scott Auerbach (Chemistry)**
- **Anna Branch (Sociology)**
- **Nilanjana “Buju” Dasgupta (Psychology)**
- **Mark Pachucki (Sociology)**
- **Ashley Woodman (Psychology)**
- **Linda Isbell (Psychology)**

*2. Describe any organizational relationships (as distinct from funding sources) with other agencies, public or private, outside the University.*

Not applicable.

*3. Describe the organization’s advisory board or other governance group.*

CSSR had an advisory board composed of three senior campus administrators when gaining interim approval. However, due to the departures of all of those people from campus, the advisory board is not currently functional. Upon gaining recognition as a permanent center, we will revise that internal advisory board, composed of senior campus officials. We will also add an external advisory board of individuals with national reputations for scholarly excellence in the study of access and student success. The advisory boards will meet once each semester. Our current plans for invitations to these advisory boards are as follows:

**Internal Advisory Board**

- **Brandi Hephner LaBanc, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Campus Life**
- **Carolyn Bassett, Associate Provost for Student Success**
- **Nilanjana “Buju” Dasgupta, Professor, Psychology**
- **Cris Smith, College of Education, Associate Dean of Research and Engagement**

**External Advisory Board**

- **Cecilia Rios Aguilar, UCLA College of Education, Associate Dean for Equity and Inclusion, Spencer Foundation Board Member**
- **Shouping Hu, Louis W. and Elizabeth N. Bender Endowed Professor of Higher Education and the founding director of the Center for Postsecondary Success (CPS) at Florida State University.**
- **Matthew Mayhew - William Ray and Marie Adamson Flesher Professor of Educational Administration, The Ohio State University**
- **Robert Reason - Professor / Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, Iowa State University**

*4. Will this be an institute — an independent organizational unit, acting as a department for purposes of non-faculty personnel actions and appointments, able to solicit its own funds without departmental head approval?*

No

*5. If a center, describe the relationship within the department or college to which this organization is subordinate.*

The CSSR is an administrative sub-organization of the College of Education. It is responsible for preparing its own planning documents and budgets for the approval of the Deanery. However, it operates independently of existing centers and programs organized within the college.

*6. Describe arrangements for any patent rights, copyrights, or other ownership components of activities, and any restrictions on access to research information.*

The US Department of Education, National Science Foundation, and private foundations are anticipated to be the funders of the majority of CSSR research activities. Their competitive grant awards typically require that information produced using federal funding be a part of the public domain. As a result, we do not anticipate generating copyrights or other intellectual property suitable for licensing or technology transfer.

### **Resources**

*1. Describe the space available for use by the organization. (If this is not a permanent location, indicate other space arrangements that are to be made in the future, if known.)*

The College of Education has provided, and will continue to provide, appropriate space to support CSSR. Furcolo N119 currently provides space for our equipment, including restricted data computers, as well as desks for Center graduate assistants.

*2. Describe any requests for space that have been made.*

No additional space needs are anticipated, and no additional requests have been made.

*3. Describe any repairs, renovations, major equipment needed to make the space you have useful to the organization.*

We do not anticipate any need for repairs, renovations, or major equipment.

*4. If University employees or students are or will be using space, describe the arrangement.*

Graduate assistants will regularly use the space. University personnel who are on our restricted data license will also use the space, as the data are housed in the Center location. We do not anticipate non-University employees or students using the space.

### **Staffing (when operation is fully developed)**

**1. Non-Faculty (provide rank or grade, student status, working title, FTE, source of funding).**

Graduate assistants have been and will be hired to support specific projects based on the availability of externally-funded budgets for those projects.

**2. Faculty involved (provide name, department, extent involved, release time arrangement, if any).**

In addition to Ryan Wells (Professor) and Ezekiel Kimball (Associate Professor), the following faculty are affiliated with CSSR, and involved on in project-specific capacities. No release time is connected to affiliation.

- Sade Bonilla, Assistant Professor, EPRA
- Jonique Childs, Assistant Professor, Student Development
- Darrell Earnest, Associate Professor, Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies
- Chrystal George Mwangi, Associate Professor, EPRA
- Alexandra Lauterbach, Associate Professor, Student Development
- Ashley Woodman, Lecturer, Psychological and Brain Sciences

*3. Describe how the Center or Institute may impact existing teaching responsibilities of participating faculty members through “buy-out” arrangements, reduced teaching loads, or other provisions, and how such impacts will be resolved.*

Release time is not part of the initial arrangements for this center and will not be granted except when a priori agreements have been reached to support specific projects. Any such agreements will follow College of Education procedures and policies for requesting and supporting release time.

*4. Attach a detailed budget showing sources of funding, full-year basic operation costs and anticipated expenditures. (This should show programmatic expenditure descriptions, kinds of funding accounts and amounts by subsidiary accounts as well as alternative funding arrangements or programmatic adjustments to be made if funding sources fail.)*

**MOTION:** That the Faculty Senate approve the Creation of a Center for Student  
30-21 Success Research, as presented in Sen Doc. No. 21-059.



Please also find four letters of support in these appendices. One is from the Dean of the College of Education, where our Center is housed. Two are from UMass campus partners with whom we have worked on projects. And one is from an external partner who has collaborated with our Center on multiple funded projects.

There is also a letter from College of Education Associ

CSSR - Aggregated Project Budgets and Expenses		
5 Years FY16-FY20 (July 1 2015 - June 30 2020)		
	Budgeted	Expended
AA Payroll - Faculty Payroll	\$ 334,602	\$ 158,661
CC Payroll	\$ 63,605	
Grad Students		\$ 109,075
Other Personnel		\$ 32,769
Fringe	\$ 48,102	\$ 39,488
Tuition	\$ 37,656	\$ 29,151
Travel	\$ 18,742	\$ 6,957
Supplies/Materials	\$ 500	\$ 9,601
Other Non-Personnel	\$ 62,494	\$ 3,237
Consultants	\$ 45,000	\$ 62,427
Subawards	\$ -	\$ -
IDC	\$ 135,314	\$ 87,828
Write Offs		\$ 149
Total	\$ 746,015	\$ 539,342
Remaining	\$	206,673



**Graduate Students**

Abbott, Jordan A

Bettencourt, Genia Maria Burroughs

Chen, Ling

Edelstein, Jeffrey Alex

Fox, Anna L

Kommers, Suzan

Lala, Chirag

Mansour, Koboul Elsayed Helmyali

Thoma, Hanni Sharon

Tseng, Shao Yu

Yates, Aaron