



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MISSISSIPPI

UM IMPACT PATHWAY PROGRAM

> 800

STUDENTS SERVED
IN SPRING 2021

89

STUDENTS
COMPLETED A PRE-
SURVEY

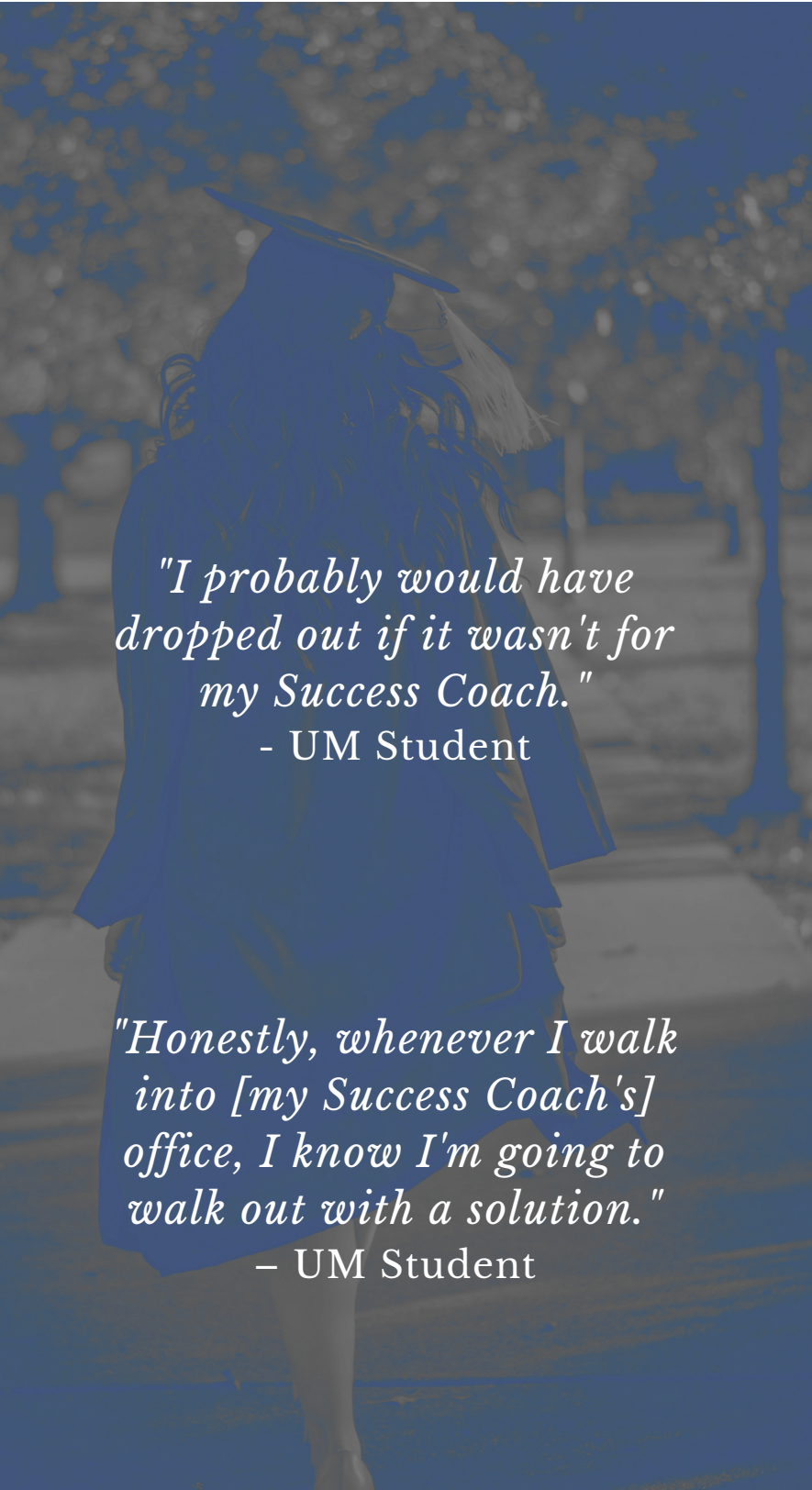
11

STUDENTS
PARTICIPATED IN
FOCUS GROUPS

11

PROJECT TEAM
MEMBERS (E.G.,
SUCCESS COACHES,
PEER MENTORS)
PARTICIPATED IN
INTERVIEWS

With funding from Woodward Hines Education Foundation (WHEF), the University of Mississippi launched its IMPACT PATHWAY PROGRAM in Spring 2021, expanding on existing UM support services. The Center for Research Evaluation (CERE) at UM is currently conducting an evaluation of the sophomore-through-senior program.



*"I probably would have
dropped out if it wasn't for
my Success Coach."*

- UM Student

*"Honestly, whenever I walk
into [my Success Coach's]
office, I know I'm going to
walk out with a solution."*

- UM Student

STUDENT EXPERIENCE



AT THE START

83%

of students thought working with a Success Coach would help them succeed at the university.

86%

of students thought they would make connections with other services on campus.

AFTER THE INAUGURAL SEMESTER

Students credit their success coaches with supporting their **academic success** in terms of organization, time management and motivation—leading many to improved academic outcomes.

Accountability to the success coach was one of the leading reasons that students cited for increased motivation.

"I definitely don't think I'd be getting as good grades as I am right now [without my success coach]. I'm making all A's and B's which is mind-blowing because it was not like that last semester or last year. I definitely think she helped me with it." – UM Student

Project team members & students agree that access to **academic and support services—both in person and virtually**—are a fundamental takeaway from success coaching sessions.

"My success coach has definitely kind of amplified the different resources that are on campus; because I mean, I realized that one person can't do everything. So, she's a good point of referral to different places that might be useful to me and just helps me follow through with things like if I express interest in something. For example, I expressed interest in a certain internship opportunity. And, so, she helped me kind of look through the different resources that might be available to help me attain that." – UM Student

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

CERE conducted focus groups with 11 students who participated in Year 1 of UM's Impact Pathway Program. In these focus groups, we explored student expectations and experiences, including what worked and what could be improved.

Overall, students saw success coaches as valuable assets that helped them **access resources**, **build a sense of community** and maintain **academic performance**. For many, success coaches **created a sense of accountability**, which **motivated** students to persist in their studies.

Access to Resources

Project team members and students agree on the importance of **access** to academic and support services **in person and virtually**.

"I wouldn't have been able to apply for accommodations for ADHD if I didn't have help doing it because it's a very complicated process. And that has improved my grades over the course of the semester, because it's allowed me access to extra time on tests and that sort of thing, so." – UM Student

Academic Benefits

High-engagement students view the program as beneficial to their academics, particularly in the sense of increased **accountability** and **motivation** (n=29 focus group mentions).

"I think they're a great support system and motivators. I don't think I'd care as much about my grades right now or doing well if it wasn't to please my success coach and peer mentor." – UM Student

Relationships & Support Systems

Students view success coaches as **counselors** or **parental figures** (n=11 focus group mentions) & **friends** (n=3 focus group mentions).

High-engagement students & project team members agree that these relationships & rapport between students & success coaches encourages **engagement** & creates a **safe space** for students.

"So, my success coach has done a really great job of building community with me and building a connection because I feel safe in that office." – UM Student

Sense of Belonging

Students mentioned lacking a university-related identity prior to success coaching. Some students felt encouraged to join and take leadership roles in clubs, while others indicated that success coaches dissuaded them from transferring to other schools. Sense of **belonging** was particularly relevant with the **transition back to campus** after COVID-19 had transitioned all schooling to virtual.

"It's more like I didn't necessarily see my place in the university. I just saw myself as somebody who was coming in and leaving after the four years, and now I feel like I've been given so much from the university, I feel a little bit of a motivation to kind of give back. So I feel like it's definitely increased that sense of community and belonging here." – UM Student

Lessons Learned



Develop a communications strategy. An **intentional** and **strategic communication strategy** for engaging students is essential to the team of Success Coaches.

Host a formal orientation & create promotional materials. All program staff expressed excitement around student engagement, including **orientation, in-person events** & a **comprehensive website**.

"I JUST AM GRATEFUL TO EVERYBODY WORKING ON THIS, IT HASN'T ALWAYS BEEN EASY, WE'RE CREATING SOMETHING NEW, WE'RE GOING TO MAKE MISTAKES. SO LONG AS WE HAVE A SPIRIT OF COOPERATION AND A SPIRIT OF SUPPORT TO ONE ANOTHER I THINK WE WILL FIX WHATEVER PROBLEMS WE HAVE AND MOVE FORWARD." – PROJECT STAFF MEMBER

Develop ELO and completion grant criteria. Program staff indicated a need for **transparent, clear & equitable** grant criteria to inform which students would receive special grants, such as Completion Grants and ELOs.

Engage student voice in program iteration. Give students a "**seat at the table**" so they can say what they need—and what they don't.



COVID-19 Challenges

Two COVID-19-related challenges that emerged during conversations with program staff were **building rapport among program staff** in remote environments and **engaging with students remotely**.

Interviewees reported that since the program was launched in the middle of the school-year, during a pandemic, it was difficult to build **rapport within and across program teams and departments**. This rapport and team-building would improve **program clarity**.

"I THINK WITH ANY NEW PROGRAM, IT'S TYPICAL TO SEE THOSE GROWING PAINS BUT I THINK IT'S PROBABLY LASTING LONGER DUE TO SO MANY ZOOM MEETINGS. I FEEL IF WE COULD ALL GET IN A ROOM AROUND A TABLE AND HASH SOME THINGS OUT, IT'D PROBABLY BE HELPFUL, BUT WE'RE NOT THERE YET." – PROJECT TEAM MEMBER

Program staff also reported challenges **connecting with students**, many of whom were not on campus and battling '**Zoom-fatigue**.'

"I DON'T THINK INTERFACING THROUGH EMAILS CONSISTENTLY IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE APPROACH, ESPECIALLY FOR STUDENTS WHO ALREADY GET PRETTY SPAMMED WITH A LOT OF UNIVERSITY RELATED EMAILS... SO, FINDING A WAY TO MAKE THAT MORE INTERACTIVE AND INTERFACE WITH STUDENTS IN A MORE CREATIVE WAY, I THINK IS PROBABLY THE BIGGEST THING."



Recommendations:

Communicate and engage. Make communication more interactive—leverage social media, chat and breakout rooms to engage students.

Promote the program. Students like promotional items and credit success coaches with helping them get organized. Give away planners with the university and program logos.

Give students online options. Students liked having an option to take advantage of services without having to be on campus. Keep online options available and encourage students to take advantage of services across campus.