

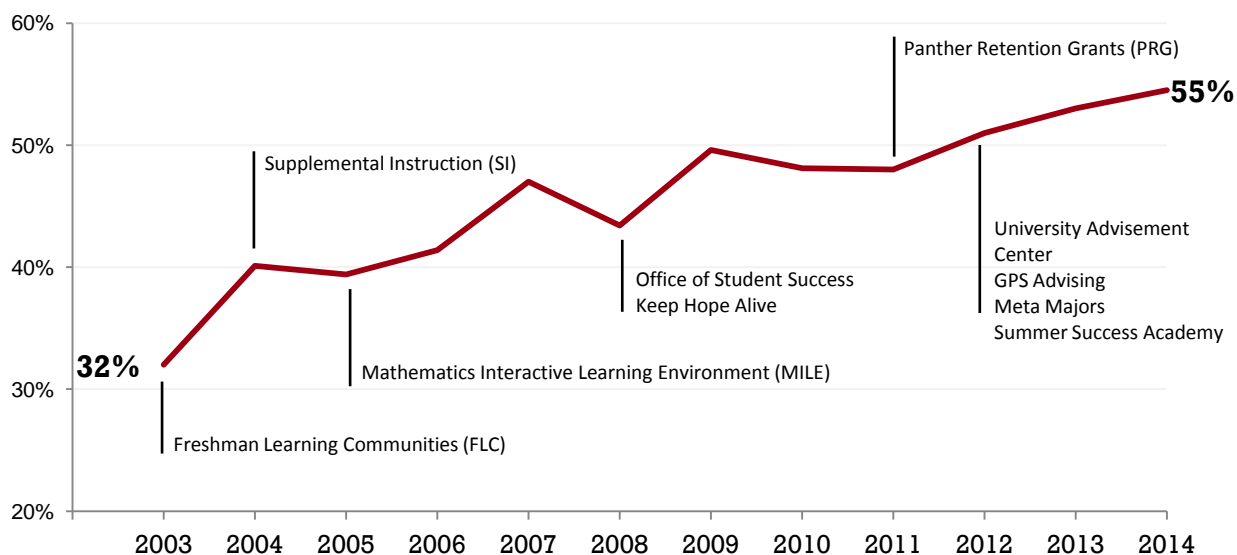


Georgia State University

OVERVIEW

When it comes to higher education, the vision of the United States as a land of equal opportunity is far from a reality. Today, it is *eight times* more likely that an individual in the top quartile of Americans by annual household income will hold a college degree than an individual in the lowest quartile.¹ Nationally, white students graduate from college at rates more than 10 points higher than Hispanic students, and are more than twice as likely to graduate with a 4-year college degree compared to black students.² The United States Department of Education cites a six-year graduation-rate of 39% among Pell-eligible students,³ a rate that is 20 points lower than the national average.⁴

GSU Undergraduate Graduation Rates by Year, 2010 to Present



In 2003, Georgia State’s institutional graduation rate stood at 32% and underserved populations were foundering. Graduation rates were 22% for Latinos, 29% for African Americans, and 18% for African American males. Pell students were graduating at rates far below those of non-Pell students.

Today, thanks to a campus-wide commitment to student success and more than a dozen strategic programs implemented over the past several years, Georgia State University’s achievement gap is gone. The institutional graduation rate has improved 22 points—among the highest increases in the nation over this period. Rates are up 32 points for Latinos (to 54%), and 28 points for African Americans (to 57%). Pell-eligible students currently represent 59% of Georgia State University’s undergraduate student population, and over the past three years have graduated at rates, on average, equal to those of non-Pell students. Georgia State University now graduates more Hispanic, Asian, first generation, and Pell students with bachelor degrees than any other university in Georgia. For four consecutive years, we have conferred more bachelor degrees to African Americans than any other non-profit college or university in the United States.

Georgia State University’s story testifies to the fact that students from all backgrounds can succeed at high rates. Because the challenges we face at Georgia State—finding innovative ways to succeed with our growing numbers

1 The Pell Institute (2015) Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States : 45 Year Trend Report (2015 Revised Edition). Retrieved from http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators_of_Higher_Education_Equity_in_the_US_45_Year_Trend_Report.pdf

2 U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014) Table 326.10: Graduation rate from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree- seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and acceptance rate: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2007. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_326.10.asp.

3 Horwich, Lloyd (25 November 2015) Report on the Federal Pell Grant Program. Retrieved from <http://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Pell0212.pdf>.

4 U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014) Table 326.10.

of at-risk students and doing so amid a context of limited resources—are precisely the same challenges faced by literally hundreds of public universities nationwide, the story resonates. Through our outreach, colleagues within the USG and nationally not only learn what is happening at Georgia State but also see what is possible at their home institutions and for their own students.

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

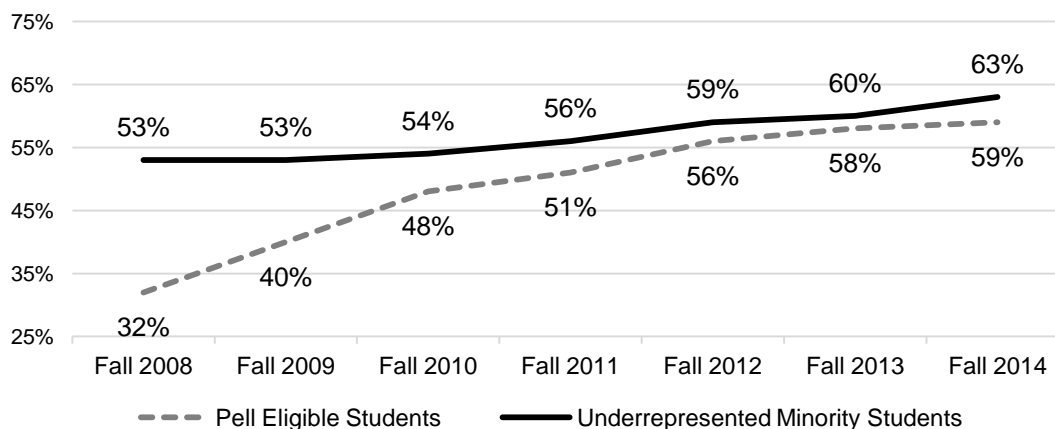
In March 2015, Georgia State University adopted a new mission statement that underscores the university’s longstanding dedication to student success, and its commitment to expanding efforts that would increase access to high-quality education in order to meet the workforce demands of the nation.

*Georgia State University, an enterprising public research university, transforms the lives of students, advances the frontiers of knowledge and strengthens the workforce of the future. The university provides an outstanding education and exceptional support for students from all backgrounds. Georgia State readies students for professional pursuits, educates future leaders, and prepares citizens for lifelong learning. Enrolling one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation at its urban research campus, at its vibrant branch campuses, and online, the university provides educational opportunities for tens of thousands of students at the graduate, baccalaureate, associate, and certificate levels.*⁵

Georgia State University’s number one strategic goal is to become a national model for undergraduate education by demonstrating that students from all backgrounds can achieve academic and career success at high rates.⁶ The most distinctive **principle** guiding our efforts has been a pledge to improve student outcomes through *inclusion* rather than *exclusion*. We are committed to improve our graduation rates without turning our backs on the low-income, underrepresented and first-generation students that we have traditionally served. To the contrary: we have pledged to increase the number of underrepresented, first-generation and Pell students enrolled and to serve them better. In our mission and our strategic plan, we have committed to achieving improved outcomes for our students not merely while they are at Georgia State University, but in their lives and careers after graduation as well.

Georgia State University now enrolls more African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, first-generation students, and Pell students than any other four-year university Georgia. In fact, the University set new records for the number of students enrolled in *every one* of these categories during the fall semester of 2014. Our undergraduate population is now 63% non-white and 59% Pell. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, Georgia State University is now one of only two universities to rank in the Top 15 in the nation for both its racial/ethnic diversity⁷ and for the number of low-income students enrolled.⁸

At Risk Undergraduate Student Populations at GSU by Year, Fall 2008 - Fall 2014



In line with our commitment to serving Georgia students through a policy of inclusion rather than exclusion, we have consistently increased the proportion of underrepresented minority students (students reporting their race to be something other than White, or who identify as ethnically Hispanic) being served, with the number up ten points over the past five years.⁹

5 Consolidation.gsu.edu (March 18, 2015) Board of Regents Approves New Mission Statement for Consolidated Georgia State and Georgia Perimeter. Retrieved from <http://consolidation.gsu.edu/2015/03/18/board-regents-approves-new-mission-statement-consolidated-georgia-state-georgia-perimeter/>

6 Georgia State University Strategic Plan (n.d.) Goal 1. Retrieved from <http://strategic.gsu.edu/preamble/goal-1/>

7 U.S. News & World Report (n.d.) Campus Ethnic Diversity: National Universities. Retrieved from <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/campus-ethnic-diversity>.

8 U.S. News & World Report (n.d.) Economic Diversity: National Universities. Retrieved from <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/economic-diversity>.

9 In contrast to the common practice of excluding Asian students from underrepresented minority numbers, Georgia State University includes them on account of the fact that a large proportion of Asian students enrolled at Georgia State University are also low

We have also continued to attract an increasing number of low-income students to our campus. Since 2010, we have seen a steady increase in the number of Pell-eligible students attending Georgia State University, from 48% up to 59% in fall 2014.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPLETION GOALS, HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Institutional Completion Goals and Results

In 2011, Georgia State University committed to reach a graduation rate of 52% by 2016 and 60% by 2021.¹⁰ We also committed to conferring 2,500 more degrees annually than we did in 2010 and to eliminating all significant achievement gaps between student populations.

On the surface, attaining these goals seems implausible. Georgia State's demographic trends—characterized by huge increases in the enrollments of at-risk students in recent years—typically would project a steep *decline* in student outcomes. Georgia State University, though, has been able to make dramatic gains towards its success targets even as the student body has become more financially distressed. In the relatively short period since the adoption of the Strategic Plan in 2011, the overall number of Bachelor degrees conferred by Georgia State has increased by 16%. The gains have been even greater for a number of at-risk student populations.

In the 2014-2015 academic year, Georgia State University conferred record numbers of bachelor degrees to Pell-eligible, first generation, Black or African American, and Hispanic students. Since the 2010-2011 academic year, the number of Bachelor's degrees conferred to first-generation students has increased by 32%, and to Pell students by 36%. Meanwhile, underrepresented students have also made striking gains over the period, with conferrals increasing by 44% for Hispanic students and 37% for African Americans.¹¹

It is interesting to note that in the 2014-2015 academic year, Georgia State University saw a decline in the number of degrees conferred to Adult Learners. This is not due to a decline in the enrollment of Adult Learners at Georgia State or in their success rates. To the contrary, because Adult Learners are defined as students aged 25 and older *at the time of graduation*, the decline in undergraduate degree conferrals to the group is a direct consequence of the average decrease in time to degree that we have been able to achieve through our numerous student success initiatives. Our undergraduate transfer students, for instance, are taking less time to earn their degrees and far fewer are reaching the age of 25 by the point of graduation.

Similarly, since the launch of Georgia State University's current strategic plan, and the start of our participation in Complete College Georgia, our institutional graduation rate has increased by 6 percentage points to a record 54%, with further gains being tracked for 2015.

income, first in their family to go to college, and/or first in their family to live in the U.S.

10 Georgia State University (2012) College Completion Plan 2012: A University-wide Plan for Student Success (The Implementation of Goal 1 of the GSU Strategic Plan). Retrieved from http://enrollment.gsu.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/57/files/2013/09/GSU_College_Completion_Plan_09-06-12.pdf

11 Actual percent increases were much higher in these two categories, but we have controlled for the effects of the University implementing more rigorous processes encouraging students to self-report their race and ethnicity.

GSU Undergraduate Degrees Conferred by Academic Year, 2010 to Present

		Academic Year				
		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Status	Adult Learners	1,528	1,553	1,689	1,755	1,679
	Pell-eligible Students	2,015	2,321	2,607	2,711	2,742
	First Generation Students	848	1,016	1,083	1,100	1,117
Race	White	1,808	1,888	1,922	1,916	1,816
	Black or African American	1,300	1,440	1,552	1,682	1,777
	Asian	463	485	558	532	512
	More Than One Race	168	146	152	179	161
	American Indian or Alaska Native	18	9	17	10	15
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	20	15	8	6	11
	Not Reported	205	227	251	281	330
Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic	3,459	3,686	3,854	3,964	3,965
	Hispanic	288	313	360	394	415
	Not Reported	235	211	246	248	242
Total Students Receiving Undergraduate Degrees		3,982	4,210	4,460	4,606	4,622

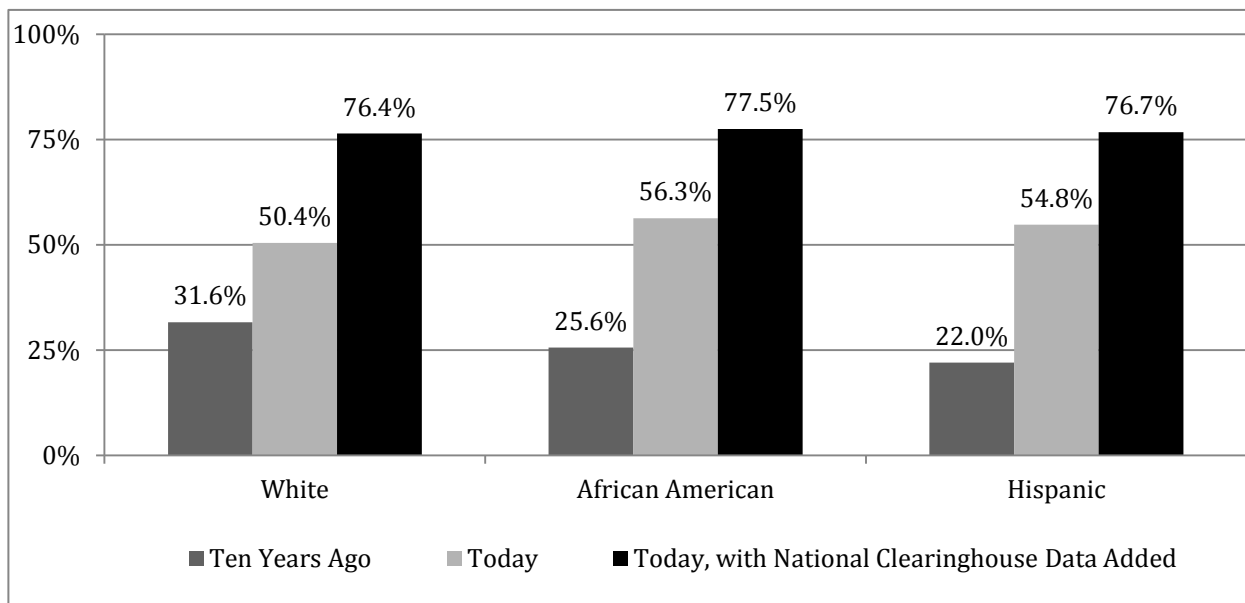
*Academic Year defined as Summer -Fall-Spring (e.g. AY 2014 - 2015 is Summer 2014, Fall 2014, and Spring 2015).

GSU Undergraduate Graduation Rates by Population, 2010 to Present

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
6-Year Graduation Rate	48%	48%	51%	53%	54%
6-Year: African American	51%	52%	54%	57%	55%
6-Year: White	46%	45%	49%	52%	53%
6-Year: Hispanic	58%	48%	53%	54%	56%
6-Year: Pell	51%	49%	51%	53%	51%
5-Year Graduation Rate	40%	43%	44%	46%	46%

Low-income and first-generation students' families move frequently due to changes in jobs and economic circumstances when compared to middle- and upper-class college students. This phenomenon significantly impacts Georgia State's institutional graduation rates. Using National Student Clearinghouse data to track Georgia State's most recent 6-year cohort across all universities nationally, the success rates are even more encouraging. For the current year, a record 76% of the students who started at Georgia State six years ago have either graduated from Georgia State or some other institution or are still actively enrolled in college. The numbers for African American (77.5%) and Latino (76.7%) students are even higher.

6 Year Graduation Rates Among First Time First Year Freshman, who Started at Georgia State University



This combination of large increases in Pell enrollments and significantly rising graduation rates confounds the conventional pattern. Nationally, one can track a strong correlation between increases in Pell rates and *decreases* in graduation rates. Georgia State University’s completion efforts have made us a clear outlier nationally. In fact, among all of our peer institutions as defined by the Board of Regents, Georgia State University now has both the highest Pell rate *and* the highest graduation rate.

How has Georgia State University made the gains outlined above? How do we propose to reach our ambitious future targets? In one sense, the answer is simple. We employ a consistent, evidenced-based strategy. Our general approach can be summarized as follows:

- Use data aggressively in order to identify and to understand the most pervasive obstacles to our students’ progressions and completion.
- Be willing to address the problems by becoming an early adopter. This means piloting new strategies and experimenting with new technologies. After all, we will not solve decades-old problems by the same old means.
- Track the impacts of the new interventions via data and make adjustments as necessary to improve results.
- Scale the initiatives that prove effective to have maximal impact. In fact, many of the programs that we offer are currently touching 10,000 students or more annually.

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGIES

1. GPS Advising

High-impact strategy	Use predictive analytics and a system of more than 800 alerts to track all undergraduates daily, identify at-risk behaviors, and have advisors respond to alerts by intervening in a timely fashion to get students back on track.
Related Goal	Goal #1: Increase in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by USG institutions. Goal #2: Increase the number of degrees that are earned ‘on time.’ Goal #3: Decrease excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree. Goal #4: Provide intrusive advising to keep students on track to graduate.
Summary of Activities	In fall 2014, our GPS Advising System was upgraded to generate financial alerts based on student housing choices and past due histories to target students for financial counseling. In 2016, Georgia State University will consolidate with Georgia Perimeter College (GPC). EDUCAUSE, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (the Helmsley Trust) and in partnership with Achieving the Dream (ATD), has awarded Georgia State University a grant to facilitate our efforts to deploy our technology solution and adapt our advising strategy in order to increase graduation rates for the 22,000 students seeking associate degrees at GPC. In addition to providing much needed support to students seeking associate degrees, the extension of our GPS to encompass the entirety of the new consolidated university provides us with the opportunity to better understand and support transfer pathways between two- and four-year institutions.
Baseline Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Students receiving undergraduate degrees in the 2014-2015 Academic Year: 4,622

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Six Year Graduation Rate: 54% • Mean number of credit hours earned at time of undergraduate degree completion: 142.9 • This past academic year, there were more than 43,000 individual meetings between students and advisors that were prompted by alerts from GPS Advising.
Interim Measures of Progress	<p>The numbers we are achieving via the programs are exceptionally strong. We have been tracking the use of the system and gathering interim metrics such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit hours at the time of graduation (which have declined by an average of 4)
Measures of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Undergraduate Degree conferrals • Undergraduate Six-Year Graduation rates • Mean number of credit hours earned at time of undergraduate degree completion
Lessons Learned	<p>The true potential of predictive analytics comes, not from its ability to identify students at risk, but in its ability to support intensive advising practices. In order for predictive analytics to make a significant impact in higher education, technology solutions must be accompanied by investment in advising personnel and practices that can most effectively translate data into action.</p> <p>Academic choices have a significant impact on career aspirations and vice versa. With the introduction of a new career matcher feature into our existing GPA advising platform (powered by data from Burning Glass), students are shown lists of common careers commonly associated with their chosen or prospective majors, as well as information about what skills are sought after by employers in those fields. Advising students with a view to life beyond graduation provides them with a broader perspective about what academic success means, as well as stronger sense of direction and motivation to pursue their degree, not as an end in itself, but as a springboard to future success in life and career.</p>

2. Summer Success Academy

High-impact strategy	<p>Use predictive analytics to identify admitted students for the fall freshman class who are academically at-risk and require that these students attend a seven-week summer session before fall classes.</p> <p>The program was initiated in 2012 as an alternate to deferring weaker freshmen admits to the Spring semester. Students earn 7 hours of credit toward their Bachelor's degree while receiving intensive academic and personal support including supplemental instruction, advisement, learning communities, team building, financial literacy training.</p>
Related Goal	Goal #7: Increase the likelihood of degree by transforming the way that remediation is accomplished
Summary of Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since summer 2014, the design of the summer Success Academy program was revised to include several additional features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Friday Workshop Series</i> • <i>A Service Learning Component</i> • <i>Targeted Academic Coaching</i> • <i>Program Incentives</i> • <i>Increased emphasis on developing rapport with students prior to the summer through regular communication and follow-up</i> • <i>A Professional Mentorship Program</i> • <i>A STEM Freshman Learning Community</i>
Baseline Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The one-year retention rate for students participating in the Summer Success Academy in 2014 was 81.5%, a significant increase over the 50% retention rate that would be expected by this population as recently as 2011.</i>
Interim Measures of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In summer 2015, the program enrolled 288 students.</i> • <i>The average one-year retention rate for students who enrolled in the Summer Success Academy since Fall 2012 is 87%, four points higher than the average among non-Summer Success Academy students of 83%</i> • <i>The two-year retention rate for students who participated in the Summer Success Academy in Fall 2012 is 80%, ten points higher than the two-year retention rate for all other students entering as Freshmen in the same year.</i>
Measures of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention rates • Graduation rates
Lessons Learned	<p><i>While the Summer Success Academy is a program that would most certainly be of benefit to all students, it is important to ensure that the size of the program does not outstrip resources. The amount of personalized attention that students receive in the program is a significant reason for the program's success, not only because of the level of academic coaching required for our most at-risk students, but also because mentoring by peers and professionals also provides academy students with a sense of self-efficacy and the 'soft' skills necessary to 'do college.'</i></p>

Georgia State University currently has a proposal before the Kresge Foundation to expand our current program, while at the same time collecting validation data that would allow the Foundation to help promote the Success Academy as a national best practice for closing the achievement gap for at-risk populations

3. Panther Retention Grants

High-impact strategy	<p>Provide micro grants to students at the fee drop each semester to help cover modest financial shortfalls impacting the students' ability to pay tuition and fees to prevent students from stopping/dropping out.</p> <p>Staff examine the drop lists for students with genuine unmet need, who are on track for graduation using our academic analytics, and who have modest balances for tuition and fees. Students are offered micro grants on the condition that they agree to certain activities, including meeting with a financial counselor to map out plans to finance the rest of their education.</p>
Related Goal	<p>Goal #1: Increase in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by USG institutions</p> <p>Goal #10: Mitigate the detrimental effects of financial need on student recruitment, retention, and graduation</p>
Summary of Activities	<p>2,094 grants were distributed in 2014-2015. The largest group of recipients last year were seniors, who often are running out of Hope funding or exhausting other aid.</p>
Baseline Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89% of students who received PRG funding in 2013-2014 either graduated or had reenrolled in at least one of the two subsequent semesters • 93% of seniors who received PRG funding in fall 2014 either graduated or had reenrolled in at least one of the two subsequent semesters • 59% of seniors who received PRG funding in 2013-2014 graduated within three semesters (one year) of receiving the grants.
Interim Measures of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rate of "returnees" to the program in 2014-2015 was under 25%. • In 2014-2015, Georgia State University saw a greater than 2:1 return on its return on investment through an increase of \$5.2M in recovered tuition and fees.
Measures of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention Rates • Graduation Rates
Lessons Learned	<p>A data-driven approach to award dispersion ensures that support is given to students who are both in need and who are likely to succeed when their need is met. This represents a shift in perspective, away from distributing funds as a response to financial need alone, and toward an approach that is first and foremost motivated by an interest in eliminating non-academic barriers to student success.</p> <p>Many students lack the financial literacy necessary to ensure that an otherwise sustainable amount of financial support is managed effectively through to the end of their degrees. The Panther Retention Grants are an excellent way to respond to the financial needs of student who are on track to degree, but who encounter financial shortfalls as they near graduation. In an effort to be more proactive, GSU has added a set of financial indicators to its predictive analytics and has also committed to establishing a dedicated financial counseling center by the end of Spring 2016. Through proactive interventions like these, GSU expects to see fewer of its students run into financial problems later in their degree, while at the same time providing tis students with the tools necessary for financial security in career upon graduation.</p>

4. Keep Hope Alive (KHA)

High-impact strategy	<p>In 2008, the graduation rate for students who lost the Hope scholarship was only 20%, 40-points lower than the rate for those who held on to it. Gaining the Hope Scholarship back after losing it is a statistical longshot: only about 9% of Georgia State students pull this off. Using a \$500 incentive for two semesters after the scholarship is lost, the Program requires students to sign a contract agreeing to meet with their advisors, attend academic skills workshops and participate in financial literacy training.</p> <p>By signing a contract to receive \$500 for each of the first two semesters after losing Hope, students agree to participate in a series of programs and interventions designed to get them back on track academically and to make wise financial choices in the aftermath of losing the scholarship.</p> <p>Scholarship Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Program is open to freshman and sophomore students with a 2.75 – 2.99 HOPE grade point average.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student must pursue a minimum of 30 credit hours within the next academic year (fall, spring, and summer semesters). ○ Students must attend Student Success workshops facilitated by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. ○ Students must meet with their academic coach on a regular basis. ○ Students are required to attend mandatory advisement sessions facilitated by the University Advisement Center.
Related Goal	Goal #1: Increase in the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by USG institutions Goal #10: Mitigate the detrimental effects of financial need on student recruitment, retention, and graduation
Summary of Activities	Keep Hope Alive supported a record number of students and continues to have a success rate of about 50% even with a significant expansion in the number of students.
Baseline Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Since 2008, institutional HOPE retention rates have increased by 50%, from 49% to 77% in 2014. ● The six-year graduation rate for students who lost their HOPE scholarship at some point in their academic carrier has increased from 21% in 2008 to 35% in 2014.
Interim Measures of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For students in KHA in the period from 2011 to 2014, better than 55% gained the scholarship back at the next marker ● Leveraging our \$1,000 scholarship investment by gaining between \$6,000 and \$12,000 of Hope dollars back again.
Measures of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Retention rates for students receiving the HOPE scholarship ● Six-year graduation rates for students who lost their HOPE scholarship at some point in their academic career.
Lessons Learned	Losing the HOPE scholarship puts students far more at risk than losing a 3.0 GPA.

5. Meta-Majors

High-impact strategy	<p>Requiring all students to choose a meta-major puts students on a path to degree that allows for flexibility in future specialization in a particular program of study, while also ensuring the applicability of early course credits to their final majors. Implemented in conjunction with major maps, block scheduling, and freshman learning communities, meta-majors provide clarity and direction in what would otherwise be a confusing and unstructured registration process.</p> <p>Upon registration, all students are required to enroll in one of seven meta-majors: STEM, Arts & Humanities, Health, Education, Policy & Social Science, and Exploratory. Once students have selected their meta-major, they are given a choice of several block schedules, which are pre-populated course timetables including courses relevant to their first year of study. On the basis of their timetable selection, students are assigned to Freshman Learning Communities consisting of 25 students who are in the same meta-major and take classes according to the same block schedules of 5 – 6 courses in addition to GSU1010, a 1 credit hour course providing students with essential information and survival skills to help them navigate the logistical, academic, and social demands of the University.</p>
Related Goal	Goal #2: Increase the number of degrees that are earned ‘on time.’ Goal #3: Decrease excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree
Summary of Activities	<p>A major enhancement associated with the program this year has been the engagement and partnership of the colleges around meta majors. Instead of just exploring majors based on the content and insights developed independently by the instructor for the FLC, colleges are structuring the orientation class and developing extensive programming designed to support major/discipline and career exploration. For example, last year the Robinson College of Business completely re-thought how Robinson presents GSU 1010. Last year, they ran a natural experiment where half of their FLC sections were taught with the enhanced curriculum they developed and half were taught the old way. Students who had the RCB enhanced curriculum were retained at a better rate and were much more involved with student organization and with majors. This year all the RCB FLCs are being taught in this way and they are working on a plan to structure and build on what they are doing in GSU 1010 to enhance the major across all program years.</p> <p>The FLC team also improved the hiring process for GTAs associated with the program and improved support for GSU 1010 instructors.</p> <p>Additionally, we have worked to improve math alignment for majors. One of the benefits of the FLC program is ensuring that students only take college algebra and calculus if they need it. Though we do not have math in every FLC, communities that do have math ensure that students are on a math track appropriate to their major. Students that do not need calculus either take Statistics or Math Modeling.</p>

Baseline Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the 2014-2015 academic year, enrollment in a Freshman Learning Community by meta-major was found to increase a student's likelihood of being retained through to the following year by 11% (82% versus 71% for students who were not in an FLC).
Interim Measures of Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 80% of non-honors, non-Athlete freshmen were in an FLC in Fall 2014.
Measures of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Average GPA• Freshman retention rates• Credit hours at graduation
Lessons Learned	<p>Time is money, and students who switch between majors, especially after the freshman year, accumulate wasted credits. With large numbers of low-income students who have strictly limited resources, mistakes in choosing majors can equate to college attrition.</p> <p>Meta-majors, block scheduling, and freshman learning communities have all been shown to significantly improve the chances of student success. GSU has introduced each of these approaches at different times in its history. Bringing each of these best practices together as part of an integrated admissions strategy has produced a synergy, with power greater than the sum of that of its parts.</p>

OBSERVATIONS

Georgia State University is testimony to the fact that students from all backgrounds can succeed at high rates. Moreover, our efforts over the past few years show that dramatic gains are indeed possible—not through changing the nature of the students served but through changing the nature of the institution that serves them.

Timeline of Student Success Initiatives at Georgia State University

Initiative	Year Started	Summary	Scale
Freshman Learning Communities	1999	First-year students sorted into cohorts of 25 based on meta-major; take all courses together in block schedule.	95% of first-year students in 2013-14
Supplemental Instruction	2005	Students who are most successful in courses hired as peer tutors for other students in the course; many tutors eligible for work-study.	9,700 students in 2013-14
Mathematics Interactive Learning Environment	2006	Redesign of introductory math courses (algebra, statistics, and pre-calculus) using a hybrid, emporium model of face-to-face and machine-guided instruction.	7,500 students in 2013-14
Keep HOPE Alive Scholarship	2008	Small grants to students who lose eligibility for Georgia's HOPE merit scholarship, combined with academic and financial counseling.	377 students since 2009
Panther Retention Grants	2011	Small grants (combined with academic and financial counseling) to juniors and seniors who are on-track academically, but are required by a state of Georgia rule to be dropped from classes because they have small outstanding balances on tuition or fees.	4,200 students since 2011
Graduation and Progression System	2012	Sophisticated dashboard for advisers that displays real-time analyses of student academic progress and raises alerts calling for intervention; coupled with consolidating undergraduate advising and more than doubling the number of advisers.	Prompted 43,000 student-adviser meetings in 2013-14
Summer Success Academy	2012	Opportunity for the most academically at-risk 10 percent of incoming freshmen to take 7 credit hours and receive intensive academic advisement and financial literacy training during the summer before their first year.	320 students in Summer 2014

Source: Building A Pathway to Student Success at Georgia State University¹²

Successful Strategies and Lessons Learned

From Reactive to Proactive

Georgia State University's Panther Retention Grant Program continues to be among its most successful college completion programs. Not only does it continue to make a significant difference for the many students who receive it, but this strategy is also being adopted by many other colleges and universities across the nation. By demonstrating the impact of innovative ways of eliminating barriers to successful and timely degree completion, Georgia State University is making a difference in the lives of students beyond its own borders.

As important as it is to address financial need when it arises, it is also important to be proactive and work to reduce the chances of students running into financial hardship in the first place. From our experience with students receiving Panther Retention Grants, and from improvements to our GPS Advising platform, we have learned that many of our students lack the skills necessary to plan the use of their financial aid in a sustainable fashion. Georgia State University has committed to establishing a Financial Counseling Center, which is expected to open by the end of Summer 2016. (See below for more information)

12 Ithaka S+R (2015) Building a Pathway to Student Success at Georgia State University. Retrieved from http://sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/reports/SR_Case_Study_Building_Pathway_Student_Success_042315_0.pdf.

From Competition to Collaboration

As a founding member of the University Innovation Alliance, Georgia State University has been working with ten other national research universities to find scalable solutions to problems facing low income, first generation, and minority students on their way to college completion. By putting aside traditional university ranking systems that pit universities against each other, the University Innovation Alliance has, in just one year, made great strides in changing the national conversation around higher education. Through sharing and mutual support, successful programs at each UIA institution are being replicated. The US News and World Report ranks Georgia State University 5th in the country among the “most innovative” universities,¹³ which is evidence of the fact that innovation is increasingly synonymous with evidence-based approaches to student success. Building on the success of our data-driven approach to intensive advising, Georgia State University has been awarded an \$8.9 million First in the World grant from the Department of Education.¹⁴ For the next four years, we will be taking the lead on a project involving each of the other eleven schools in the University Innovation Alliance, which will establish a scientifically valid link between intensive advisement and college completion for low income and first generation students. When students succeed, we all win.

Limits to Scalability

In summer 2014, a record 320 students enrolled in the Summer Success Academy. With a cohort of this size, the program saw larger class sizes and reductions in student motivation and engagement. Although it is possible that changes in student behavior were not directly caused by the increase in numbers, our team underwent a thorough program evaluation process, which resulted in several significant improvements, including incentives, workshops (which address academics, social skills, personal development, leadership), smaller class sizes in courses, and various other opportunities to engage. Anecdotally, these changes have been seen to significantly improve motivation and student engagement. Based on our experience in 2014, we made the conscious decision to reduce enrollments in 2015. Assuming our changes see the kind of improved student performance that we expect, we are planning once again increase our enrollments in summer 2016.

Planned Improvements to College Completion Activities

The work we have been doing to promote student success at Georgia State University since the launch of Freshman Learning Communities in 1999 has steadily increased graduation rates among our traditionally high risk student populations, but it has also served to foster a culture of student success among faculty, staff, and administration. In addition to the well-established and high impact strategies described above, Georgia State University continues to employ data analysis to identify and understand the obstacles that our students are facing, and to test innovative new solutions to facilitate efficient pathways to the attainment of high quality degrees.

With the help of a Transformational Planning Grant generously awarded to Georgia State University in July 2014 by the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities (APLU) in partnership with Urban Serving Universities (USU) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), we have initiated a series of major projects meant to address three major issues that continue to confront our students: (1) limited availability of courses necessary for the most timely academic progression, (2) insufficient financial literacy among our student and the devastating implications of many of the poor decisions that result), and (3) failures to deliver the alerts that identify that a student if off path is the most systematic and timely manner possible.

I. Optimizing Course Scheduling using Predictive Analytics

Until now, course scheduling has been too often based on faculty preference, which meant that a disproportionate number of courses were being taught during the middle of the day frequently on topics that did not fully address the progression needs of students. Additionally, there was not always sufficient campus classroom space to offer the number of courses requested during peak times, and we had insufficient capacity in required courses to meet student demand. Finally, scheduling of prerequisite and sequential courses was often interrupted by faculty leaves and availability, which delayed student progression in many cases. As a result of an analysis conducted by our Office of Institutional Research, we have shifted our course scheduling policy so as to balance faculty preference with other important factors like room availability, student demand, and academic program requirements. We now will employ the aggregate data that we are collecting on the major maps and progression of each individual student to predict what courses are needed and in what numbers each semester. As a result of our new policy framework, we expect to see immediate and marked improvements in our rates of student progression, along with a resulting decrease in average cost per degree and an increase in student satisfaction. With help from Ad Astra, we are implementing a predictive analytics solution that will allow us to consistently execute our new, more student friendly scheduling model, while at the same time allowing us to be constantly adaptive to changes in student course demand as they occur.

II. Establishing a Financial Counseling Center

¹³ Georgia State University News (September 9, 2016) U.S. News Ranks Georgia State Among Nation’s Leading Teaching, Innovative Universities. Retrieved from <http://news.gsu.edu/2015/09/09/u-s-news-ranks-georgia-state-among-nations-leading-teaching-innovative-colleges-and-universities/>

¹⁴ Georgia State University News (September 21, 2015) Georgia State University Gets \$8.9 Million Grant from U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://news.gsu.edu/2015/09/21/georgia-state-university-gets-8-9-million-grant-from-u-s-department-of-education/>

In an effort to mitigate the financial risks to student retention that are created by non-academic collegiate expenditures, GSU has used ten years of student financial data and more than 140,000 Georgia state student records to develop predictive analytics identifying when students make financial decisions that put them at risk of attrition. These enhanced predictive analytics include information about student housing choices and past due histories to target students for financial counseling. SunTrust Foundation will fund a dedicated financial counseling center with an extensive outreach function using these cutting-edge analytics—the first of its kind in the USG and one of the first in the nation. President Becker has made a commitment to the opening of such a center, expected by the end of the 2016 academic year.

III. Empowering Students through Mobile Application Development

In collaboration with the Education Advisory Board, GSU helped to develop a student-facing tool for smart devices that incorporates data analytics to provide students with major and career guidance, best-fit courses and schedules, time management tools, and smart resource recommendations about student support that is relevant to their specific needs. The current version of the app provides students with time management coaching in the form of syllabus- and analytics- driven alerts or “nudges”—real-time notifications that pop up on the students’ smart phones and tablets the second an issue is identified. This mobile application was piloted in two phases during the spring and summer of 2015, and is currently deployed for use by a large cohort of students participating in the GSU Summer Success Academy. Based on research and lessons learned from the pilot, the application is undergoing a redesign which will continue to be tested during the 2015-16 academic year.

As the story of Georgia State University demonstrates, institutional transformation in the service of student success does not come about as a result of a single program, but grows from a series of small changes that undergo continue reevaluation and refinement. What it also shows is how a series of seemingly small but successful initiatives can significantly transform an institution’s culture. As we have seen improvements in the success of our students, the campus community has come to be driven by a shared vision.

Building on our success in the use of adaptive learning technology in introductory mathematics courses, for example, we are in the process of rolling out adaptive and hybrid versions of introductory courses in Psychology and Political Science. In 2008, DFW rates in College Algebra, Pre-Calculus, and Introduction to Statistics stood at an average of 43% and were, and represented a leading reason motivating students to drop out of Georgia State University after their first year. By replacing the traditional model with one that would see students spend only one hour in lecture per week, and three hours a week in a dedicated computer lab working through personalized, adaptive exercises, we have seen a marked improvement in the success of students in these challenging but foundational courses. Since reconfiguring these first year math courses, and the inauguration of MILE (our Mathematics Interactive Learning Environment), we have served more than 7,500 students each year using this strategy and have seen a decrease in the DFW rate by more than 50% (down to 19% in Fall 2014). Through this change in approach, we now see approximately 1,800 more students pass their introductory mathematics courses per year, and in a way that does not sacrifice academic rigor or the quality of learning. As such, the courses have proven truly preparatory for success in higher level courses. By implementing similar strategies in psychology and political science, we expect to see significant gains for students in these departments as well.

With a strong institutional vision, well defined goals, and nationally recognized accomplishments, Georgia State University has developed a culture of student success oriented toward constant improvement upon existing programs, while at the same time disseminating insights about our experiences for the sake of fostering the success of students across Georgia and the nation as a whole.

The year ahead will be an exciting and challenging one, as Georgia State University consolidates with Georgia Perimeter College (GPC) to form the largest institution of higher learning in Georgia, and one of the largest in the nation. If the lessons we have learned, the initiatives we have implemented, the technologies we have developed, and the results we have achieved can be transferred to the context of GPC, the ultimate winners will be the students of the state of Georgia.

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