



GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Mission

Georgia Southern University is a public comprehensive and Carnegie Doctoral/R2 university offering associate, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees in nationally accredited programs in the liberal arts, sciences, and professional disciplines.

The University provides transformative learning opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse student population through its legacy of commitment to academic excellence and personal attention. Through the shared resources of its multiple locations, the University creates vibrant learning environments that foster an inclusive, student-centered culture of engagement designed to prepare students for lifelong service as scholars, leaders, and responsible stewards of their communities. The University enhances the quality of life and drive economic development in the Coastal Georgia region, the State of Georgia, and beyond by supporting collaborative efforts in technological innovation, scientific advancement, education, health services, artistic creativity, and cultural enrichment. Faculty, staff, and students embrace the values of integrity, civility, kindness, respect, sustainability, citizenship, and social responsibility in every facet of the University.

Fall 2018 Undergraduate Student Profile

As evidenced by fall 2018 student demographic data, Georgia Southern University enrolls a primarily full-time, residential, undergraduate population. Of 26,408 students enrolled in fall 2018, 23,130 (87.5%) were undergraduates and 20,823 (79%) were full-time. With a freshman on-campus residence requirement, the University housed 90% of beginning freshmen on campus. Consistent with its mission as a University System of Georgia institution, 90% of undergraduates were state of Georgia residents. The University enrolled 56% (n=14,897) undergraduate female students and 44% (n=11,511) undergraduate male students. Minorities accounted for 30% of the total University enrollment. Only 6% (n=1,388) of undergraduates were transfer students with most of these coming from other USG institutions.

The University first-year retention rate for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen who entered in fall 2017 (and returned in fall 2018) was 78%, dropping two percentage points from the previous year. The six-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen who entered in fall 2012 and completed a bachelor’s degree was 50%, completing at the same rate as the previous cohort. It is worth noting that approximately 15% of this cohort completed their degree at another institution of higher education, representing a total degree completion rate of 65%.

Table 1: Undergraduate Student Populations and One-Year Retention Rates

Undergraduate Student Demographics	Fall 2018 Percent of Student Body	Retention Rates Fall 2018
Hispanic/Latino	6.9%	78.1%
Black/African-American	25.1%	79.7%
White	60.3%	77.4%
Other	6.9%	78.3%
Unknown	.8%	81%
First Generation	30%	74.6%
Adult Learners	16%	73%
Pell Eligible	34.7%	75.2%
Military & Military-Affiliated	8%	75%

Source: Georgia Southern University Office of Institutional Research

Georgia Southern recognizes that there are differences in both retention and graduation rates, depending upon campus and student type. Our institutional priority is to address the variance in retention and graduation rates by continuing to build and scale student success initiatives and resources across the institution.

Evidence of Undergraduate Student Academic Preparedness

Regular Admission

Regular freshman admission at Georgia Southern University requires students to have a total SAT (evidence-based reading & writing + math) score of at least 1030 or have an ACT composite score of at least 20 and meet the Board of Regents minimum requirements for each portion of the SAT/ACT. Students must also have a satisfactory grade point average on the required high school curriculum (2.5 or higher). To be considered for transfer admission, students must be eligible to return to their current school, have a cumulative college GPA of 2.0 or higher on all work attempted, and have a minimum of 30 transferable semester hours or 45 transferable quarter hours.

The academic profile of beginning freshman for fall 2018 was a 3.36 high school GPA, a score of 1139 on the SAT, and a score of 23 on the ACT. Table 2 displays the average high school GPA for beginning freshmen for the past six years. The data indicates that Georgia Southern University generally admits above average students but would not be categorized as a “highly selective” institution.

Table 2: Average High School GPA for Beginning Freshmen for Past Six Fall Terms

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
3.21	3.24	3.27	3.29	3.33	3.34	3.36

Source: Georgia Southern University Office of Institutional Research

MOMENTUM YEAR UPDATE

Georgia Southern has participated in and sent teams to all USG Momentum events, including the Momentum Approach Summit, the Advising Academy, the Academic Mindset Summit, the Fall and Spring Co-requisite Academy meetings, and Gateways To Completion meetings (G2C). We are also educating the campus about both Momentum Year and the Momentum Approach, while seeking input about next steps.

The co-requisite model for learning support in English and in Mathematics was fully implemented in Fall 2018 on all three campuses. Georgia Southern University created a development and implementation committee that established the new policies and procedures for our learning support model. All policies and procedures reflect the USG guidance in this area. The Academic Success Center provides information on student placements for co-requisite courses to the academic departments and communicates learning support policy and procedures to academic advisors, admissions, and the Registrar’s Office. Learning Support courses are offered by the departments of Math and Writing and Linguistics. Furthermore, all learning support students have the same instructor for the CORE course and the co-requisite class.

Georgia Southern created nine (9) academic focus areas for exploratory students. Colleges and departments worked to design these focus areas as part of the institution’s Momentum Year implementation. Academic Affairs, the Registrar’s Office, and ITS collaborated on building the meta-majors in BANNER. All programs of study have been mapped to one of the nine focus areas (meta-majors) and Admissions is in the process of building them into the application (i.e. Exploratory in Business, Exploratory in Health Professions). Focus areas were used, in Summer 2019, at First-Year Orientation (SOAR) and all incoming first-year students completed a pre-orientation assessment (*MyMajors*) to assist them in confirming a focus area or major at orientation. The redesign of the academic and advisement elements of Orientation specifically focused on improving students’ transition to college by guiding them through the inform, discern, and affirm process in choosing an academic pathway.

Georgia Southern distributed the USG Academic Mindset Survey, via email request to new students, in Fall 2017 and Fall 2018. Both the initial survey and the follow-up survey had poor response rates, although the numbers improved in 2018. For Fall 2019, the USG Academic Mindset Survey will be administered as an assignment in our required First-Year Seminar course. Students will complete the first survey during the first week of classes, with the follow-up survey administered in mid-November. We have inventoried colleges, departments, and other academic affairs units on academic mindset practices in use. We are using the data to develop strategic faculty and staff professional development opportunities. Georgia Southern has also created a “mindset” committee, made up of faculty leaders who engage in innovative practices with their students.

As part of both our Momentum Year and our Transitions Improvement Plan, we re-evaluated the Orientation process to better help our students navigate their transition to College. As noted above, we completely restructured the academic aspects of our orientation programming, including our pre-Orientation modules, and added a pre-orientation major/career assessment element. We also pre-registered our first-year students for fifteen-hour schedules, arranged in day/time blocks that students had identified as best fit.

Georgia Southern continues to work on a more holistic approach that integrates students' academic and co-curricular activities. This also allows us the opportunity to build a transition process through the first full year of a student's enrollment at the institution.

OTHER INSTITUTIONAL HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES, ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

Georgia Southern has made adjustments to its Complete College Georgia plan and initiatives to accommodate meeting the needs of students on three campuses. Many of our initial strategies were shared and scalable; however, our initial benchmarks and goals were no longer applicable. The strategies outlined below, like our Momentum Year and Transitions Improvement Plan, reflect the student success goals of Georgia Southern University, post-consolidation.

High-Impact Strategy: Early Academic Alerts

Improve academic alert communications and expand to all students in areas A-E CORE courses, along with other key courses as designated by academic programs.

Related Goal

Increase the sophomore to junior progression rate to 70% by fall 2025. This goal changed between 2017 and 2018 due to the changes in retention, persistence, and graduation rates created by merging data from three campuses.

Demonstration of Priority and/or Impact

Student attrition is greatest between the first and second years. However, an additional eight percent of Georgia Southern students leave the institution after their sophomore year. Georgia Southern continues to work to identify potential barriers and alleviate those barriers, where possible, to help students persist at the institution and progress to graduation. Many sophomore students experience both academic and financial challenges that did not present in their first year – or were alleviated by the high degree of programming and support in place for first-year students. Our goal in expanding the Academic Alert program was to provide additional support, as well as an early warning system to our sophomore students, as well as first-year students.

Summary of Activities

In 2017-2018, the CCG team implemented a revised Academic Alert policy. Beginning in fall 2017, academic alerts were expanded from the freshman population to all students enrolled in core courses in areas A-E, as well as in other key courses as designated by departments. Academic alerts were also renamed from early alert/midterm grades to emphasize that they are not midterm grades, but rather indications that students are not performing satisfactory work in one of several categories (i.e., grades, attendance, participation, missed assignments, or some combination of these categories).

Faculty are encouraged to submit academic alerts as early as possible to allow more time for students to make improvements and, in most cases, to allow academic advisors, academic success coaches, and faculty opportunities to intervene. Faculty may submit academic alerts as early as the first day of the term. However, the academic alert campaigns to faculty begin the third week of the term. Faculty are then asked to submit their alerts within a specified time frame (generally a month).

Measures of Progress

Baseline measure:

Fall 2016-Fall 2018 second-year retention: 65%

Lessons Learned

Georgia Southern transitioned to EAB SSC Navigate for alert submission in fall 2018. We use a campaign model to capture grades, which also allows us to nudge instructors to submit academic alerts multiple times. Each alert issued for a student creates a case that allows for structured follow-up from an academic advisor, academic success coach, or other student success and support professional. Alert notifications to students also direct them on how to reach out to their instructor for advice and support.

However, it has also become clear that the broader use of alerts in CORE courses has limited opportunities for strategic outreach and intervention. Our next steps will be to explore whether using targeted major-specific sophomore-level courses is a more effective approach to intervention with sophomore students.

High-Impact Strategy: "Soar In 4!" Campaign (Local Branding of "15 To Finish")

Increase the number of undergraduate students enrolling in 15 or more credit hours per semester.

Related Goal

Increase average undergraduate credit hour load from 12.38 (Fall 2018) to 14.00 by Fall 2022.

Demonstration of Priority and/or Impact

A minimum full-time load is not sufficient to allow students to graduate on time. Encouraging students to register for a 15-credit hour load per semester has considerable potential to reduce time to degree. Furthermore, both USG and Georgia Southern data demonstrates that students who attempt at least fifteen hours per term in their first year graduate at substantially higher rates than their peers.

Summary of Activities

Prior to summer 2019, we showed a two-minute “Soar in 4!” video to students and parents at orientation. The video had three objectives: (1) promote graduation in four years; (2) inform students that completing more than 15 hours per semester often corresponds with higher term and overall GPAs; and (3) demonstrate the costs of additional semesters.

In summer 2019, we moved to an interactive conversation with students and parents in a joint information session, led by academic advising teams at orientation. The presentation and discussion had three objectives: (1) promote graduation in four years; (2) inform students that completing more than 15 hours per semester often corresponds with higher term and overall GPAs; and (3) demonstrate the costs of additional semesters. Advising teams also provided both students and parents program maps, with all degree requirements presented in eight semesters (four years). In addition, we registered our first-year students for fifteen-hour schedules, arranged in day/time blocks that students had identified as best fit.

We have also continued previous “Soar in 4!” marketing efforts, including social media placement, bus advertisements, digital signage, yard signs, door decals, and posters, and through an advertisement in the student “Our House” publication. There is also significant information on “SOAR in 4!” on the Provost’s website and available in academic advisement areas.

Measures of Progress

Baseline measure:

Fall 2018 average undergraduate credit hour load: 12.38

Fall 2018 undergraduate students not enrolled in 15 or more hours: 10,201 (44%)

Lessons Learned

Initial data from fall 2019 indicates a small increase in undergraduate credit hour load. Furthermore, more students began fall 2019 with a fifteen-hour schedule. Again, initial data indicates a 3% increase in the number of students enrolled in 15 or more hours. Moving from a generally passive approach to information sharing to a proactive strategy of interaction with parents and students, coupled with guaranteeing students the right schedule as they enter their first semester in college, seems to be moving Georgia Southern and its students in the right direction. We will spend the next year refining our registration strategy and timing for our first-year students. We will also explore opportunities to pre-register sophomore, junior, and senior students for key progression courses – allowing them to complete a schedule, rather than create it from whole cloth.

High-Impact Strategy: New Academic Intervention, Academic Standing, and Limited Grade Forgiveness Policies

Decrease the number of students suspended from Georgia Southern University, effectively limiting their chances of earning a degree.

Related Goal

Increase student persistence and progression rates, particularly in the sophomore and junior years.

Demonstration of Priority and/or Impact

Each year, approximately 25% of students dip below an institutional GPA of 2.0. Students in poor academic standing often leave the institution—not because of suspension—but because their academic progress (or lack thereof) negatively impacts their financial aid (SAP), their self-esteem, their ability to balance work and to support themselves academically by seeking academic support, etc. Each of these students met the admissions requirements of the institution and should, by all rights, be successful in meeting their goal of earning a degree.

Summary of Activities

Partnering with the Provost’s Office (Associate Provost for Student Success and Advising), two Faculty Senate committees revised the institutional Academic Standing Policy and wrote a Limited Grade Forgiveness Policy. The new policies were approved by the Faculty Senate in November 2017 and took effect fall 2018.

The new Academic Standing Policy is intended to hold students accountable without imposing excessively punitive requirements for continued enrollment at the institution. Students struggle academically for many reasons and some stumble spectacularly during their academic careers. An academic standing policy should both hold students accountable and provide them with a safety net of support, resources, and opportunities. It should also reward, not continue to punish, movement in the right direction (i.e., term GPAs above 2.25). Revising the Academic Standing Policy provided an opportunity for the institution to articulate the standards we expect of students, outline the consequences of failing to meet those standards, and clearly explain both the pathways to success and the tools, resources, and support a student can reasonably expect to receive as they strive for academic excellence.

Georgia Southern also established a limited Grade Forgiveness Policy. Not having a grade forgiveness policy meant that missteps in the transition from high school to college were often punitive rather than instructional and transformative. In addition, many students who end up in poor academic standing require additional semesters to bring their GPAs up to 2.0. These students end up with anywhere from 10% to 40% more credit hours than required for graduation alone. The Limited Grade Forgiveness Policy (a) requires an application from the student; (b) limits both the number of retake attempts and the number of grade replacements; (c) limits the grade forgiveness to courses in which a D or an F was earned; and (d) limits the type of course for which a student can apply for grade forgiveness to CORE (Area A-E) courses.

In addition, to provide support for students in poor academic standing, the Academic Intervention Policy was revised to include all students in academic difficulty, not just first-year students. Students needing academic intervention will be paired with Academic Success Coaches and will create individualized Academic Improvement Plans.

Measures of Progress

Baseline measure:

Fall 2018 undergraduate students with GPA below 2.0: 2,487

Some metrics for this goal are still under development. All policies went into effect in August 2018 with the start of the 2018-2019 academic year. Next year, we will be able to better assess how at-risk students are progressing toward good standing. The first term in which students may be suspended, under the new policies, is fall 2019.

Lessons Learned

We are working to educate faculty on the challenges that students face, outside the classroom, that impact their academic output and progress. We also want faculty to see the many ways students work to improve their academic performance. As part of that process, we have created a role in EAB SSC Navigate for the Academic Standards Committee. As the Committee reviews student appeals, they will be guided through the advisement and success coaching notes, as well as be able to review the students’ Academic Improvement Plans.

HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGY: REGISTRATION CAMPAIGNS

Increase number of students registered for the next term by end of current semester.

Related Goal

Increase student retention, persistence, and progression metrics by creating a culture of enrollment.

Demonstration of Priority and/or Impact

Each semester, a number of students fail to register for the subsequent semester. While many of these students have valid reasons for not registering (such as graduating or transferring), others do not register due to difficulties experienced with registration or academic success issues. In fall 2018, 15,719 undergraduates were eligible to register for spring 2019. As of January 18, 2019 (end of schedule adjustment), 1,232 (7.8%) were still not registered for spring 2019.

The reasons why undergraduate students were not registered for spring 2019 as of January 18, 2019 are shown in Table 3. These data were collected from the survey portion of the injection pages (with a 30% response rate).

Table 3: Reasons for Not Registering for Spring 2018 for Students Who Responded to Survey

Reason	Number of Students Listing as Reason
Transferring	169
Personal	66
Financial	28
Military	14

Academic	12
Internship	21
Graduating	15
Family	8
Courses Unavailable	3
Other	39
Total	375

Summary of Activities

Each semester, several thousand undergraduate students fail to register during their scheduled registration period. To encourage them to register, the Associate Provost for Student Success and Advising administers an electronic survey (commonly referred to as the injection pages) to unregistered students at least three times each semester.

The first injection page is sent the day after registration begins for that particular group of students. The page is sent via My.GeorgiaSouthern to any student who has not registered for the subsequent semester. The injection page asks whether the student plans on registering for the following semester. If the student replies “no,” then the injection page asks for the reasons why: academic reasons; courses unavailable; family issues; financial issues; graduating; internships; military duties; personal reasons; transferring to another college; or other. Some of these reasons (like internships, graduating, transferring, military duties) are valid and do not require any further action. Others (academic reasons, courses unavailable, financial issues) are more within the control of the University and are the areas where our efforts are most likely to result in conversions from unregistered to registered status. Academic Advisors, associate deans, and other academic faculty and staff reach out to students, no matter what their reason, to gather more information and to offer registration assistance. If the student replies “yes,” then the injection page inquires as to why they have not registered.

The second injection page is sent towards the end of classes for that semester. This page is sent to all students who originally indicated that they plan to register but have still not done so. The injection page asks whether they plan to register and the reasons why they will not register or have not registered thus far. The third injection page is sent just before classes begin the following term, reminding students to register and asking if they need assistance from their advisor or another support unit on campus.

To convert ‘not registered’ students in areas within our control, the following activities are employed:

Current data on each college’s ‘not registered’ student population is shared by the Associate Provost with the applicable college dean’s office and academic advisement coordinators. Academic advisors use the information to reach out to ‘not registered’ students (through emails, phone calls, text messaging, and campaigns through EAB SSC Campus) to assist students in getting registered before the end of the semester.

In addition, Georgia Southern has created a Student Dashboard to function as another tool for communicating critical deadlines and other alerts that could affect a student’s registration and academic progression. The alerts focus on tuition and fees, financial aid, and registration and advising. Alerts are time-bound and triggered throughout the semester so students will receive personalized, timely communications as needed.

Measures of Progress

Baseline measure:

Baseline measure is the number of ‘eligible to register’ undergraduate students in the fall semester. While this number will vary each fall term, the objective is to reduce by 5% by the end of drop/add the following spring semester. The baseline measure (fall 2018 eligible to register students) was 15,719.

Lessons Learned

The injection page format provided us with data we were previously unable to collect. As we move forward, we are investing ways to do more personalized registration campaigns through EAB SSC Navigate. The injection pages are clunky and students report that they are annoying and drive them away from registration rather than towards. Students report that they respond much better to the personalized communications from their advisors facilitated by the EAB platform.

OBSERVATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Georgia Southern is engaged in many student success initiatives and high-impact practices. In our 2019 report, we will also report on our progress for the following student success strategies.

Reducing unnecessary credit accumulation:

The majority of degree programs at Georgia Southern University are 124 credit hours (120 hours + 4 institutional hours). Some degree programs in Music, Engineering, and Education are higher, with none exceeding 132 hours. In Fall 2018, 5,791 students were enrolled full-time, even though they had earned 120+ hours. In AY 2019-2020 we will work to develop academic advising strategies, increase student use of program maps and DegreeWorks, and strategize how to provide students with resources that might limit change of major actions.

First-Year Experience course (FYE 1220) redesign:

Georgia Southern engages in First-Year course redesign processes every five years or so. After participating in the USG FYE Academy, the AY 2019-2020 redesign is closely aligned with our Momentum Year and Transition Improvement Plans. We strategically and deliberately included elements of Inform, Discern, and Affirm, academic mindset, grit and perseverance, and transitions into and through college.

Sophomore-Year Experience course (CORE 2000) implementation:

Georgia Southern created a new Sophomore-Year Experience (SYE), CORE 2000, in the consolidation process. The course, which is styled as a CORE capstone that bridges general education to the discipline for students, had a pilot implementation in spring 2019. The goal of the course is to directly address second-year attrition by engaging students earlier – and more fully – with their desired major and professional goals.

Momentum Approach*Initiative One*

All academic programs will engage in a comprehensive curricular review and redesign (CCRR) process.

Goal: Increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates by updating curriculum to align programs and student learning outcomes to principles of best practices, trends in field and discipline, and industry and workforce needs.

Initiative Two

Communicate information clearly and transparently to students about what they need to know and do throughout their educational journey.

Goal: Provide clearly articulated transition tasks for all levels and populations of students.

Initiative Three

Restructure and realign academic support services areas in Academic Affairs to better meet student needs.

Goal: Systematically remove institutional barriers to student persistence and graduation and ensure that we deliver wrap-around support services to all students.

Initiative Four

Build and maintain an inclusive community that facilitates student engagement and fosters a positive educational journey for all students.

Goal: Academic Affairs and Student Affairs will collaborate on programming that helps students integrate their co-curricular activities with their academic program of study.

Initiative Five

Create Enrollment Services Centers to serve as a front-line, go-to resource for students on both the Armstrong Campus and the Statesboro Campus.

Goal: Create an Enrollment Services Center on the Armstrong Campus Center in AY 2019-2020.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND COMPLETION TEAM

Georgia Southern University's Student Success and Completion Team is:

Dr. Carl Reiber, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Christine Ludowise, Associate Provost for Student Success and Advising

Dr. Scot Lingrell, Vice President for Enrollment Management

Dr. Melanie Miller, Interim Vice President for Student Affairs

Our Academic Advising and Academic Success Leadership team.