

COMPLETE COLLEGE GEORGIA STATUS REPORT SAVANNAH STATE UNIVERSITY (SSU)

Updates, Progress, and Future Work

In her Complete College Georgia Plan, SSU established goals to increase access, retention and completion. Globally, the university committed to raise the four-year graduation rate by 16% (*i.e.* from 10-26%) and to raise the six-year graduation rate by 15% (*i.e.* from 34-49%). The goals require acceleration of the rate of successful exit from learning support courses and an increase in the progression rate of students moving towards degree completion.

In the Academic Year 2012-13, the most recent graduation rates are as follows:

Four-Year Rate for the 2008 Freshmen Cohort	7.9%
Six-Year Rate for the 2006 Freshmen Cohort	32.1%

Investigation of influences on low graduation rates revealed specific issues that appear to cause significant delays in graduation:

- I. Many students accumulate excessive credit hours without completing a degree. Contributing to this outcome are two factors:
 1. Students switch among majors, accumulating credit hours that do not contribute to the program in which they are eventually graduated.
 2. Students retake courses that they have previously passed with a grade of D—not satisfactory for particular majors, yet counted as credits completed.

- II. Entering freshman are “retained” for the second year at a rate of approximately 72% overall. Learning Support students, who are not college-ready, constitute approximately 10% of the entering class. Their retention rate averages 60% over the past 7 years. While these rates are comparable to other institutions, they are not indicative of genuine academic progress since many freshmen “return” in the second year without attaining sophomore standing (*i.e.*: successfully completing 30 credit hours). Contributing to this outcome are several factors:
 1. The average annual course load of the freshman cohort is 26, not 30 credits. Students generally regard 12 credits/term as a full load, rather than a minimum of 15 credits. This perception is based on the number of credits necessary for full financial aid rather than for satisfactory academic progress.
 2. A “gap” exists between average credits attempted and average credits earned, due to a significant number of withdrawals from courses during the term.

- III. A significant percentage of students intentionally register “part-time”, due to financial pressures and the need for nearly full-time employment. We have begun to track separately and to differentiate between the genuine “part-time” students (those attempting

and completing <12 credit hours/term), and the full-time but “under-performing” students (those attempting and completing 12-14 credits/term). Furthermore, some students discover that they have not satisfied core requirements as they approach the end of their studies. Many students do not regularly consult their academic advisors. They often enroll in programs and courses for which they are not prepared by prior study. As a result, students have by-passed institutional requirements, registering for classes without having satisfied pre-requisites.

- IV. Limited course scheduling in some programs may present an impediment for some students, especially those “out of synch” for numerous reasons. A new advisement instrument, Degree-Works, will help advisors and students to plan effective curricular pathways.
- V. Curriculum design may itself contribute to delayed graduation. Some majors require >120 credit hours for completion. Summer offerings frequently do not include upper-division requirements. This may delay graduation. *In the upcoming round of program reviews, faculty will be asked to justify programs requiring more than 120 credit hours for completion.*)

The university has taken significant steps towards addressing these issues. SSU has reexamined both advisement and learning support. Degree-Works is being implemented to monitor student academic progress and curriculum planning. When fully functional, it will be accessible by students, advisors, and curriculum schedulers to facilitate scheduling students into appropriate courses. SSU has also implemented the Grade-First early alert module, piloted last year within a limited number of courses with high D, F, and W rates. It is being implemented in all courses this academic year (2013-2014). The pre-requisite check functionality within BANNER is being fully implemented. This also will improve the efficacy of Degree-Works.

Warnings and Probation - The university has reviewed its academic policies on issuance of warnings and probation. As a result, an academic hold will apply to students on probation, along with a requirement that they will be enrolled in a “Learning Skills” course, under the auspices of the SSU Center for Academic Success. The objective is to assure that these students are under close guidance of professional advisors and that their impediments are being addressed.

Diverse Student Body - SSU continues collaboration through the CAMINO initiative, supported by the Lumina Foundation. The SSU Center for Academic Success has recruited an advisor for Hispanic students and funded a position in the Office of Admissions to be filled during academic year (2013-2014).

Transforming Remediation - SSU has updated its plan for transforming remediation, shifting its focus from the tiered model proposed in the original plan, toward strategies informed by this year’s system-wide meetings and forums on learning support. Currently, we have observed some success in expediting students through learning support by enrolling students in an 8-week learning support followed immediately by an 8-week core course. This allows students to catch up with their non-learning support peers by end of the term. In our two semesters piloting this approach for English, students who exited learning support passed the subsequent 8-week core

course at a higher rate (90%) than the average pass rate for the course (70%). This suggests a remarkable benefit due to recent remediation. Ongoing changes to course delivery models will continue. We also are proceeding to redesign the mathematics learning support as a co-curricular component of the core math course. Finally, we aim to help more students place into the core as they enter SSU by creating opportunities for skills practice prior to entry COMPASS testing for fall 2014 implementation. **SSU strongly supports system-level policy revision that would allow alternatives to the COMPASS as an exit requirement from Learning Support in favor of in-course assessments.**

Early Alert - An early alert system, Grades First, was piloted in spring 2013 and received alerts for over 300 students, who were contacted by the Center for Academic Success and referred to campus resources. The overall student response rate for the outreach efforts was lower than anticipated, so alternate methods of contact and follow-up will be added to the fall 2013 iteration of the program.

Adult Learning - SSU has convened its Adult Learning Committee, which will aim to develop its initial set of policies and practices for comprehensive prior learning assessment by the close of the fall 2013 semester.

Advising - During the 2012-2013 academic year, SSU successfully implemented centralized professional advising for all first-year students through the Center for Academic Success (CAS). Advisors saw more than 85% of all first-time full-time freshmen for at least one advising session during the academic year. Beginning in fall 2013, the professional advising program will expand to include all students under 60 credit hours. This will help address deficiencies in advising that we have identified. Through its professional advisors and the First Year Experience, CAS structures an individualized pathway of study for each student. Thus, each first year student develops, in concert with an advisor, an 8 semester program of study. A similar path towards completion will be required of transfer students. Undeclared students will undertake a structured path for their first two years, then work with major advisor to establish a clear course sequence towards accomplishment of the degree. SSU is also participating in STEM GPS (Guided Pathways for STEM majors) in cooperation with Savannah Technical College and Armstrong Atlantic State University.

Partnerships

SSU is engaged with Savannah Technical College at several levels. We have entered into an agreement whereby Savannah Tech students, especially those with significant distances of residence, will be allowed to reside in SSU housing. We are also establishing reverse transfer for students who would be best served at the Technical College. Additionally, we are developing a framework to utilize the Savannah Tech ESL Program to serve international students with insufficient English language proficiency. These discussions began in Fall 2012 and were expedited through the 2013 Summit.

Savannah State University continues to maintain current P-12 partnerships and is establishing new ones. Ongoing P-12 partnerships with Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS) include two TRIO programs (Upward Bound and Talent Search) and also GEARUP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). These are federally funded programs that aim to prepare students from low economic backgrounds and/or first generation college potential students for higher education. Already, funding for Talent Search and for Upward Bound has been renewed through 2016 and 2018 respectively. This is evidence of ongoing commitment to service to and engagement with the P-12 Schools.

Savannah State University is also partnering with the Housing Authority of Savannah in support of the Choice Neighborhood’s Comprehensive “Transformation Plan” for the East Savannah Gateway. This partnership focuses on student completion in the SCCPSS. The plan addresses three components: neighborhood, housing, and people. Thus, SSU students will work with the Principal Investigator, Prof. Deden Rukmana of the SSU Urban Planning Program, to develop sampling methodology, to conduct and analyze neighborhood surveys, and to report findings to the Housing Authority.

The School of Teacher Education provides expertise to the education taskforce as it works to develop strong, viable strategies to improve the performance of the four schools identified in the Authority’s original grant application: Spencer ES (K-5), East Broad ES (K-8), Shuman ES (K-8), and Savannah HS. Our collaboration with the Housing Authority of Savannah, in conjunction with the Superintendent of Savannah-Chatham County Public School System and other stakeholders, has as one major component the creation of high quality schools.

Other partnerships with SCCPSS include the Summer Science Camp in cooperation with the Bartlett Middle School. They also include two initiatives that develop talent at the high school level, *i.e.* SSU-JET (SSU Junior Engineering and Technology) and the Mathematics Summer Camps. Our STEM 360 efforts support education at all K-12 levels throughout the school district.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS

STEM Initiatives	
	Number of Student Participants
Summer Science Camp	85
SSU Jet	24
Mathematics Summer Camps	35
STEM 360	60
Department Education TRIO PROGRAMS	
GEAR-UP	500
SSS (Student Support Services)	175
Upward Bound	135

Additionally, SSU hosts Savannah Early College in cooperation with the Savannah Chatham School District. While in secondary school, students take courses here and earn college credits. On June 10th, Early College held its graduation at Savannah State University for 48 stellar seniors, matriculating to institutions throughout the University System of Georgia and the nation. Our Dual-Enrollment programs reached 86 students during the past academic year, of which the majority consist of Early College participants.

Key Observations and Evidence

I. How is SSU tracking and analyzing data to assess progress made to date?

SSU has invested in and is now implementing in IRPA, an institution-wide enterprise data warehouse to facilitate tracking and making key indicators easily available for campus use in monitoring its CCG progress and student success. An initial set of tracking metrics are now being built into this system and soon will have dashboard displays constantly available for key decision-makers (other metrics are planned for subsequent addition):

1. Enrollment Levels (# & %): Tracked longitudinally by ethnicity, gender, and other status metrics (i.e.: military). [*E.g.: Hispanic students grew from 14 to 76 between 2008 and 2012*]
2. Retention Rates: from fall to fall for freshman cohorts, separately for “regular” and “learning support” students. [*All Freshmen retained at 72%; Basic Studies students retained at 60%*]
3. Progression Rates: from fall to fall for freshman cohorts, separately for “regular” and “learning support” students. (Tracking movement from FR to SO to JR to SR)
4. Course Completion Rates: for all courses, by term, aggregated at various levels for diverse monitoring concerns (e.g.: learning support courses, freshman courses, math courses, upper-division courses, by college, etc.) [*University-wide average course completion rate = 72.8% between 2004—2010*]
5. Graduation Rates: Four-year and Six-year rates for entering freshman cohorts, as historically reported to USG and the federal government through IPEDS.
6. Program Productivity Rates: tracking the number of annual graduates (numerator) in contrast to the number of registered students (current headcount) with the declared major (denominator) on record.
7. Number and Percentage of Un-Advised Students: tracking students by year & class level without formal advisor of record. [*Between 2008 and 2012, 30-40% of SSU undergraduates had no formal advisor on record.*]
8. Academic Standing Rates: tracking the % of students in good standing, with warning, suspension, probation status, by class level (FR, SO, JR, SR). [*Over the past five years, 82.7% of students overall have been in “Good Standing”; 10.4% on “Warning”; 4% on “Probation” or “Continued Probation”.*]

- II. Strategies that are being developed to sustain data collection and evaluation of effectiveness at SSU:
 1. Two major, large scale innovations at SSU are underway for enhancing the informing and planning of student success: the Enterprise Data Warehouse with its distributed dashboards and the Degree Works application for student curriculum tracking and course scheduling.

Sharing Lessons Learned

[The “big lessons” learned from the campus plan process that should be shared with others, how data has informed them, and the implications for others and the USG System.]

1. A traditional approach to advising may not serve students well—especially those at risk. Thus, SSU has appointed professional advisors for all first and second year students. This change, along with other newly implemented strategies, will facilitate substantive discussions between advisors and advisees.
2. Students on academic probation often ignore their status until the greater impact of suspension becomes unavoidable. Our new approach that issues an academic hold for students placed on probation and requires that such students enroll in a “Learning Skills” course serves both to refocus at-risk students and to apply targeted remedies in a timely manner.
3. SSU has been able to expedite the successful exit of students from learning support English courses and completion of the subsequent college level course. These lessons must be generalized to Mathematics.
4. Institutional impediments, such as course scheduling and unnecessarily extended curricula, may contribute to slow progress toward completion.