



Georgia Regents University

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Georgia Regents University occupies a unique place in our state, our nation, and the higher education arena. As Georgia's fourth research institution, we have a unique designation as the state's only public, academic health center. In our nation, we are one of a few institutions that offer a broad array of traditional liberal arts, education, and business degrees along with the full breadth of allied health sciences, nursing, dental medicine, and medicine programs. In the higher education arena, we are one of the few institutions to undergo a major organizational transformation and blending of two institutional cultures in the 21st century. Through this transformation, Georgia Regents University has become a dynamic, responsive institution that places student success at the core of our vision to become a top-tier university that is a destination of choice for education, health care, discovery, creativity, and innovation. Guiding this vision is our mission.

"Our mission is to provide leadership and excellence in teaching, discovery, clinical care, and service as a student-centered comprehensive research university and academic health center with a wide range of program from learning assistance through postdoctoral studies."

Our mission statement explicitly states that we are student-centered, and we believe firmly in holding the student at the core of all our educational activities. As such, we explicitly focus on our students within our strategic plan in our aim to 1) create, enhance, and sustain programs that prepare graduates for success in a rapidly changing global workplace and society, 2) provide an environment that promotes innovative education, and 3) develop an undergraduate curriculum with a distinctive profile that embraces the principles of liberal arts as fundamental to all disciplines and that recognizes the value of a culture of intellectual inquiry, creativity, and undergraduate research. These goals guide our new initiatives both as a dynamic institution and as they relate to retention, progression, and graduation of our undergraduate student body.

In the 2013 - 2014 academic year, Georgia Regents University enrolled 5,653 undergraduate students in the institution. Of these students, 3,629 (64%) were female and 2,024 (36%) were male. The enrollment of females versus males remains relatively stable compared to previous years. The ethnic diversity of the student body is 3,217 (57%) White, 1,427 (25%) Black (Non-Hispanic origin), 302 (5%) Hispanic, 274 (5%) multiracial, 28 (<1%) Asian, 27 (<1%) American Indian or Alaska Native, 22 (<1%) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 356 (6%) unknown or non-disclosed. The ethnic and racial diversity of our students remains constant. Maintaining ethnic and racial diversity is important to the institution as we further develop into a broad-based research institution. The average age of our undergraduate student body is 24. This means we must pay attention to the expectations of traditionally aged students while addressing the concerns of our adult students. Two thousand six hundred seventy-two (47%) undergraduate students received Pell grants. In 2012, less than 26% of our full-time undergraduate students enrolled in 15 or more hours. In 2013, that number increased to 48%.

Undergraduate enrollment has decreased by 709 students from 2011 - 2012 to 2013 - 2014. Part of this decline in enrollment is due to the changed mission of the institution and the phase out of University College and Learning Support. Further, the institution has adopted a plan to gradually increase the freshman index range over a seven-year period to meet the University System of Georgia Research Universities Group minimum. The incoming cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen in fall 2013 had a higher freshman index with more than 54% meeting or exceeding the 2500 or higher minimum. However, the increasingly higher freshman index means a smaller cohort of students are eligible

for admission than would have traditionally had access to Georgia Regents University.

The enrollment patterns and demographics of our undergraduate students inform the development of Georgia Regents University's student success initiatives. Rather than targeting specific populations, we are committed to maintaining the current demographic mix. Further, because the typical course load previously taken by our students did not keep them on track to graduate, one of our primary foci is increasing the number of hours students take each semester. The concentration on this effort requires the creation of new administrative structures, such as the Academic Advising Center, to help students succeed. The push to increase enrollment in more hours also means we must find ways to eliminate unnecessary course work through new models to help ensure success. All of this must happen while we continue to focus our efforts on the students who fall within the lower end of the existing freshman index range to ensure their success and on-time completion while we increase our standards.

Our Complete College Georgia goals and strategies, as outlined in Section II, are designed to meet the needs of current and future students. The strategies we have selected are not intended to be short-term endeavors. They are intended to fundamentally change the culture of the institution and the way we support and interact with our undergraduate students to ensure their success in college and life.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPLETION GOALS AND STRATEGIES

After extensive review of our initial goals, strategies, and metrics over the past three years, we decided to pursue four

goals with associated high impact strategies. These goals incorporate the continuation of some items from our original Complete College Georgia plan, “Our Path Forward,” and the pursuit of new initiatives moving forward. These new initiatives are a result of our maturation as an organization and further analyses of what has worked well nationally and with institutions similar to ours. As defined by Complete College Georgia, our strategies fall within the four overarching goals:

- Goal 1. Increase the number of undergraduate degrees awarded,
- 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, and
- Goal 4. Provide intrusive advising to keep students on track to graduate.

Goal 1: Increase the number of undergraduate degrees awarded

Georgia Regents University has already begun to monitor the number of degrees awarded. Our aim is to increase the number of all undergraduate degrees awarded across all cohort groups at Georgia Regents University. We have intentionally chosen to not focus on a particular demographic group because we see needs across all our populations.

Goal 2: Increase the number of degrees that are earned “on-time”

To help keep students on target to graduate “on-time,” defined as within four years, we must increase the number of students who take 15 or more hours per semester. One of our original Complete College Georgia goals was to implement a fifteen-to-finish campaign called “4Years4U.” The 4Years4U campaign requests that students sign a pledge to take at least 15 credit hours per semester each semester until they finish their undergraduate degree. For the freshman cohort entering in fall 2013, 47% of the students signed the pledge, 72% enrolled in at least 15 credit hours, and 42% of the total cohort earned 15 or more credit hours. In spring 2014, 54% of this cohort signed up for at least 15 credit hours and 32% of the total cohort earned 15 or more credit hours. For the fall 2014 cohort, 89.5% enrolled in at least 15 credit hours.

Further, we created a **financial incentive** through tuition structures to encourage students to take full course loads and to finish within the four-year time period; full-time students pay for 15 hours regardless of how many units they take. The hope is not only that students will take at least 15 hours because they are paying for that many credits. The hope is that the students will be encouraged to take additional units because they are not charged additional tuition and fees. In addition to these tuition incentives, we established the “Completion Promise Award,” which are grants intended to provide assistance for those students who are a few hours short of graduation but do not have the financial means to finish. In 2013 - 2014, 19 students received approximately \$41,000.

Having students take 15 hours per term is the necessity to ensure that students stay within appropriate tracks to graduate. Our analysis showed many students had earned

more credits than necessary to earn a bachelor’s degree. The major causes of excess credits included switching majors due to potential career choices, poor course selection, and lack of advisement on appropriate courses to complete a particular major.

Goal 3: Decrease the excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree

To ameliorate the excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree, Georgia Regents University instituted three high impact strategies. First, we instituted the Academic Advising Center, which provides dedicated **professional advising support** to students who have earned less than 60 hours of credit. The Academic Advising Center has 14 professional advisors who specialize in particular degree programs and areas, such as sciences, arts/humanities, and pre-allied health and nursing. A second strategy was to implement block schedules for the first semester for all new freshmen. The **block schedules** are based on a student’s intended area of major and include the necessary courses to ensure that students can complete their intended major within four years. We will augment block scheduling in the coming year to focus on a block schedule beyond the first semester. The third high impact strategy requires that any student who wishes to **change a schedule once registered or change majors** must meet with an academic advisor. This new requirement means that students will be informed of how the changes might impact their choice of major, their financial aid, and the timely completion of their degree thus helping them stay on track. As we move forward with a focus on professional academic advising, Georgia Regents University is committed to keeping the number of advisors to national norms.

Goal 4: Provide intrusive advising to keep students on track to graduate

Coupled with the goal to decrease excess credit hours are two new intrusive advising strategies. The first strategy is to create **program maps** for all undergraduate degree programs. The creation of program maps is tangential to another campus project focused on student learning outcomes at the program and course level. The end result of both the program maps and the student learning outcomes projects is a path to a degree through “choice architecture,” which reduces course selection opportunities for students but does not sacrifice the quality of learning. The second strategy focuses on defining and **creating meta-majors**. Georgia Regents University’s approach to meta-majors will be different from many that conceive meta-majors only for undecided students. Our meta-majors will focus on clusters of potential majors for all students. One such cluster might be nursing/occupational therapy/radiological sciences and another might focus on English/foreign language/history. These clusters have common science and mathematics core courses, which allow students to explore potential majors without earning credits that would not ultimately count towards their degree.

A strong **analytic backbone** supports all these strategies to change institutional culture and drive students to success. We have piloted GradesFirst and are in the process of piloting, for full implementation in fall 2014 term, the Student Success

Collaborative system from the Education Advisory Board. Combined, the two systems will provide early intervention for students doing poorly in courses and also work to help students select majors in which they will be successful. These analytic tools will be implemented both in the Academic Advising Center and with faculty who advise upper division students within the major.

In concert, the four goals and their associated strategies outlined above will directly impact student retention, progression, and graduation for our current and future students. While the initiatives already in progress continue to develop, a challenge lies in maintaining focus around each of these strategies. Another challenge is perfecting our use of the newly implemented analytics. Continuing to be proactive in the training and communication with the entire campus

community about how each individual contributes to undergraduate student success is key to achievement of our goals and strategies.

SUMMARY OF GOALS, HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES, AND ACTIVITIES

Over the past three years, we have modified our goals and strategies very little in the pursuit of higher rates of retention, progression, and graduation. Many of the strategies have now become part of the institutional culture. This created an opportunity to further expand, grow, and concentrate on certain programs we believe would have the greatest impact. Through this process we have discovered several high impact strategies. These are listed below.

GOAL

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF DEGREES AWARDED “ON-TIME”

High Impact Strategy

The 4Years4U strategy promotes the enrollment in 15 or more credit hours per semester and is supplemented with a financial incentive program where students pay for 15 credits hours but are allowed to take more without additional costs.

Summary of Activities

The 4Years4U campaign was officially launched for the incoming fall 2013 freshmen class. The campaign requests that students sign a pledge to take 15 or more credit hours per semester. The fall 2014 freshman class will be the second class under the 4Years4U campaign.

Promotional giveaways, branded with the 4Years4U logo, were included for those students who signed the pledge. In addition to the promotional giveaways for students, signs and banners were posted around campus to promote the campaign and flyers were included in campus orientations prior to the start of the freshman year. The cost to develop and purchase the materials for the campaign was approximately \$25,000 and the implementation timeline took 4 months.

Interim Measures of Progress

The 4Years4U campaign is a continuation of an initiative that began in fall 2013. It will take 4 years before we see the first cohort of students who signed on to the campaign graduate. Forty-seven percent of the fall 2013 cohort of students signed the 4Years4U campaign and 42% earned 15 or more hours in fall 2013. In spring 2014, 54% of this cohort signed up for at least 15 hours and 32% earned 15 or more credit hours.

Measures of Success

The 4Years4U campaign uses a series of step metrics to determine the progress of students toward a degree “on-time” for those students beginning in the fall 2013 and later. The metrics are based on the entering fall cohorts each year.

- % of first-year students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the fall term
- % of first-year students earning 15 or more hours by the end of fall term
- % of first-year students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the spring term
- % of first-year students earning 30 or more hours by the end of spring term
- % of sophomore students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the fall term
- % of sophomore students earning 45 or more hours by the end of fall term
- % of sophomore students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the spring term
- % of sophomore students earning 60 or more hours by the end of spring term
- % of junior students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the fall term
- % of junior students earning 75 or more hours by the end of fall term
- % of junior students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the spring term
- % of junior students earning 90 or more hours by the end of spring term
- % of senior students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the fall term
- % of senior students earning 105 or more hours by the end of fall term
- % of senior students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the spring term
- % of students graduating within 4 years
- % of students graduating within 6 years

GOAL

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES AWARDED

High Impact Strategy

The Georgia Regents University - East Georgia College State – Augusta Partnership strategy embeds a two-year access institution that focuses on remediation and college preparedness within the

context of a four-year research institution. At the completion of 30 units with a minimum GPA equivalent to the minimum transfer GPA for University System of Georgia Research Universities Group institutions, a partnership student is guaranteed transfer to GRU.

Summary of Activities

The GRU-EGSC – Augusta partnership was originally scheduled to take three years to develop and implement. The purpose of the partnership was to provide an access point for those students who came from outside 50 miles of GRU and met the historic Augusta State University freshman index and admission standards but not the new freshman index and admission standards. The partnership came to fruition within six months of initial talks and accepted the first class in 2013.

To help implement the partnership on campus, three classrooms were dedicated to EGSC use in Galloway Hall on the GRU Summerville campus. An additional laboratory room was assigned for part of the day in the Science Building. Administrative, faculty, and student support offices were placed in the basement of Payne Hall. Three former GRU Learning Support faculty members were hired by East Georgia State College to teach in their program. Agreements were also brokered so that students paid all GRU fees in addition to their EGSC fees. This provides EGSC – Augusta students with access to many of the same opportunities provided to GRU students such as computer labs, libraries, the career center, and participation in student activities.

As we enter fall 2014, due to growth in the program, EGSC – Augusta is requesting additional classroom and laboratory space outside of their current allotment. Their Academic Center for Excellence has moved from Payne Hall to Galloway Hall to be closer to students. Future plans are under way to offer up to 59 units at the EGSC – Augusta campus. This would allow students to complete most of their associate’s degree prior to transferring to GRU.

Interim Measures of Progress

The first group of 96 students entered in fall 2013 and 139 students in spring 2014. The program added close to 180 new students for the fall 2014 cohort and had approximately 69 students continue from the previous year. As of fall 2014, 12 students transferred from EGSC – Augusta to GRU.

Measures of Success

- As this is a partnership, GRU is assessing several metrics to determine future viability of additional partnerships similar to this one. They include
- # of applicants who meet the old admission standards but not the higher research university standards
- % of first-year students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the fall term
- % of first-year students earning 15 or more hours by the end of fall term
- % of first-year students enrolled in 15 or more hours in the spring term
- % of first-year students earning 30 or more hours by the end of spring term
- # of eligible students who transfer to GRU at the completion of 30 or more hours

Goal

Decrease excess credits earned on the path to getting a degree

High Impact Strategy

As GRU does not offer Learning Support, the “stretched” option is for any student who may meet mathematics admission standards but need extra support to succeed in their Area A mathematics course. The “stretched” MATH 1111 strategy provides “just-in-time” mathematics remediation within a regular section. Further, these particular sections are taught five days a week; however students pay tuition for and receive credit for 3 hours.

Summary of Activities

The “stretched” math course concept was piloted with MATH 1111: College Algebra in fall 2012 during the initial construction of the original Complete College Georgia plan. In fall 2013, MATH 1111 had one supplemental instruction class added in addition to one “stretched” class. For fall 2014, three sections of “stretched” and three sections of supplemental instruction MATH 1111 will be offered. The “stretched” courses in mathematics will continue to be offered on an as needed basis.

A “stretched” version of ENGL 1101: College Composition I was offered in fall 2013 as a pilot. Two sections of ENGL 1101: College Composition I will be offered in fall 2014 term.

Interim Measures of Progress

The fall 2012 pilot of MATH 1111: College Algebra had a 67% success rate (ABC) compared to the regular sections, which had a 59% success rate. The fall 2013 “stretched” courses had a 62% success rate compared to 58% in the regular sections. The supplemental instruction had only a 46% success rate compared to the regular sections.

Measures of Success

- The success of the “stretched” courses is based on the following metrics:
- % of students who earn an ABC in stretched courses compared to regular courses
- % of students who participated in stretched courses and earn an ABC in subsequent mathematics courses

Goal

Provide intrusive advising to keep students on track to graduate

High Impact Strategy

The Academic Advising Center strategy created a professional advising office for students with less than 60 hours of credit earned toward their undergraduate degree. The advisors actively monitor a group of students, including their success in courses and enrollment in appropriate credit hours that

align with their intended major.

Summary of Activities

The Academic Advising Center was created in summer 2014. Over the course of the 2013 - 2014 academic year, 14 professional advisors were hired or relocated from undergraduate departments to the new professional advising office.

Interim Measures of Progress

As of fall 2014, all undergraduate students with less than 60 hours began seeing a professional advisor. This includes most of the students from the fall 2013 cohort and all from the fall 2014 cohort. Some additional students from prior academic years will also be monitored by the Center if they have less than 60 credit hours.

Measures of Success

The metrics used for academic advisement are similar the same as those used in the 4Years4U campaign with the advising center being responsible only for students earning up to 60 hours.

In addition to the high impact strategies above, we have several original strategies that have become part of institutional culture. In the initial Complete College Georgia plan, we set strategies to create a first year seminar program, place more emphasis on academic enrichment activities for high ability students, analyze any policy that was perceived to hinder retention, progression, and graduation, and redesign our undergraduate core curriculum. In 2014, we will continue our Convocation program, begun in fall 2013. Our academic enrichment areas (study abroad, honors, and undergraduate research) have seen major increases in student participation. Study abroad saw a jump from 174 students in 2012-2013 to 275 students in 2013-2014. Our honors program enrolled 139 students in fall 2013 compared with 101 students in fall 2012.

In 2014, we expect nearly 200 students to enroll in the Honors Program. The Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship Summer Scholars program added 8 students in 2014 for a total of 29 compared with 21 in 2013. We will offer the first INQR 1000: Fundamentals of Academic Inquiry course this fall in pilot format. The INQR 1000 course is designed to improve retention through student exploration of an academic topic under the guidance of a professor. Many of our faculty who teach core general education courses have gone through the curriculum design academy. The academy aims to assist faculty in redesigning courses with techniques that are known to enhance student engagement. These are now part of ongoing operations and we continue to monitor their effects on the success of our undergraduate students.

OBSERVATIONS

Our activities focus on a triad of student engagement, faculty engagement, and administrative support to achieve higher rates of retention, progression, and graduation. The high impact strategies listed above have proven to be successful for Georgia Regents University and our students. Of the original strategies and activities pursued, all but one, have been effective at beginning to increase retention, progression, and graduation. Our success is the result of implementing programs that tackle multiple issues at once. These programs include student access with the Georgia Regents University - East Georgia State College partnership, the transformation of remediation through stretched mathematics courses, the examination and modification of core curricular (gateway) courses, and providing para-academic opportunities for students to engage academically. The one original program that was least effective is the Augusta Gateway Program, which was intended to allow students who lived within 50 miles of the university to pursue an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science if they met the historic Augusta State University enrollment minima. One set of metrics used to assess this effectiveness was the same as the 4Years4U metrics with respect to enrolling in 15 or more credit hours and successfully earning 15 or more credit hours per term. The other metric was the enrollment number, which has been lower than anticipated. Its effectiveness was not due to organizational capacities but rather faster implementation and growth in our partnership with East Georgia State College. We see this as a win-win for students as it allows opportunities for access to higher education with East Georgia State College providing necessary remediation and preparation support while allowing Georgia Regents University to redirect resources to ensure success once

students transfer to our institution.

The overarching goals and strategies we pursued and continue to pursue have changed little. As we have matured as an organization, GRU has added the goals and strategies outlined in Sections II and III to further our original intentions. Many of the original goals have moved into an operational phase such that they are now part of the normal culture for student success of the institution. Modifications for the next phases are the result of understanding the next phase of growth of our institution.

The analysis of the success of the original goals and strategies and now our future versions of them create an opportunity for several takeaways. First, not all change needs to be incremental. The policy modifications we tackled in our first plan were analyzed, modified, and implemented within a three-month period. These institutional policies included how the institution handles withdrawals, military fee waivers, and a "hold harmless" tuition policy. These were selected based on an analysis of "W" rates, specific student population needs and national trends, and consolidation promises. Additional modifications have been made based on USG-driven changes such as academic renewal and required high school curriculum deficiencies. Second, we approached many issues from multiple sides, addressing all of the parts at once rather than modifying in a piecemeal fashion. The changes to our general education core curriculum looked at which courses were barriers to completion. They were modified to align better with other University System of Georgia institutions core curriculum and/or were redesigned through the newly implemented Curriculum Design Academy program. Third, major projects such as Complete College Georgia require a constant communication presence to the faculty, staff, and

students of the institution. As changes were implemented, we ensured all affected stakeholders were notified of the change and what it meant for them. Associated with this was the need to help individuals understand the centrality of the multiple efforts to achieve undergraduate student success. Our changes were not just for changes sake; they were because analysis showed a potential for improvement. Finally, the efforts require celebration of successes. These celebrations help individuals tangibly see their efforts and stay committed to them.

As we move forward with our Complete College Georgia

plan and our development as the next, great American university, our leadership remains committed to the continual engagement with challenges that obstruct a successful undergraduate experience. As George Keller said in *Academic Strategy* (1983), "...decision making means that a college, school, or university and its leaders are active rather than passive about their position in history." Georgia Regents University will be at the forefront of crafting what comes next in undergraduate student success for the state, nation, and higher education.