



Middle Georgia
State University

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INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Middle Georgia State University (MGA) is a five campus institution that serves a diverse student body through traditional and hybrid delivery of curriculum, as well as, distance learning opportunities. It is the mission of MGA to educate and graduate inspired lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region through professional leadership, innovative partnerships, and community engagement. The institution's vision is to transform individuals and their communities through extraordinary high learning. Four core values underscore this vision: stewardship, engagement, adaptability and learning.

Census data define the Fall 2016 student body to be Georgia residents (95.9%), predominantly White Non-Hispanic (55.1%) and Black/African American Non-Hispanic (34.1%), and under 25 years of age (71.9%). Sixty-two percent of the student body (62%) were enrolled full-time. Females comprised 58.1% of the student body and males 41.9% of the student body. This student body profile remains relatively unchanged from Fall 2013 the first year as a consolidated institution. Student Body characteristics for Fall 2016 are found in Appendices Table 1. A comparative profile of student characteristics Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 is found in Appendices Table 2.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPLETION GOALS, HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES & ACTIVITIES

Quality and distinctiveness of student success are 2015-2018 strategic priorities for MGA. Each of these attributes is dependent on data-driven decision making, better service to students, more efficient use of faculty and staff time, and utilization of tools to measure and communicate performance. Keeping students on track to program completion is the CCG goal most closely aligned with MGA's strategic priorities. Outcomes for this goal include improved persistence and retention rates and increase in the number of students completing their degree on-time.

Faculty and professional advisors of the newly consolidated institution began January 2013 the construction of an infrastructure that would support students' academic success. Over the last four years of Complete College Georgia work, the level of training in providing intentional advising became more focused and the use of data tools to guide retention and completion campaigns more common. During this time period most of the CCG best practices have been instituted. EAB Student Success Collaborative (SSC) and DegreeWorks were adopted to guide advising conversations and to make data informed decisions about strategic retention campaigns.

To best gauge the impact of the retention and completion work across the evolution of MGA from a college to a university with a blended function, three CCG metrics were selected. Those metrics are (a) 5-year one-year retention rates, (b) number and percentage of students enrolled in 15 or more credit hours and (c) percentage of credits successfully completed versus attempted end of Fall semester. Retention rates for the institution as a whole are found in Appendices Table 3, retention rates for first time freshmen are presented in Tables 4 and 5, number and percentage of students enrolled in 15 hours are in Table 6, and percentage of credits completed verses attempted in Table 7.

Data show a positive trend in retention rates overall for the institution, especially for students who began fulltime and students enrolling in 15 credit hours. Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 retention rates for the university as a whole also signify the need to re-envision retention strategies for students who begin part time, students with learning support requirements, and students of color. FTF retention rates indicate that retention rates for Black/African American lag behind Whites Non-Hispanic. Credits successfully completed versus attempted remained unchanged Fall '2015 (77.86%) to Fall 2016 (77.86%). Data on course redesign to address this barrier will not yield any meaningful results until the end of the 2017-2018.

2016-2017 HIGH PRIORITY STRATEGY

Strategic retention campaigns were the primary institutional strategy for completion goals. Some campaigns were designed for short term impact, others for long term systemic change. Retention campaigns were conducted by personnel in advising offices, academic affairs, admissions, athletics, and student affairs. The Professional Advisor for student athletes, who is also a coach, monitored mid-term grades of the players and their eligibility per NAIA regulations. Students off-track to graduate or who were on-track to lose their eligibility were advised on how to return to good standing. There was no significant change in average GPA for 2016-2017, however, the number of student athletes earning a GPA between 3.5 and 3.99 increased over last year's number.

The Vice President of Student Affairs, who also serves as the Student Code of Conduct Officer, used student profile data to guide intentional conversations about behavioral choices. Qualitative data suggests that the conversations were more productive, especially in identifying non-academic challenges that were barriers to academic success.

Fall 2016 the Vice Provost of Academic Initiatives convened a work team of representatives from all divisions of the institution to create a coordinated calendar of communication nudges with the goal of improving student response rates to important communicate. Implementation for the communication calendar is Fall 2017.

The Office of Admissions created a watch list of international students to monitor compliance. Several students were found to be out of compliance and corrective action taken. A direct result of this campaign and an example of improving service to students is that academic advising for these students was transferred to the Director of the Office of International Programs. The Director can monitor compliance throughout the semester, but more importantly, assist international students in finding the right support for their unique personal challenges.

2016-2017 HIGH IMPACT STRATEGY

MGA historical data suggests that first-time-full-time freshmen who completed their first semester with less than a 2.0 cumulative GPA were at greatest risk of “stopping out”, academic suspension, or loss of financial aid. An academic recovery retention campaign was conducted for 129 freshmen with GPAs between 1.3 and 1.9. The three directors of the Student Success Centers worked with the Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives to create a common set of interview questions, a survey of success barriers for the students to complete, and an academic recovery plan template. The University’s Enrollment Support Team (call center) contacted each of the students with an invitation to meet with one of the Directors and to schedule the appointment during the initial phone call. Fifty-four students accepted the offer. The academic recovery plan was guided by the challenges the student identified on the survey. All students reported their poor academic performance was for reasons other than course material. Of the 54 participating students, 55.6% earned a 2.0 Spring semester GPA and 38.9% raised their cumulative GPA to 2.0 or higher. It is noteworthy that not a single student met their tutoring goals nor did they meet with the Career Counselor as written into the Academic Recovery Plan. Data captured does not lend itself to further analysis but does support the need to investigate the academic supports MGA provides and the relevance or appropriateness as designed.

REFLECTIONS, OBSERVATIONS, & PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR

In the last four years, MGA has undertaken three SACSCOC substantive change reviews, retro-re-accreditation for Macon State College, five discipline specific accreditation reviews, and a level-change from college to state university. In the midst of the work to affirm the educational quality of certificates and degrees awarded, the institution has implemented a significant number of best practices for student engagement, retention, and completion in alignment with USG BOR initiatives such as Math Pathways for STEM and NON-STEM majors and re-design of learning support courses, as well as, CCG strategies listed in the 2016-2017 strategy survey. The greatest challenge has been to provide equitable and appropriate services to students across the campuses and for students pursuing a degree on-line.

First lesson learned is that active engagement with data informed decisions about what MGA students need to maximize their opportunity for academic success is a paradigm shift away from adoption of best practices for the sake of adoption. When data informed, all divisions of the institution become interdependent related to student completion and ultimately accountable for their practices and policies. The use of analytics in decision making at MGA is in its’ infancy. Conversations about institutional practices/policies that create artificial barriers to success and how to tailor academic supports for students is becoming more common than they were in 2013. As an example, historical data of students pursuing the Pre-Licensure BSN display a bi-modal distribution for the number of course credits taken first semester most predictive of program completion. Part-time students who took 6 to 8 credits their first semester had a 42.5% graduation rate compared to full-time (12-14 credits) with a 22% completion rate. Psychology majors who took 12-14 hours their first semester had a high graduation rate. The next cycle of CCG work will rely on analytics to strengthen the impact of the CCG strategies that have been adopted.

Second lesson learned is that a blended institution must remain flexible in educating students about the business of being a student. An advising framework created 2012-2013 was sufficient for the short term; a framework based on the perception that students remain loyal to one of our five campuses. Data show that MGA students are migratory, taking courses on multiple campuses either face-to-face or via distance education technology. MGA faculty and staff have provided sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest that barriers to student completion are not necessarily academic in nature. Only 4% of the students Fall 2016 semester were academically suspended; 7% total for the 2016-2017 academic year. Research in progression and completion work affirms that the business of being a student will often detract from the academic success and degree completion forcing many students to “stop-out”, lose their financial aid, or lose their good academic standing. Add to the commonly cited reasons for students leaving is the reality that conducting one’s student business on a multi-campus institution is simply burdensome and can be confusing if the student’s first point of contact gives misinformation or sends the student on the office-to-office-to-office scavenger hunt for the correct answer. Improving engagement with and outreach to students will be the high priority strategy for the 2017-2018 CCG year.

The high impact strategy will be the creation of a teaching and learning center for first and second year students known as The Armory, a place where Squires become Apprentices and Apprentices become Knights. The Armory will serve as the hub for educating and supporting students in conducting their business as a student to stay on path to completion. Services will

include but not be limited to, direct instruction in using the institution's student portal and DegreeWorks, providing academic support services such as intentional advising and academic recovery, and coordinating with academic unit workshops, program orientations, and information sessions.

The 2017-2018 academic year is also MGA's third year as a state university executing the final year of its' first Strategic Plan. Four CCG Goals are integral to this third year MGA plan. They are (a) increase the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by 3% ,(b) increase degrees earned on time by 1.5%, (c) provide intentional advising to keep students on track as measured by a 2.20% increase in credits successfully completed, and (d) improve access for underserved communities, especially Military and African Americans. Each of these goals is cross-divisional by design.