



University of Georgia

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

The University of Georgia—a public, research, land- and sea-grant institution with commitments and responsibilities to the entire state of Georgia—is the birthplace of higher education in the U.S. Its mission is encapsulated by its motto: “to teach, to serve, and to inquire into the nature of things,” three distinct actions that are visually embodied in the three pillars of its iconic arch at the entrance to campus. This Complete College Georgia report is once again focused on that first pillar “to teach” and on how the University’s teaching mission aligns with its retention, progression and graduation efforts. UGA’s faculty and staff are committed to superior teaching and to student learning, to serving a diverse student body, and to promoting student success with timely graduation as one goal.

UGA’s challenging learning environment and innovative programs garnered national attention and recognition in 2016. Kiplinger Magazine ranked UGA 10th in its 2017 list of the “100 Best Values in Public Colleges.” U.S. News & World Report’s 2016 “Best Colleges” edition placed UGA 18th among public universities while Forbes lists UGA No. 17 on its list of “Top 25 Public Colleges 2016.” *The New York Times* ranked UGA at No. 10 among public universities doing the most for low-income students in its 2015 College Access Index; the University was named the top tier-one research institution in the nation for its service to student veterans and their families; and for the third year in a row, UGA received an INSIGHT Into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award for its efforts to foster an inclusive, diverse campus.

UGA offers baccalaureate, master’s, doctoral, and professional degrees in the arts, humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, physical sciences, agricultural and environmental sciences, business, ecology, engineering, environmental design, family and consumer sciences, forest resources, journalism and mass communication, education, law, pharmacy, public health, social work, and veterinary medicine. It is the state’s oldest, most comprehensive and most diversified institution of higher education with more than 10,000 faculty and staff members and over 36,000 students (undergraduate, graduate and professional, enrolled in 17 schools or colleges). It offers 136 undergraduate majors, 97 undergraduate and graduate certificates, and 238 graduate programs.

There is no single undergraduate student profile at the University of Georgia. Rather the institution is a rich tapestry of diverse students with widely varying backgrounds, interests, experiences and challenges. In Fall 2016, the total undergraduate population numbered 27,951 students, the vast majority of whom hailed from the state of Georgia (90% vs. 8% out-of-state and 2% international). The majority of undergraduate students (94%) were enrolled full time; 43% were male; and 30% were of racial/ethnic minority status (see Table 1). In Fall 2016, the typical UGA undergraduate was of traditional age (≤ 24 years), entered as a first year student, lived on campus for the first year, and was seeking a first undergraduate degree. The five most popular majors were: Biology, Psychology, Finance, Computer Science and International Affairs. The cohort that matriculated in Fall 2016 numbered 5,420, with a mean SAT score of 1,258 (compared to the national mean of 1,002) and high school GPA of 3.97.

The University of Georgia is a national leader among public universities in the numbers of major scholarships earned by our students. Since 1995, UGA has produced nine Rhodes Scholars, five Gates Cambridge Scholars, six Marshall Scholars, three Mitchell Scholars, 51 Goldwater Scholars, 13 Truman Scholars, 13 Udall Scholars and 36 Boren Scholars. In addition, 112 UGA students were offered Fulbright Scholarships in the past 15 years; according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, UGA is one of the top producers of U.S. Fulbright students by type of institution.

All of the University of Georgia’s Complete College Georgia goals are aimed at improving retention and graduation rates, with particular attention on increasing the four-year graduation rate from 62.7% (for the 2011 cohort) to 68%¹ for the 2020 cohort. Data show that the time to degree has been steadily declining from a high of high of 4.21 years for the 2008 graduating cohort down to 4.02 years for the 2015 and 2016 graduating cohorts (see Table 5). The gains for transfer students have been much more modest, and the University is beginning to implement strategies to ease their transition to UGA. According to the data, we see an upward trajectory in both the retention and graduation metrics over the last few years (see Table 2). The first-year retention rate for the 2014 and 2015 cohorts was a record high of 95.2%; data are not yet available for the 2016 cohort. The four-year completion rate improved by over 3% to 66.1% for the 2012 cohort; data are not yet available for the 2013 cohort. The excellent five- and six-year completion rates are holding steady at about 82% and 85% respectively.

Of particular note are UGA’s first-year retention rates and six-year completion rates for underrepresented populations (see Table 3). For example, the first-year retention rate for the 2015 cohort of Black/African-American students is 95.9%, which exceeds that for the student population as a whole (95.2%), and the six-year graduation rate for all Hispanic students in the 2010 cohort is 86.9%, which exceeds that of the population as a whole (84.8%).

The University of Georgia has a high performing and academically strong student body. The teaching and learning environment at UGA is characterized by a large number of high-impact practices that, as research has shown, are known to

¹ This 68% four-year graduation rate represents the average of our aspirational institutions for the 2007 cohort.

support student success and thereby promote student retention, progression and completion. Most of these practices can be found in every one of the schools and colleges at the University; those most widely used include a first-year experience (our award-winning First Year Odyssey Seminar), first-year learning communities, global learning,² service learning,³ collaborative learning, experiential learning, internships, and undergraduate research opportunities. Through the Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities (CURO), for example, all UGA undergraduates—including students in their first year—have the opportunity to engage in faculty-mentored research regardless of discipline, major or GPA. At the Spring 2016 CURO Symposium 408 students shared their research findings with the University and local community.⁴

In Fall 2016, UGA became one of the largest research institutions in the country to require that all undergraduates fulfill an experiential learning requirement before graduation. A growing body of research demonstrates that experiential learning enhances student learning, success in the classroom, on-time graduation, and transition to the workforce. UGA students can meet the requirement by engaging in creative endeavors, study abroad and field schools, internship and leadership opportunities, faculty-mentored research, and service-learning. To date, UGA has validated nearly 1,500 such opportunities, including courses and non-credit activities, each one of which is designed to enhance learning and position UGA students for success after graduation. Double Dawgs, another innovative program, was launched in Fall 2017 to provide pathways for students to earn both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in five years or less. The program, in addition to saving time and money, will give ambitious and motivated students a competitive advantage in today's knowledge economy and help position them for success after graduation.⁵ Currently UGA is offering just over 100 Double Dawgs programs, either within a single department and discipline or across departments, schools, or colleges. UGA's traditional degree programs, in concert with these innovative initiatives, demonstrate that UGA is preparing the work force that will serve the state now and well into the future.

The personalized mentoring that students receive through both the experiential learning requirement and the Double Dawgs program are strengthening student-faculty relationships, a factor known to improve student outcomes and completion. Building and sustaining meaningful student-faculty relations is a primary goal of our award-winning First Year Odyssey Program and also undergirds the Small Class Size Initiative (SCI) that was begun in the 2015-16 academic year. The SCI enables students to receive more personalized attention from their professors by decreasing the size of some critical courses. Furthermore, we know that reducing the number of large class sections in high-demand instructional areas improves student learning outcomes and further enhances our world-class learning environment.

Our Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) supports innovative instruction with a robust program of workshops, faculty learning communities, and course design/redesign classes that show faculty how to incorporate high-impact strategies such as flipped and blended classrooms, the "Reacting to the Past" pedagogy, active learning strategies, and problem-based learning, among others (see Appendix C).

INSTITUTIONAL COMPLETION GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIVITIES

This year the University of Georgia is reporting on three primary Complete College Georgia goals: 1) increasing the number of degrees earned on time; 2) providing targeted, proactive advising to keep students on track to completion; and 3) restructuring instructional delivery to support educational excellence and promote student success. To meet these goals, the University has implemented a number of strategies that are synergistic and advance several of our CCG priorities. This year we report on six of those strategies.

GOAL: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF DEGREES THAT ARE EARNED ON TIME.

- Strategy 1: Offer programming and interventions to promote student academic success, progression, and completion.
- Strategy 2: Reduce class size in targeted classes to promote student academic success, progression, and completion.

GOAL: PROVIDE TARGETED, PROACTIVE ADVISING TO KEEP STUDENTS ON TRACK TO COMPLETION.

- Strategy 3: Hire additional advisors and restructure advising to be more proactive to promote student academic success, progression, and completion.
- Strategy 4: Create an Exploratory Center to help students find the right major quickly and to promote student academic success, progression, and completion.

GOAL: RESTRUCTURE INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS.

² UGA ranks 5th nationally in participation in short-term duration study abroad programs.

³ In 2016 a record number of unique undergraduate students (4,849) enrolled in a course with a service learning component, and 1,193 took more than one service learning course; 78% of the students who responded to a survey reported that the service-learning component of the course positively influenced their intention to complete their degree.

⁴ This was the record number of participants until the Spring 2017 Symposium which shattered that record with 554 students.

⁵ Because UGA students matriculate with, on average, 20+ hours of credit (from AP and/or dual enrollment), the Double Dawgs program affords these students a clear path to leverage those hours and make the most of their time at UGA.

- **Strategy 5:** Expand online course offerings, particularly in the summer sessions, to give students more flexibility in planning their programs of study and to promote student academic success, progression, and completion.
- **Strategy 6:** Encourage the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and peer-learning assistants to promote student academic success, progression, and completion.

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1:

OFFER PROGRAMMING AND INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

PRIMARY CONTACTS:

T. Chase Hagood, Director of the Division of Academic Enhancement, тчagood@uga.edu and Naomi J. Norman, Associate Vice President for Instruction, nnorman@uga.edu.

OVERVIEW:

UGA's Division of Academic Enhancement (DAE, www.dae.uga.edu) hosts much of our academic programming targeted to students at risk, including programming for first generation students and scholarship recipients. Headquartered in Milledge Hall and with satellite offices in Brumby Hall, Science Learning Center, Miller Learning Center, Russell Hall Academic Center, and Boyd Science Library, the DAE offers all UGA students a wide range of services and courses designed to support their academic efforts from the day a student is admitted until graduation. DAE's mission is to support students as they transition into higher education and sustain their progress through the University.

Attendance begins with the Freshman College Summer Experience (FCSE), a transformative four-week academic residential program for a diverse community of first-year undergraduates that helps students form meaningful academic and social networks. The FCSE was redesigned so that students now enroll in three credit-bearing courses: a service-learning course that fulfills the experiential learning requirement, a discipline-based course, and a small-group seminar on personal development. In addition, graduate student mentors live in-residence during the program to provide sustained support as students navigate their first experiences as college students. First-year retention rates for FCSE indicate that the program has a long record of successfully helping students transition to UGA and getting their time at UGA off to a good start; for every cohort, except 2014 and 2015, FCSE students were retained at higher percentages than the overall student population. We are confident that the changes to FCSE we implemented this summer—including the commitment to continue programs for FCSE students during the academic year—will positively affect those first-year retention rates.

DAE also proactively reaches out to students identified by UGA's predictive model as being at risk of not being retained. This outreach is designed to make those students aware of DAE's many resources, including specially-designed courses in creative thinking, study strategies, and metacognition; a comprehensive Academic Resource Center and space for active learning; tutoring, both online and face to face (tutors had 22,156 appointments for 7,973 unique students in 2016⁶); academic success workshops; and academic counseling. DAE also is home to CARE, the Collaborative Academic and Retention Effort, which is designed to help students improve their academic performance by helping them become self-regulated learners and scholars in their chosen fields and disciplines. The CARE program is open to all students and is required of students on scholastic probation. In 2016, the CARE office counseled 469 students (a 21% increase over 2015). Students who participate in CARE see significant increases in their GPAs and are often back in good academic standing within one semester of participation. By identifying struggling students early and helping them get back into good academic standing, retention and completion become more realistic outcomes for these students.

STRATEGY 2:

REDUCE CLASS SIZE IN TARGETED CLASSES TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS, PROGRESSION, AND COMPLETION.

PRIMARY CONTACT:

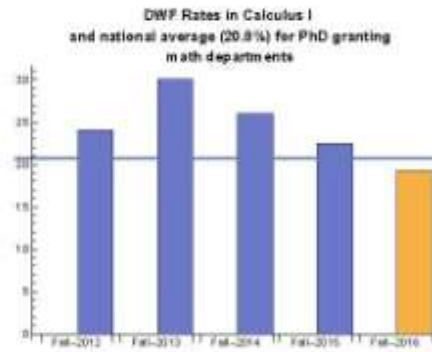
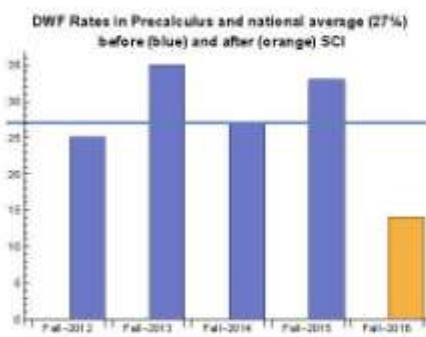
Rahul Shrivastav, Vice President for Instruction, rahuls@uga.edu

OVERVIEW:

For the Small Class Size Initiative (SCI), UGA invested \$4.4 million in the 2015-16 academic year as part of a continuing effort to reduce class sizes by hiring faculty and creating more than 300 new course sections in 81 majors across campus. These new course sections fall into three large categories: 1) high-demand courses in growing fields such as engineering, business, and public health; 2) courses that historically have high failure rates; and 3) "bottleneck" courses. To cite one example, the Mathematics department received SCI funds to add sections of pre-Calculus and Calculus classes with enrollments capped at

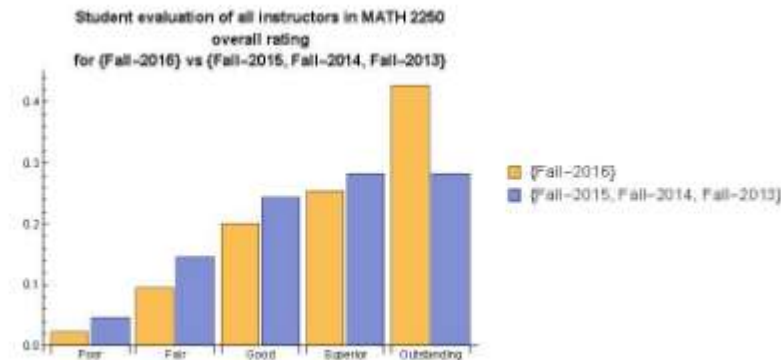
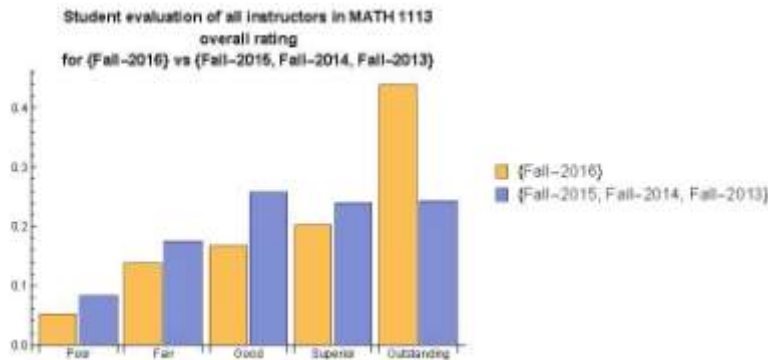
⁶ We have long tracked tutoring appointments; we now also are tracking the impact of tutoring on student success and will have data to report in future years.

19. The results after only one year are quite encouraging. Student and faculty reaction is strongly positive, DWF rates are down in both classes, and more students are progressing into the next course in the sequence on schedule.



As the charts above indicate, the DWF rate in both classes has decreased, dropping below the national average for the first time since Fall 2012 for Calculus and since Fall 2013 for pre-Calculus. Indeed, in the pre-Calculus program, the DWF rate has dropped to approximately half of the national average. This decrease is critically important for progression and completion because so many majors (particularly STEM majors) depend on timely completion of the Calculus sequence to stay on track for graduation.

Results were equally significant when assessing student satisfaction. The student survey data for pre-Calculus classes is averaged over roughly 700 responses per semester. The graphs below show the fraction of student ratings of their instructor’s “overall effectiveness” in pre-Calculus (MATH 1113) and Calculus (MATH 2250). On the graphs below, the bars in blue show a composite average of student ratings for the previous three fall semesters, while the orange bar shows the evaluation data during Fall 2016.



In previous semesters, about 50% of the students rated their instructors as “Superior” or “Outstanding” whereas in Fall 2016, almost 50% of students rated their instructor as “Outstanding.” Moreover, every aspect of the class rated by the students shows similar improvements in student rating: the students rated their instructors better in using class time, providing feedback, being responsive to questions, being available for consultation outside class, and increasing interest in the subject. This interest seems to have driven a sharp shift in enrollments in classes in the Calculus sequence: year-over-year, spring

semester Calculus enrollment is up by 14% while spring semester pre-Calculus enrollment is down by about 7%. These figures suggest that the department is succeeding in moving students on schedule from pre-Calculus to Calculus. In the case of Mathematics, the impact of the SCI was enhanced by the decision of the department to create a Mathematics Active Learning Team seminar to discuss evidence-based pedagogy.

We expect to see similar results for classes in other departments that benefitted from the SCI. We are confident that the SCI makes it possible for students across campus to receive more personalized attention from their professors and to reap other benefits derived from enrolling in small classes in critical instruction areas.

STRATEGY 3:

HIRE ADDITIONAL ADVISORS AND RESTRUCTURE ADVISING TO BE MORE PRO-ACTIVE AND TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS, PROGRESSION, AND COMPLETION.

PRIMARY CONTACTS:

Judith Iakovou, Director of University Advising Services, jiakovou@uga.edu and Naomi Norman, Associate Vice President for Instruction, nnorman@uga.edu.

UGA continues to focus on improving advising for all undergraduate students. In 2015, the University added 25 professional advisors to its advising corps, 10 more in 2016, and is poised to add more this year. All of the schools and colleges that serve undergraduate students now have professional academic advisors working with their students, and all have adopted a more centralized advising model to keep each student, whenever possible, with the same academic advisor throughout their undergraduate career. Excellent advising helps enable students to attain their academic goals, and research shows that meaningful relationships with advisors are critical elements of superior undergraduate education and degree completion. On a campus with more than 26,000 undergraduate students, students may at times need the kind of guidance, support, and encouragement that only well-trained academic advisors can provide.

In the summer of 2015, UGA hired a Director of Academic Advising Services who provides leadership for university-wide academic advising initiatives and ongoing support for college-level advising services. She plans, manages, and participates in academic advising initiatives, with an emphasis on university-level strategic partnerships between advising units and other student support services at UGA; oversees assessment of advising campus-wide; recommends policy to increase retention and degree completion; helps develop best practice guidelines and training for academic advisors across campus; and advises the administration on ways to communicate with “millennials” to increase their likelihood to stay on track to completion.

UGA is deploying two technological solutions to achieve our goal to decrease the time to graduation by improving advising: DegreeWorks Planner and Starfish Connect/Early Alert. UGA advisors have used DegreeWorks for a number of years, and with the launch of the Planner in 2016, advisors and their students have the ability to create a long-term plan for degree completion, verify that the courses included on the plan will fulfill their degree requirements, and show students when they are “off-plan” to graduation. Once students learn how to use the Planner effectively, we expect that it will both increase the number of degrees awarded overall and decrease excess credits accumulated by students.

We also have purchased Starfish Connect and Early Alert. These two tools—known at UGA as SAGE—are improving communications between students and advisors, helping manage workflows, collecting information about students, raising flags about students, and helping direct students towards resources when they need them. Several units piloted SAGE in Spring 2017, and the platform was deployed campus-wide in Fall 2017. We expect that SAGE, by improving communication and workflow, will positively impact retention and graduation and will lead to more job satisfaction among advisors.

In Fall 2014, the University of Georgia employed approximately 115 professional advisors/ program coordinators: of these, 81 were full time with an average caseload of 325-350 students each; 22 were 75% time with an average caseload of 235 students each; and others held supervisory roles within the corps of academic advisors. On average, each advisor was advising too many students, and most stayed with a student one or two years at the most. A total of 35 additional advisors have been hired over the last two years to address these concerns. With the addition of these advisors, the average caseload for each advisor has been lowered by approximately 20-25%. Lighter caseloads give advisors time to focus on an individual student’s needs and goals, guide that student to think critically and reflect on their learning experiences, and provide information about co-curricular and experiential learning opportunities and about academic and other resources available on campus. All of this, we believe, will lead to improved graduation rates.

Changes in the advising structure are expected to improve retention (especially second and third- year retention) and completion rates. Targets for 2020: first-year retention rate to improve to 96% and four-year graduation rate to improve to 68%. We also are developing a predictive tool to identify students who may be having difficulty staying on track to graduation and are at risk in a number of areas, including losing HOPE or Zell Miller funding. Advisors now have access to these scores in SAGE that are helping them deliver timely interventions.

STRATEGY 4:

CREATE AN EXPLORATORY CENTER TO HELP STUDENTS FIND THE RIGHT MAJOR QUICKLY AND TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS, PROGRESSION, AND COMPLETION.

PRIMARY CONTACTS:

Judith Iakovou, Director of University Advising Services, jiakovou@uga.edu and Jennifer Eberhart, Coordinator of the Exploratory Center, jteber@uga.edu.

In FY 2016, the Office of Institutional Research at the University of Georgia conducted an exhaustive study of the academic pathways our students take from enrollment to graduation. In evaluating student data for more than 4,310 first-time freshmen who graduated in Spring 2014, we observed that only 32% of these students graduated with the same major in which they started while 19% switched majors twice and about 6% changed majors three times or more. These shifts typically meant more student debt, extraneous credits, and a longer time to graduation. It is apparent that a large number of our students may benefit from advice specifically tailored to help them better navigate the myriad choices of majors available to them at UGA.

In light of this data, UGA opened the Exploratory Center (EC) in August 2016. The Center is staffed by professional academic advisors who advise all students with unspecified majors, as well as students with intended-business and intended-journalism majors, and students who want to transition from one major to another. Currently, 14 advisors staff the EC for both scheduled and walk-in appointments. In addition, the Career Center holds walk-in hours, and EC advisors are partnering with both the Career Center and Student Affairs on programming opportunities. EC advisors work one-on-one with students who have not yet selected a major, are having trouble selecting a major, or feel they are in the wrong major and need help selecting a path that better aligns with their interests and skills.

In the year since it opened, the EC has facilitated nearly 12,000 appointments with students; clearly the Center is meeting an important student need. We are currently collecting data on the number of students who changed majors in 2016 and the number of times they did so. We expect to see a decrease in the number of students changing their major this year, which should improve time to graduation for students who enter UGA as unspecified.

STRATEGY 5:

EXPAND ONLINE COURSE OFFERINGS, PARTICULARLY IN THE SUMMER SESSIONS, TO GIVE STUDENTS MORE FLEXIBILITY IN PLANNING THEIR PROGRAMS OF STUDY AND TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS, PROGRESSION, AND COMPLETION.

PRIMARY CONTACTS:

Stephen Balfour, Director of the Office of Online Learning, Stephen.Balfour@uga.edu and Paul Klute, Director of Office of Institutional Research, pklute@uga.edu

In 2013, the Office of Online Learning (OOL) launched a Fellows program to recruit and train faculty to design, develop and teach high-quality online courses. Through this initiative UGA has developed 49 online courses in the core and 181 upper division courses. Many of these are online-only courses or online versions of high-demand courses that fulfill several areas in the GenEd degree requirements. By offering high-demand, required courses in an online format during the summer, students have flexibility in course scheduling which allows them to meet degree requirements in a timely manner, ultimately contributing to increased degree completion and reduced time to degree. In addition to individual online courses, recent efforts have focused on creating and delivering online degree programs; in total, UGA now hosts 27 online programs, including an entirely online BBA degree (see Appendix B).

Although the majority of credit hours are still earned in residential, face-to-face courses, growth in the roster of online courses is impacting time to degree. In addition to giving students more flexibility in planning their programs of study, online courses allow students who are studying or interning off campus or who must return home to work full time during the summer to stay on track for graduation. Indeed, summer online enrollments have risen dramatically between Summer 2014 when online enrollments accounted for only 10.5% of the overall enrollments and Summer 2016 when online enrollments rose to 35% of the total summer enrollment. The data also show that more and more students complete their undergraduate degree with at least one online course in their program of study.

It is clear that online courses contribute to student credit hour production and progression toward degree completion. Increased communication across campus from the Office of Instruction and advisors has helped drive students into online options, especially in the summer. The Office of Online Learning will continue its various programs, such as Online Fellows, to support the creation of additional online courses, especially courses that fulfill core requirements, major requirements, or are in high demand. Because the Registrar's office is now using the waitlist feature in Banner, departments are better able to identify high-demand courses that would benefit from online sections.

STRATEGY 6:

ENCOURAGE THE USE OF OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OERS) AND PEER-LEARNING ASSISTANTS (PLAS) TO PROMOTE STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS, PROGRESSION, AND COMPLETION.

PRIMARY CONTACTS:

Laura Crawley, Interim Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, lcrawley@uga.edu; T. Chase Hagood, Director of the Division of Academic Enhancement, tchagood@uga.edu; Timothy Burg, Director of the Office of STEM Education, tburg@uga.edu; and Naomi Norman, Associate Vice President for Instruction, nnorman@uga.edu.

For the past several years, UGA's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) has coordinated, in collaboration with the Office of STEM Education and the Division of Academic Enhancement (DAE), a number of initiatives and activities that impact student success and completion. See Appendix C for a complete description of the programs and initiatives sponsored by CTL that support retention, progression, and completion.

One such initiative is the Open Education Resources (OER) program for classes with large enrollments and traditionally expensive textbooks. At UGA we have found that most faculty who adopt OERs continue to use them and encourage other faculty in their departments to do the same. We estimate that UGA students have saved about \$2.7 million in book purchases through OERs since 2013. Moreover, during the 2016-17 academic year, CTL continued work on a grant received from the Gates Foundation in partnership with Rice University to research the overall efficacy of using OERs within the UGA context. Dr. C. Edward Watson, former director of our CTL and now an associate vice president with AAC&U, conducted the research; his forthcoming study compared the performance of first-generation students using OERs against other students. His preliminary results suggest that OERs level the playing field in terms of grades by giving all students access to course materials on day one.

The Office of STEM Education at UGA is tracking the use of Peer Learning Assistants (PLAs) on campus. PLAs are used in a number of sections of different STEM courses and according to different models. In Mathematics, for example, they use supplemental instruction delivered by peers while some sections of Physics and Chemistry (especially those taught in SCALE-UP classrooms) deploy PLAs within the regular classroom. The most comprehensive use of PLAs is found in elementary Biology classes. Dr. Kristen Miller, Director of Biological Sciences, teamed up with Dr. Julie Luft, Athletic Association Professor of Mathematics and Science Education, to create a course that prepares undergraduate students to be Peer Learning Assistants (PLAs) in BIOL 1107 and 1108. The course—which is taught on a hybrid model—gives students the pedagogical training needed to help other students succeed in challenging math and science classes. The PLAs provide support and individualized attention to their students. In addition, their course provides a means for the PLAs to master course content, put learning into action, and nurture their own communication skills. Their vital assistance to the class also allows the faculty more time to focus on teaching and improving student outcomes. The effort started with a handful of PLAs and two sections of BIOL 1107 (roughly 400 students) the first semester and is now up to five sections of BIOL 1107 and three sections of BIOL 1108 with 20 volunteer PLAs (including 8 returning PLAs) working with more than 1,200 students in Fall 2017. The Office of Instruction and the Office of STEM Education is establishing additional tracking of both the PLAs and the students they assist as well as assessment tools to measure the impact of the practice on both groups of students.

OBSERVATIONS

The University of Georgia's retention and completion plan is focused both on having an engaging and supportive environment designed for the success of all students and on providing specific programs for students who are at risk. At the University of Georgia, students are being retained and are completing bachelor's degrees at exceptional rates. The first-year retention rate for all students hovered around 94% every year from 2008 through 2013 and rose to 95.2% in 2014-2015; first-year retention and six-year completion rates for certain underrepresented populations at UGA also realized gains (see Table 3). Despite these gains, there is work still to do, especially with underrepresented populations and transfer students. In addition, completion rates for the entire undergraduate population also have increased by several percentage points during the past 10 years. For the 2007 cohort, the four-year completion rate was 58% but was 66.1% for the 2012 cohort. Similarly, the average time to degree for entering freshmen has steadily declined, from a high of 4.21 years for those graduating in 2008 to an historic low of 4.02 years for those graduating in 2015 (see Table 5). Our goal is to boost our four-year completion rate to 68% by 2020.

UGA graduates are recruited by major corporations, small businesses, non-profit organizations, and government. Indeed, UGA's 95% career outcomes rate⁷ is 13% higher than the national average. Even more striking is that 91% of full-time employed graduates obtained that employment within three months of graduation. And large numbers of graduating seniors (20%) reported they had been accepted into graduate school.

The University of Georgia's completion strategy combines programs targeted to specific populations as well as those that impact the entire undergraduate population. Our completion strategies were implemented with our high performing, academically strong student body in mind—to challenge, engage, and support students on their way to timely completion. Our retention and graduation rates, positive enrollment trends, number of degrees conferred, and job offer rates underscore UGA's ability to help address the workforce needs of the future.

⁷ The Career Outcomes Rate is calculated from the percentage of students who are either employed, continuing their education, or not currently seeking employment within an average of 6 months after graduation.