



# AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY

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UNIVERSITY

## SECTION 1. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Augusta University (AU) is Georgia’s designated health-sciences University and a dynamic, comprehensive research university offering more than 150 areas of study, across ten colleges through undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. AU provides a rich intellectual environment for students to become leaders, scholars, researchers, educators and clinicians as they seek to advance their field and impact their community. Among 5 strategic and 3 interwoven priorities, the new AU Strategic Plan is anchored by strategic priorities for Learning and Student Success. This commitment reflects AU’s efforts to be a student’s destination of choice for education, health care, discovery and innovation. Of course, the strategic goals developed through the new strategic plan will directly influence key priorities in our Momentum planning.

In 2020, more than 6,775 faculty and staff members served a student body of 5,675 undergraduate, 1,921 graduate, and 1,969 professional/post professional students enrolled in 10 schools or colleges. AU delivers 46 undergraduate majors, 49 undergraduate and graduate certificates, and 57 graduate and professional programs and is home to the state’s only public medical school and only dental school. In fall 2021, AU’s enrollment average increased 3% with a total student enrollment across all colleges at 9,610.

The five most popular undergraduate majors in fall 2020 (in order) were Business Administration, Biology, Nursing, Psychology, and Kinesiology. Over the past several semesters we have seen enrollment growth in several programs. From fall 2019 to fall 2020 the number of students enrolled in Cybersecurity has almost tripled as majors moved from 83 to 218. Our newly created Health, Society, and Policy degree has continued to grow its enrollment each fall term and our Psychological Sciences program has increased enrollment by 22% from fall 2018 to fall 2020.

*(Sources: Qilk and AU Data Portal)*

Our undergraduate first-year fall to fall retention rate has held steady for the past several years. However, our retention data confirm there is room to improve. After developing a pattern of annual improvements, this past year’s retention rate (full time fall 2020 to fall 2021) rate dropped several percentages point from 73.5% to 70.2%. This drop is likely associated with external factors from the pandemic such as financial strain on students and shifts in employment opportunities. In addition, our six-year graduation rate continues to increase.

Table 1 – Percent of First Time, Full Time Freshman Cohort Retained from Fall 1 to Fall 2

Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020
Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 2016 Cohort	Fall 2017 Cohort	Fall 2018 Cohort	Fall 2019 Cohort
74.9%	75.1%	72.6%	72.7%	71.9%	73.5%

Table 2 – First Year, Full Time Freshman Six Year Undergraduate Degree Graduation Rates

	AY 2013-14	AY 2014-15	AY 2015-16	AY 2016-17	AY 2017-18	AY 2018-19	AY 2019-20
	Fall 2008 Cohort	Fall 2009 Cohort	Fall 2010 Cohort	Fall 2011 Cohort	Fall 2012 Cohort	Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort
<b>6 Year</b>	32.0%	30.2%	26.4%	27.4%	31.4%	39.8%	49.9%

Source: *University System of Georgia By The Numbers*

Importantly, the fall 2020 undergraduate student population at Augusta University continues to be a highly diverse group of students, both demographically and academically. Most students were from the state of Georgia (89%) and were attending AU full time (84.5%). The number of White students has held steady over the past five years, but since 2015 the number of Black students has

increased (from 1,117 to 1,373). Additionally, the number of Hispanic/Latino students has dramatically increased from 275 in 2014 to 451 in 2020. (Source: USG Qlik Portal).

For peer institution comparative data, please visit <https://www.augusta.edu/ie/facts/peers/php>.

## **SECTION 2: IMPROVEMENT PRACTICES - UNDERSTANDING CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

### **Strategic Enrollment Management Planning**

Augusta University embraces the process of continuous improvement aligned with our institutional strategic plan and unit goals. In 2018, President Keel set a goal to grow student enrollment to 16,000 students by 2030. This aspirational goal will strive to “recruit and support a diverse student body to progress and develop in an environment that prepares them for their future education, personal, societal, and professional endeavors”. In support of AU’s enrollment growth and the continued priority for student success, Dr. Neil MacKinnon, AU’s new Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost, sponsored creation of a formal Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Planning project. SEM activities and strategies are necessary to attain AU’s enrollment goal. The SEM planning project will develop a comprehensive and sustainable SEM Plan that will position the University to meet enrollment goals, while in alignment with the University’s mission, values, and new strategic plan.

In June 2021, Augusta University engaged American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) consultants to assist in the development of a comprehensive SEM Plan that includes data-informed strategies and tactics to meet student enrollment goals. SEM planning will ensure there is alignment between current practices, as well as provide a cohesive guide forward.

The SEM project engages a Core Team of academic leaders to consider recommendations and serve as Change Champions to educate faculty, staff and students and promote strategies and activities that retain and promote students. In addition to the Core Team, three teams for Recruitment, Retention, and Data will conduct environmental scans, evaluate current data, and develop data-driven strategic goals for student retention. Final steps of the SEM Plan will create a robust, internal change management and communication plan, inclusive of education and training. The journey to building the SEM Plan offers AU an opportunity to have critical open discussions between academic leadership, college faculty, academic, and student affairs units. The SEM Plan is on track to be completed by early spring 2022.

### **Structured Change Management Process**

Beginning with the SEM Plan, and being incorporated into all new student success projects, is the intentional use of a consistent change management process. Led by trained institutional personnel, structured plans are developed to provide a framework to guide faculty, staff and students through transitions of change when implementing new strategies for student success.

### **Academic Student Success Leadership Changes**

In addition to a new EVP of Academic Affairs and Provost, AU had several leadership changes that directly impact student success units. May 2021 brought a new Director of Academic Advising and a new Director of Study Abroad in September 2021. AU is currently conducting a search for a new Associate Vice President of Student Success expected to begin in early 2022. These leadership changes will allow AU the opportunity to increase collaboration across key areas and enhance assessment efforts. A primary focus, an organizing principle, for the AVP for Student Success is the full implementation of initiatives that are aligned to support the 4toFinish, Momentum Approach, work.

### **Customer Service and Momentum Training**

As a division, Enrollment and Student Affairs is committed to focusing on student recruiting and retention. In July, all staff participated in a customer service training based on Dennis Snow’s *Unleashing Excellence* (2003). Departments created common purpose statements and learned about the critical elements of service delivery. During fall 2021, departments are reviewing customer service standards, practices, and processes through service mapping to remove barriers students may encounter with admissions, enrollment, and support services. In addition, all staff participated in 4-to-Finish training. This training provided institutional data on student retention and asking staff how they might manage their activities and processes within the 4-to-Finish framework. All new employees in the division participate in this training as part of their onboarding process.

## **SECTION 3. YOUR BIG IDEA**

AU has connected the USG Momentum Approach concepts to both our recruiting and retention strategies (e.g., student affairs and academic affairs) as a way to help build bridges at critical junctures and transitions of the educational journey for our students. AU continues to focus our energies on four key transition points on the student journey:

- HS to college
- General education to major
- Undergraduate to graduate and professional schools  
College to career

For maximum results, and to nudge the Retention/Progression/Graduation (RPG) needle, AU has built these conceptual bridges across units across our University community to help students from the time of recruitment to graduation and employment.

A significant part of the bridge building is growing in our students' a capacity for college-level academic thinking. We have adopted approach that we will emphasize a growth mindset while also inviting an academic mindset. The AU Big Idea during the USG Momentum Summit IV was to create a concierge service in a single location that provides information and intentional connections to students at key transition points along their academic journey. AU found it difficult to identify a single location to accommodate all student support services. However, a reflection of our commitment to building substantial bridges for key transition moments, is our increased commitment to the First and Second Year Experience Office in which many concierge services are now being provided.

The AU FYE/SYE program was elevated as a stand-alone program to help isolate the work, consolidate FYE/SYE resources, and offer additional opportunities to engage students to grow emotionally and intellectually as they also explore their purpose in college. Now, the FYE/SYE office (known as **The Treehouse** because of its top floor, all glass office space) is centrally located on the Summerville campus (e.g., where many undergraduates take classes) and provides an ideal location where students can receive “just in time” answers to questions about the first two bridge transition points in college: high school to college and general education to major. As part of the overall 4-to-Finish initiative, the office also provides information about campus-wide programming for both academic and student affairs, such as events, presentations and workshops to strengthen students' purpose. As we have had visions for a single location, concierge type service, the Treehouse has in many ways taken that idea to an exciting level.

## SECTION 4.1: MOMENTUM WORK RESILIENCE UPDATE

### Incorporate 4-to-Finish more broadly into the university culture

The institutional collaborations around the Momentum Approach are both effective and wide-ranging. The Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs introduces the 4-to-Finish concepts to students at orientation then engages them with co-curricular learning opportunities across their academic journey. Academic colleges have stress-tested curricula and honed degree programs to support a timely and smooth degree progression and completion. The Division of Instruction and Innovation has expanded the First Year Experience for beginning colleges students, enhanced program maps linked to academic advising, hosted mindset and purpose workshops, cultivated high-impact practices that enrich academic experience, and expanded technology resources to provide holistic student retention and progression support. The notion of 4-to-Finish is not just a helpful moniker, it has become a transformative and instructive cultural norm for the entire institution.

### 4-to-Finish Task Force

The creation of a 4-to-Finish Task Force was temporarily suspended so as not to distract from efforts to support the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan and institutional Strategic Planning efforts for Learning and Student Success. What has transpired, however, is the work we had intended for the Task Force has in many ways been assumed, or subsumed, by the work in the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, and often by the same people. Ultimately, our intention is to re-establish this priority once institutional planning efforts are complete and a new Associate Vice President for Student Success joins AU in spring 2022.

### Extend Orientation/Transition Programming

Summer orientation is key in the student transition from high school to college. It is an important time to share overall expectations and institutional support services with new students. The Office of New Student and Family Transitions re-imagined the transition experience for new undergraduate students by creating a three-step onboarding process to enhance retention and streamline the matriculation process. An online Welcome began student onboarding with a self-directed Welcome program built around the 4-to-Finish framework. Students were then offered the option to attend a one-day, in-person or virtual, Jaguar Nation Orientation experience. College Welcomes, Academic Advising, and Engagement sessions all incorporated 4-to-Finish in their presentations. Students and families strongly agreed/agreed (97.6%) that after attending Orientation they possessed knowledge of the academic expectations for their chosen pathway, strategies and resources to be successful, and key university resources who provide leadership for curricular and co-curricular experiences.

The Division of Instruction and Innovation developed two new opportunities to promote Momentum goals: an orientation session focused on growth mindset and a conference day focused on academic induction. The Academic Success Center and Pamplin College Writing Center hosted the orientation sessions to engage students and their parents in exploring the idea of what it means to have a

growth mindset. The discussion focused on the benefits of trying new things, adopting new strategies to reach goals, and described the strong support network AU has created to assist students in reaching their academic goals.

Units in the Division of Instruction and Innovation hosted a “Momentum Day” conference with pop-up concierge-based sessions to connect students to the academic components of 4-to-Finish. Academic Advisement, Academic Success, Career Services, Writing Center, First Year Experience, Study Abroad, and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship lead sessions over the day to highlight purpose, pathways and mindset and to make strong student connections at this key transition point.

During the summer 2021, we recognized that students may not have had the opportunities to make the robust personal connections that normally occur during our two-day Orientation sessions. This theory was validated when students answered this question on the Orientation survey. Only 62.7% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “During orientation I was able to begin developing relationships with other new students, student leaders, and university faculty/staff members.”

In response, we implemented the NearPeer technology application for our new students. We discovered that 415 new students, Orientation and Leap Week Leaders utilized the application. Peer connections made via NearPeer include:

- 16 per user
- 7,306 total
- 85% of users have made peer connections in NearPeer
- Logins (uses) in NearPeer 21 per user
- 9,807 total
- Time spent in NearPeer 3.4 hours per user  
1,586 total hours

### INQUIRY 1000: Design Your Life

All entering students continue to complete the INQR1000 course to support the integration of purpose, pathways and mindset into the curriculum. The course is managed by the Office of First Year and Second Year Experience (FYE/SYE) and is designed for first and second year students with approximately 15 sections per year. As a way to support faculty who teach these courses and to emphasize the role of the 4-to-Finish commitment, we have embedded within the course content six modules of learning:

- **Explore purpose of a college education.** Individual/public good; innovation and invention; salary and satisfaction; working conditions
  - **Uncovering your purpose rather than finding a passion.** Mission not job title – Ted talk with guided questions.
  - **Academic mindset, motivation and goals.** Persistence; SMART goals in college; short term and long term goals.
  - **Connecting college to careers – widening options.** Develop three career options – primary, alternate and wild card.
  - **Knowledge, competencies and skills.** Illustrate how college coursework develops skills needed for post-graduation.
- Major mapping and planning an academic journey.** Students complete their major map - plan for changes.

As part of this course, students are asked to choose one of two assessments offered by Career Services to complete, resulting in over 200 new assessments in August. Brief videos were shared with instructors to help them debrief the assessments with their students. It is notable that conversations among instructors and students further engaged the two groups in the welfare of each, elevating the power of Engagement as a retention effort. Student evaluations have been very positive, especially in the areas of faculty-student and peer-to-peer interactions. We plan to continue increasing the number of INQR Design Your Life (DYL) sections offered over time to support the integration of purpose, pathways and mindset into the freshman curriculum.

### Enhance High Impact Practices

The AU High Impact Practices Implementation Team participates in the USG process to support the statewide HIP goals as a critical element of our 4-to-Finish Momentum Approach. At AU, our undergraduate enrollment in HIPs has remained fairly steady between 27% and 30% over the last five years (excluding AY21). These numbers, based upon 2020-21 enrollment, indicate that AU has a strong and consistent presence of HIP engagement, but also that our institution has significant room for improvement in order to be on par with similar institutions. AU will continue to broaden awareness of HIPs among faculty, increase the number of course section with HIP attributes in our SIS system, and expand equitable access and participation in HIP programs. It is our intention that a commitment to HIPs will reveal itself in both attribute designation in Banner and in practice by our faculty who subscribe to this work with special care. We envision that all students will have significant HIPs experience when coming to AU.

The primary HIPs currently underway at AU are Internships, Study Abroad/ Study Away, Capstones and Undergraduate Research. Research shows students engaged in campus related work tend to persist in College. Career Services partnered with Financial Aid and Human Resources to offer best practices training to over 80 campus supervisors who recruit and manage student employees. In August, Career Services hosted a Campus Student Employment Fair, linking hiring departments with students interested in campus

work offerings. Twelve campus departments and over 80 students attended. Career Services plays a key role in helping students engage in experiential learning opportunities that lead to exciting, meaning-making, career or graduate studies destinations. An ideal contained in the notion of purposeful choices and academic pathways.

### First Year/Second Year Experience Programming

In addressing the need for resiliency, the Office of First and Second Year Experiences offered two types of programming for freshmen and sophomore students struggling with connection to the university, to their major and/or their future pathways: Book Club and Grit Campaign.

Student Life and Engagement (SLE) awarded First and Second Year Experiences (FYE/SYE) a Grant in the amount of \$2500 to support book clubs that challenged freshmen and sophomores to plan and prepare for future steps. The selected books reflect the 4-to-Finish initiative to enhance Purposeful Choices and Pathways.

In fall 2021, FYE/SYE hosted 5 book clubs (both in person and virtually) using 4 different sources:

- The Latte Factor: Why You Don't Have to Be Rich to Live Rich
- Win or Learn: The Naked Truth about Turning Every Rejection into Your Ultimate Success
- How to Win at College: Surprising Secrets for Success from the Country's Top Students
- The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter - and How to Make the Most of Them Now

Over 60 students participated in these small group discussions and many more are anticipated to join the Spring 2022 Book Club groups. Students engaged with the content, the facilitators and their peer group, creating a high-impact practice. Students reflected on how this opportunity helped to support their efforts in navigating college and life beyond.

To align with our 4-to-Finish approach and counteract the “academic rut” students may feel from the pandemic, FYE/SYE created an engaging month-long series of workshops/conversations about resiliency titled GRIT WEEK. We defined GRIT using Angela Duckworth’s research on resiliency. She states, “*GRIT is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. GRIT is living life like it’s a marathon, not a sprint*”. FYE/SYE collaborated with the Division of Communications and Marketing, faculty from undergraduate colleges, Alumni and Donor Engagement, Academic Success Center, Academic Advising Center, and Study Abroad in developing and implementing the GRIT Campaign. GRIT WEEK workshops offered students a space to share their fears, concerns and practical strategies to help students realize they are not alone and normalize the transition experience.

In addition to the workshops, students were also asked to write a letter to themselves (Growing their own Grit) which will be mailed to their home addresses during the holiday break – right before spring semester. We are expecting nearly 200 students to participate in writing encouraging letters to themselves which we are hoping will also connect with their parents, too.

Finally, we asked AU faculty, staff, alumni and students to share their personal stories of “Grit” in terms of academic success. These stories were posted using a hyper-doc on the FYE Website and shared campus-wide. Sharing stories of resiliency helps students realize they are not alone, and normalizes the transition experience.

### Multicultural Mentorship Program

The Multicultural Mentorship Program (MMP) program is a new, as of fall 2021, peer mentoring program designed and designated for Augusta University's students from minority identities. The MMP assists with the first-year transition into the Augusta University community. First year students are paired with trained upper-class student mentors to aid in their adjustment to college life and Augusta University. All participants engage in social, personal, and professional development opportunities that are exclusive to the program.

- Hosted two retreats to train our Mentors and to acclimate and welcome our first-year mentees to the campus.
  - Retreats occurred in July and August of 2021
- Hosting one MMP General Meeting each month for all students in the program
- Hosting one social event each month for all the students in the program
  - September: Arts in the Heart Trip
  - October: Bike Tour of Augusta

### African American Male Initiative Program

The African American Male Initiative (AAMI) recently transitioned from the Academic Success Center to Multicultural Student Engagement (MSE), to benefit from alignment and integration with the Multicultural Mentorship Program, as well as other MSE initiatives and networks. AAMI is a leadership development program designed to cultivate the talents and abilities of African American male students to support their academic and future career goals. Our goal is to promote student success and improve

graduation rates through social and academic networks. Through collaborating with university and community partners we intend to connect students with others to envision their future, to explore their passions, and to actively engage in their college experience.

- Hosting one “Man Cave Monday” program each month that focuses on an aspect of holistic wellness.
- Hosting one “Follow-up Friday” each month that serves as a social and bonding event.

## SECTION 4.2: GLOBAL MOMENTUM SUPPORT

### Communication Planning

Previous to the Momentum Summit IV, AU had adopted language that embraces four strategies, four habits of mind, that when embraced/adopted by faculty and students, support student success. AU branded this umbrella campaign **4-to-Finish** to: 1) encourage students to actively **engage**; 2) develop an academic growth **mindset**, 3) craft an academic **pathway**, and 4) uncover their **purpose**. We have gathered a diverse group of people, representing multiple areas of our organization, to collaborate and extend our 4-to-Finish initiative. Led by our Vice Provost for Instruction & Innovation and Vice President for Enrollment & Student Affairs, the team is focused on building opportunities for our students and moving the RPG needle at Augusta University.

Augusta University (AU) has connected the USG Momentum Approach concepts to both our recruiting and retention strategy communications (e.g., student affairs and academic affairs) as a way to help build bridges at critical junctures and transitions of the educational journey for our students: 1) high school to college; 2) general education to the major; 3) college to professional or graduate school, and; 4) college to career. For maximum results, and to nudge the RPG needle, AU uses these conceptual bridges to help students understand these critical transition points.

The Division of Enrollment and Student Affairs developed 4-to-Finish branding logos (see Appendix A) to foster awareness across the institution. Consistent use of the logos for student program materials, social media, and website pages is important to communicating the principles of engagement, mindset, purposeful choices, and pathways into the fabric of undergraduate education.

### Faculty and Staff Outreach and Support

The Center for Instructional Innovation continues to support faculty across the University to develop interactive content and leverage technology to engage students and promote academic success.

The Academic Success Center collaborated with the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs to host two faculty seminars in the spring of 2021. The topics addressed student success and highlighted the mindset, introducing and explaining the relevance of the theory in the college classroom. Content included strategies to utilize to support a growth mindset in students as well as in faculty approaches to teaching and learning. The key concept was trying new strategies to encourage engagement and support learning. The seminar content was shared with other institutions at the USG Academic Advising Academy in September 2021.

## SECTION 5: OPTIONAL SUPPLEMENTAL UPDATES

### Student Success Management System Enhancement

Many recommendations from our Strategic Enrollment Management Plan assessment address the need for a more robust technology to track student progress and alert staff and faculty when a student may need support. Our SEM planning exercises confirmed the underutilization of our current Student Success Management System platform (EAB Navigate) outside of our Academic Advising Center. A project has been initiated to expand the use of our EAB Navigate Student Success platform to utilize key functionality for early alerts and predictive analytics to support a holistic approach to student success.

Below is one brief analysis reflecting the increase in student enrollment after engaging in at least one faculty/staff appointment in the Navigate system.

#### Spring 2021-to-Fall 2021 Reenrollment + Navigate Appointment Engagement

The below analysis focuses exclusively on our “First Term Fall 2020” student population

- *1,059 students enrolled in Spring 2021 - 75.6% reenrolled in Fall 2021*
  - *952 had 1+ Navigate Appointment in Spring 2021 - 77.6% reenrolled to Fall 2021*
  - *107 had 0 Navigate Appointments in Spring 2021 - 57.9% reenrolled to Fall 2021*

For the past several fall semesters we have improved student outcomes in our Gateway to Completion courses. The withdrawal rate decreased by 5% from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 and the number of A and B grades in these courses increased. In fall 2021 we redesigned our Early Alert/Progress Report program to focus on and further support our Gateway to Completion Courses and other first year courses that can barriers to student success. The Writing Center Director is now involved in the Early Alert/Progress Report program by receiving timely information about student performance so they can conduct outreach to these students.