



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

SECTION I: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Mission:

As a comprehensive institution of the University System of Georgia, Valdosta State University is a welcoming, aware, and vibrant community founded on and dedicated to serving our communities' rich and diverse heritages. Through excellence in teaching, basic and applied research, and service, VSU provides rigorous programs and opportunities that enrich our students, our university, and our region. The VSU mission consists of three interrelated parts: Student Mission, University Mission, and Regional Mission. VSU awards associate, bachelor's, master's, educational specialist, and doctoral degrees. [See full [VSU Mission Statement](#).]

Geographic Service Area:

As a comprehensive university, VSU is charged with meeting the general and professional educational needs of its South Georgia service area, which stretches from the Atlantic Coast to Alabama, encompassing forty-one counties and 31 percent of the land area of the state.

Composition of the Student Population

In Fall 2020, VSU served 12,304 students (headcount) with FTE of 10,632 of which:

- 77.8% undergraduate students; 22.2% graduate students
- 68.1% female
- 66.2% enrolled full-time
- 26.6% of undergraduates lived on campus
- 47.3% white, 38.1% black, 1.6% Asian
- 2,617 enrolled as beginning first-year students (2,324 FT and 293 PT)

SECTION 2: IMPROVEMENT PRACTICES

As you can see from the sections that follow, the Divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Student Success have worked cooperatively to lessen the structural and motivational obstacles to student success. We continue to improve the pathway from acceptance to new student orientation to enrollment. As our next first-year seminar class evolves, we hope to even further launch students successfully into their first year and beyond. The system office has assisted by the virtual gatherings from those involved in this work around the system, so faculty and staff can share resources and strategies.

Additionally, our Division of Information Technology has worked extensively with the other divisions to onboard Slate, a new customer relationship management tool (CRM), and Civitas, a new data analytics platform. Slate will provide enhanced communication pathways from admissions through graduation. Civitas will provide "signals" to inform our advising, help us understand the persistence lift of our retention activities, and provide real-time insights on students who are most at risk of leaving the institution. Our IT division has partnered with these vendors, and we have worked with USG-ITS to implement both products on our campus.

SECTION 3: VSU'S BIG IDEA

Our overarching Big Idea is the alignment of a number of critical initiatives (QEP – experiential learning, Gateways to Completion, First Year Seminar pilot, Concierge Coaching) under the umbrella of Momentum Approach. Students have benefitted from the aspects of this that we have already implemented and are already excited about our expansion of experiential learning.

With the launch of the QEP, there has been a definite and purposeful connection of the QEP to the First Year Seminar pilot. The QEP Advisory Committee endorsed the First-Year Seminar as an approved experiential learning activity. By the end of the Fall 2021 semester, we will have one semester of data to analyze and ascertain the impact on first-year students.

- The FYSE 1101 courses, through students' engagement in a high-impact practice, lay the foundations for students' participation in experiential learning activities beyond the course. In the course, students are introduced to the process of inquiry and are required to complete a signature assignment which is also showcased in the VSU Undergraduate Research Symposium in the spring. In addition, the General Education Coordinator submitted an experiential learning endorsement for the FYSE 1101 signature assignment so that students are able to earn credit toward the experiential learning student recognition program which is part of VSU's QEP.
- The VSU G2C initiative as contracted with the John N. Gardner Institute (JNGI) is coming to a formal end. However, many of the strategies developed during the initiative are continuing in a number of courses within the core curriculum. As a result of the success of these strategies, the course redesign efforts will continue at VSU under a new name that accurately reflects the direction in which the institution will apply the lessons learned from the G2C initiative. These redesign efforts will be applied to a wide range of courses at VSU, not just courses that were part of the G2C initiative. The design of the FYSE 1101 course is a current example of how some of the strategies learned from the G2C initiative (e.g.: SALG) are being incorporated into non-G2C courses. In addition, some of the courses that incorporate redesign strategies may also include activities that meet the criteria to apply for endorsement as an experiential learning activity through the QEP.
- The Concierge Coaching (CC) program is also interconnected with the aforementioned initiatives as it provides "another touchpoint" for engaging students to ensure they have the resources necessary to achieve positive momentum toward fulfillment of their academic and career-related goals. The CC program impacts students who take FYSE 1101, students who engage in experiential learning activities, and students who take courses in which G2C-related course redesign strategies are being incorporated. The CC program provides an opportunity to make sure that students are aware of the institutional resources available, to notify the correct units when students need to be engaged with the resources they provide, and to collect and provide critical feedback regarding the ways in the provision of resources can be improved.

Thus, directly and indirectly, these major initiatives at VSU work together to create an interconnected system in which students are able to experience the "Momentum Approach" at VSU.

SECTION 4.1: MOMENTUM WORK RESILIENCE UPDATE

Further Progress on Creating a Productive Academic Mindset

Starting in 2020 with new faculty and continuing campus-wide in 2021, VSU has devoted efforts to further help faculty understand the importance of a productive academic mindset and increase practices to encourage this mindset in our students. During the past two academic years, our Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) New Faculty Learning Community has covered the concept of growth mindset and teaching strategies for growth during a session of this new faculty learning community that meets every three weeks each semester. In addition, for VSU's opening weeks this fall, CELT developed and delivered a new one-hour workshop/webinar entitled, "Teaching for Growth and Adopting an Academic Growth Mindset as Faculty." Any faculty member could register for this training that was offered both in person and online, with an abbreviated version offered during this year's general education meeting. The recording of the webinar is stored in our Learning Management System (BlazeVIEW), making it accessible asynchronously to all VSU faculty at any time. Finally, CELT is rolling out another growth mindset-related training for faculty and administrators that focuses on writing reflections about teaching and approaching the annual faculty evaluation as formative career growth. Entitled "Writing Your Reflection about Teaching for the Formative Faculty Annual evaluation and Tenure & Promotion," it runs 1.5 hours long and is currently being offered this fall to deans, department heads, and faculty leaders on campus such as the executive committee of the Faculty Senate, with the plan to deliver it both in person and online as a workshop/webinar this winter for which any faculty can register. Thus, VSU has been encouraging productive academic mindsets for faculty both in their teaching and in their own self-evaluations.

Enhance experiential learning/ HIPs, expanding this to a much wider portion of the student population

In support of VSU's Strategic Plan Goal #2 and the Quality Enhancement Plan submitted to SACSCOC, in Summer 2021, VSU rolled out "Trailblazing: Shaping the Undergraduate Experience through Experiential Learning" to the VSU Community.

During summer and fall, the following accomplishments occurred:

- In May 2021, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs appointed an interim QEP Coordinator (a tenured faculty member from Communication Arts) who was charged with the implementation and first-year pilot.
- Established an Experiential Learning Advisory Committee, which included the Interim QEP Coordinator, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, the Director for the Center of Excellence in Learning and Teaching, the Dean of the Honors College, the General Education Coordinator, the Associate Director for Student Life, and the President of the Student Government Association.
- The Advisory Committee refined the process for faculty to apply for an Experiential Learning (EL) endorsement for course activities or programs. The application asks course instructors and program coordinators to describe how a proposed course activity or program fits in each stage of the Experiential Learning Cycle model developed by David Kolb (1984). The

Advisory Committee endorsed 19 course activities for Fall 2021, which represented 26 different course sections. As of October 8, 2021, 230 students have completed the pre-test as part of their participation in an EL-endorsed course activity.

- A website was developed that includes resources for faculty to learn about the EL cycle, including how High Impact Practices can be incorporated in each stage, along with other information related to the QEP efforts (QEP.valdosta.edu).
- In order to promote experiential learning throughout campus, the QEP Coordinator and Advisory Committee, with the support of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, issued an invitation for Experiential Learning Faculty Ambassadors. We received 14 applications and selected 5 Ambassadors from various academic areas across the university through the competitive application-based process.
- One of the principal responsibilities of Faculty Ambassadors is to facilitate workshops with faculty and staff. Ambassadors participated in a 1.5-hour in-person train-the-trainer session facilitated by CELT's Director and then followed up by completing 1.5-hours of asynchronous training modules to help prepare them to host at least 10 workshops focused on Experiential Learning areas during 2021-2022.
- Experiential learning work of VSU faculty is publicly distributed on the QEP website and social media outlets (@VSUTrailBlazers on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).
- A call for Experiential Learning Seed Grants was issued on October 1, 2021 to the VSU community for use in Spring 2022. These seed grants are intended to offset project costs associated with Experiential Learning activities for Valdosta State University students.
- The Advisory Committee is currently working to create the 'TrailBlazer designation' for students who complete a specified number of EL activities at designated levels. This designation will be recognized through graduation medallions, letters from the VSU Leadership team, and an Experiential Learning transcript based on the level of participation in EL activities.

Strengthening the transition to college by meeting student needs - through more effective targeting of available resources, using student surveys

In academic year 2021, we were able to combine our Pre-Enrollment Survey inside the MyMajors platform. In doing so, we were able to provide one location for advisors to review the MyMajors assessment results and the necessary information from the Pre-Enrollment Survey. As a result of this enhancement, we were able to get our new students enrolled more efficiently.

During 2021, we identified three new ways to deepen our use of the results of the MyMajors Assessment. One of the largest concerns noted by our students was the concern of paying for college. We connected students with the "Know More. Borrow Less." campaign on campus provided by Financial Aid. During orientation this summer, we developed a new workshop provided by our Career Opportunities Office. In this workshop, our Career Opportunities staff discussed how to seek employment on, and off campus, in the first year. This workshop was consistently our most attended workshop over the summer.

Another opportunity presented as we looked at the large numbers of students who marked concerns around lack of motivation, goal setting, and poor study habits. In partnership with the Academic Support Center, three new academic coaching modules were developed to address the concerns noted above. These coaching modules are delivered by our peer tutors and available throughout the semester.

Finally, we have numerous students on our campus who experience food insecurity. As a result of the data, we connected these students to our VSU Food Pantry and shared local resources with them as well. In addition, we highlighted that students who work for VSU Campus Dining Service are eligible for a meal during their shift.

Stress the importance of campus engagement to student success

In Student Affairs, the framework for the following 3 competencies are in place: Leadership Development, Career Preparation, and Volunteer Services. We are finalizing the marketing component in late fall and plan to do a soft launch at the end of the fall 2021 semester. A full-scale marketing effort begins in Spring 2022.

Plan for a new general education curriculum

During the summer of 2020 the following general education activities were conducted:

- Continued piloting of the FYSE (First Year Seminar Experience) 1001 instructor-designed courses.
- Development of the predesigned FYSE 1101 course in collaboration with First-Year Programs.
- Piloting of the FYSE 1101 predesigned course as part of the First-Year Programs, Summer Ignite Program.
- Preliminary assessment of pretest and posttest data from fall 2020 and summer 2021 FYSE 1001 courses.
- Design and development of a campus engagement reflection activity in collaboration with the QEP coordinator, First-Year Writing Coordinator, and the Associate Director of Student Life.
- Drafting of plans for the continuation of campus engagement reflection activities that incorporate collaborations between various academic units, integrated reflection, and experiential learning opportunities.

During the fall of 2021, the following general education activities were conducted:

- Implementation and coordination of a campus engagement reflection activity in collaboration with the QEP coordinator, First-Year Writing Coordinator, and the Associate Director of Student Life.
- Submission of (QEP) experiential learning endorsement for the campus engagement reflection activity in collaboration with the coordinator of the First-Year Writing Program.
- The transition of the Core Curriculum meeting to the VSU General Education meeting. In addition to the main session, three breakout sessions allowed for further discussion of general education-related topics. The meeting was presented in person and virtually. Records of the session will be posted to the General Education Council website.
- Continued participation in the USG High Impact Practices Faculty Implementation initiative.
- Provided instructor training and supervised 7 instructors who taught 8 sections of the FYSE 1101 predesigned course this fall.
- Exploration of the design of a FYSE 1102 course to replace the VSU 1101 course so that at-risk students also have the opportunity to acquire additional skills to promote student success and to further expand on the skills they develop in FYSE 1101. This initiative course design is being conducted in collaboration with the division of Student Success and First-Year Programs.
- Designing a faculty learning community to provide professional development related to the instruction of FYSE 1101 predesigned courses. The FLC is scheduled to be offered in Spring 2022.
- Implementation of feedback via email for all Core Curriculum Course Assessment Reports submitted to the General Education Council. The feedback will be provided directly to the department head and/or assessment coordinator.
- Coordination with the Adult and Military Programs and Continued Learning Director and the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies & Research to develop a vetting structure for the adherence to Credit for Prior Learning portfolios policies after the portfolio has been reviewed by the respective department.

Forthcoming – November 2021:

- The General Education Coordinator will meet with the General Education Council to discuss the redesign of the General Education Council, general education learning outcomes, general education assessment, the incorporation of various related initiatives under the broader umbrella of General Education (e.g.: FYSE, CPL, campus engagement reflection activities, etc.), and the planning and hosting general education-related training, information sessions, and listening sessions for spring 2022.

SECTION 4.3: GLOBAL MOMENTUM SUPPORT

This year, VSU adopted a more deliberate approach in sharing the defining areas of the momentum year/momentum approach with faculty, students, and staff. In orientation for both new students and new faculty, concepts from the momentum year/momentum approach were introduced, and they were also discussed during the annual retreats for Deans, Directors, and Department Heads and the Academic Advisors.

New Student Orientation - Momentum Approach

During Summer 2021 Orientation, we focused on sharing the momentum approach with students and parents. Parents received an overview of the importance of a fuller schedule during a parents only session in the afternoon. A discussion about the belief that the minimal level of full-time credits is best for students was debunked and we utilized both USG and VSU data to reinforce the critical importance of a fuller schedule.

New students had student-only sessions with advisors in the afternoons. While the majority of our students already had a schedule prior to coming to orientation, the discussion centered around how fuller schedules help students to achieve a better semester GPA, as well as a more on-time pathway to graduation.

Develop New Momentum - Student Success Web Page, and Social Media Pushes
Communication efforts this past year centered around pandemic updates including vaccine information, campus safety, mental health resources, and commencement updates. Development of the momentum student success website will move to the current academic year with a completion date of summer 2022.

Academic Advisors - Highlight Momentum Approach

In spring of 2021, one professional development session focused entirely on the momentum approach. Advisors were reminded of the importance of the momentum approach through the discussion of the key pillars. Additionally, advising center directors now have access to a dashboard to track how their centers are doing in relation to total credits by semester and academic year. This dashboard also provides statistics on the students, by College, showing their enrollment into, and completion of, math and English in the first year. We revisited the importance of the momentum approach leading into Fall registration and prior to summer orientations.

Finally, Jonathan Watts Hull, Director of Student Success in the Office of Academic Affairs and Policy at the Board of Regents University System of Georgia (USG), provided a virtual meeting to highlight the importance of fuller schedules to the advising teams in Spring 2021. In this meeting, data from all USG institutions, along with VSU-specific data was shared.

Faculty and Staff Outreach and Support

As mentioned in earlier sections of this update, momentum approach information and emphases have been shared extensively with our academic affairs leadership team, with our faculty, and with staff, particularly our professional academic advisors.

Data Plan

All academic administrators and staff have access to data provided by Institutional Research and labeled as “Blazer Insights.” Dashboards are available on student enrollment; student admissions; grade distribution, student credit hour generation; retention, progress, and graduation; course availability, and degrees conferred. This data can be explored for the entire institution or by college or department.

Program Maps and Pressure Tests

The Associate Deans in each college have taken on the responsibility of pressure testing schedules within their respective colleges, considering also the courses they share in common across colleges.

Programs maps will be updated annually when the chair of the Academic Committee sends approved updated curriculum items to department heads.