



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY™

Report of the Student Success Task Force

Submitted November 2020





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INTRODUCTION

Mississippi State University is a public, land-grant university whose mission is to provide access and opportunity to students from all sectors of the state's diverse population and other states and countries and offer excellent programs of teaching, research, and service. MSU is accredited to award baccalaureate, masters, specialist, and doctoral degrees. Part of the University's strategic goals is to foster teaching and learning through academic and student support programs that require championing student success to assist students in obtaining degrees at the earliest time possible.

At the direction of the Provost and Executive Vice President, this task force was charged with examining the following:

- A complete inventory of all activities and programs we currently have that are relevant to student retention and success.
- A complete analysis of where these programs are overlapping or duplicative, where there are gaps, and how these efforts could work together in a more holistic manner.
- An evaluation of programs at other universities to determine where there are good examples of what we can do or should do better.
- Most importantly, without constraints of what we are currently doing, stepping back and thinking about the drivers behind a lack of student success and determining how we could assist students in fundamentally different ways, taking these drivers into consideration.

The concept of Student Success in higher education is multifaceted, with aspects related to academic preparation, career development, psychosocial characteristics, and institutional culture (along with a stronger focus on student well-being). Mississippi State is committed to being an institution where students can achieve their academic goals and thrive holistically. Generally, academic success is the purview of the Division of Academic Affairs, while well-being is a Division of Student Affairs matter. These two groups are frequently siloed in many universities, which limits collaboration. One of our internal goals is to thoroughly coordinate efforts between the two divisions and substantially strengthen the partnership. We are fortunate to also have a third division, Access, Diversity, and Inclusion, to join in this endeavor. This newly created division elevates the importance of improving diversity and inclusion across the campus. Furthermore, this collaboration of three divisions focusing on student success significantly enhances our ability to affect our student outcomes.

Our task force recognizes that to ensure student success there must be an individualized approach that requires synchronization and cooperation amongst units and departments, expanding resources for personnel and technology, seeking innovative approaches to student engagement, and on-going assessment of the programs. This document outlines action steps with priorities and timelines over the next five years. The plan is divided into six recommendation areas, which include:

- Recommendation 1: Develop institution-wide capacity for student success practices across all colleges and divisions
- Recommendation 2: Encourage greater emphasis on student success for first-generation, low-income students
- Recommendation 3: Create a culture that addresses disparities in retention and graduation rates among under-represented students, particularly African-American students
- Recommendation 4: Increase efforts to bolster first-year to second-year retention rates
- Recommendation 5: Deliver effective and consistent advising experiences across all student populations
- Recommendation 6: Increase the number of bachelor's degrees awarded across all student populations

Appendix B is an inventory of current student success activities. Our six recommendations listed above address many of these activities, but not all of them. Most of the activities not explicitly discussed in our recommendations are successfully operating and should continue. For example, Pathfinders and the Navigator Program are essential for improving retention. These programs and activities are continually being assessed and improved without requiring additional resources. For recommendations involving new programs and activities or expanding existing ones, the Task Force suggests on-going assessments for efficacy of these endeavors. This will be especially important for activities requiring major funding.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS



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THE DATA

PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION ANALYSIS FOR MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Mississippi State University enrolls two types of new undergraduate students to the university every fall: (1) first-time, first-year students (known as cohort students), and (2) first-time transfer students. Each fall, the university tracks the progress of both types of students through their academic career until they are eventually awarded a degree. The follow section displays the trends for both types of first-year students.

RETENTION RATES

Retention rates pertain only to cohort students and focus exclusively on the percentage of those students who continue their education in the second year. The original cohort may be adjusted based on allowable exclusions.

Table 1. Retention rates by race and ethnicity

Cohort	MSU	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian*	White	Hawaiian*	Multiracial
2010	83.1%	80.8%	70.7%	88.5%	85.7%	84.1%	66.7%	70.0%
2011	80.7%	73.2%	82.8%	89.7%	58.3%	83.7%	100.0%	67.4%
2012	78.5%	66.0%	84.0%	85.0%	90.9%	82.9%	100.0%	79.1%
2013	80.2%	70.9%	82.4%	87.1%	91.7%	83.3%	75.0%	73.9%
2014	82.0%	72.2%	79.5%	84.1%	66.7%	85.3%	100.0%	75.4%
2015	80.2%	73.5%	83.1%	91.5%	53.3%	82.5%	100.0%	70.8%
2016	79.3%	69.2%	74.1%	83.3%	42.9%	83.3%	75.0%	70.0%
2017	79.8%	67.4%	71.4%	81.8%	55.6%	84.3%	N/A	67.4%

* Indicates small populations of fewer than 30 students in each cohort potentially causing large year-to-year variation.

Table 2. Retention rates by Pell Grant recipients

Cohort	Pell Grant	Non-Pell Grant
2010	80.3%	84.5%
2011	74.0%	84.4%
2012	69.7%	82.5%
2013	72.1%	84.2%
2014	74.6%	85.4%
2015	74.5%	83.1%
2016	70.3%	83.7%
2017	71.2%	84.2%

GRADUATION RATES

Graduation rates pertain only to cohort students and calculate the percentage of those who graduated within six years after starting in a particular fall.

Table 3. Graduation rates by race and ethnicity

Cohort	MSU	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian*	White	Hawaiian*	Multiracial
2008	60.4%	48.1%	48.2%	65.7%	50.0%	63.9%	New classification starting in 2010	
2009	60.0%	44.6%	58.6%	66.7%	33.3%	64.5%		
2010	59.9%	42.2%	46.3%	76.9%	50.0%	66.6%	20.0%	48.5%
2011	57.9%	38.5%	53.5%	74.4%	29.2%	66.1%	100.0%	53.1%
2012	58.4%	37.8%	60.0%	70.0%	54.6%	65.6%	100.0%	45.0%

* Indicates small populations of fewer than 30 students in each cohort.

Table 4. Graduation rates by Pell Grant recipients

Cohort	Pell Grant	Non-Pell Grant
2008	48.7%	64.6%
2009	47.6%	64.5%
2010	46.4%	67.3%
2011	42.7%	66.7%
2012	42.4%	66.8%

PERSISTENCE + COMPLETION

After the third fall, some first-year students could complete degrees, which would complicate persistence calculations. Therefore, persistence and completion are usually combined to provide a complete picture.

FIRST-YEAR COHORT STUDENTS

Table 5 tracks the start fall cohort students, and the percentage who either return or graduate in subsequent years.

Table 5. Persistence and completion data for first-year cohort students

Cohort Year	Attribute	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year
2013	Total	80.2%	71.4%	67.7%	64.6%	63.2%
	Black	70.9%	57.2%	51.2%	46.6%	44.6%
	Hispanic	82.4%	75.7%	69.0%	66.2%	59.5%
	Asian	87.1%	67.7%	70.9%	64.5%	67.8%
	Am Indian	91.7%	75.0%	66.7%	58.4%	58.3%
	White	83.3%	76.6%	73.6%	71.2%	70.2%
2014	Total	82.0%	73.8%	69.0%	66.2%	
	Black	72.2%	60.1%	53.0%	47.9%	
	Hispanic	79.5%	65.4%	64.1%	60.3%	
	Asian	84.1%	70.5%	72.8%	70.5%	
	Am Indian	66.7%	58.3%	58.3%	66.7%	
	White	85.3%	78.6%	74.5%	72.2%	
2015	Total	80.2%	69.1%	64.2%		
	Black	73.5%	58.1%	52.9%		
	Hispanic	83.1%	67.5%	68.7%		
	Asian	91.5%	74.5%	72.3%		

Cohort Year	Attribute	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year
2015	Am Indian	53.3%	40.0%	40.0%		
	White	82.5%	73.3%	68.2%		
2016	Total	79.3%	70.2%			
	Black	69.2%	54.7%			
	Hispanic	74.1%	64.8%			
	Asian	83.3%	81.3%			
	Am Indian	42.9%	38.1%			
	White	83.3%	75.9%			
2017	Total	79.8%				
	Black	67.4%				
	Hispanic	71.4%				
	Asian	81.8%				
	Am Indian	55.6%				
	White	84.3%				

FIRST-YEAR TRANSFER STUDENTS

Table 6. Persistence and completion rates for first-time transfer students

	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020
2013	79.0%	71.9%	69.5%	68.3%	67.8%	68.0%	68.5%
2014		82.1%	75.0%	73.1%	71.8%	72.7%	72.7%
2015			79.5%	71.4%	67.5%	67.5%	68.0%
2016				79.5%	71.1%	68.5%	67.9%
2017					76.1%	70.2%	68.7%
2018						79.4%	74.6%
2019							83.3%

DEGREES AWARDED

The total number of bachelor's degrees awarded does not track any particular cohort or time frame. These are simply the number of students who received a bachelor's degree in any given year.

Table 7. Bachelor's degrees awarded disaggregated by race/ethnicity

Ethnicity	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Am Indian or Alaskan Native	24	11	13	9	22
Asian	41	63	69	85	85
Black or African American	495	544	540	606	614
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	0	4	3	5
White	2,371	2,547	2,750	2,776	2,992
Hispanic	61	73	94	107	100
Multiracial	37	39	40	69	65
Unknown	74	29	10	10	11
Total	3,105	3,306	3,520	3,665	3,894

DEFINITIONS

These definitions are in keeping with federal and state performance metrics. It's important that we do not conflate cohort and non-cohort students or their terminology. What we do for traditional first-time, first-year students is rarely applicable to other student populations.

Cohort Students	A group of students who enter in the fall term as full-time, first-time, degree-seeking students. Excludes transfer students and part-time students.
All Undergraduate Students	Any student enrolled in for-credit courses at the undergraduate level. Includes all enrollment types, such as transfer students, stop-out students, as well as cohort students. Also includes students regardless of full-time or part-time status.
Retention Rate	The percentage of cohort students who return for the second fall of college. This definition is restricted only to enrollment in the second fall and only to students in the cohort. All other semesters and all other student types are lumped in as part of persistence.
Persistence Rate	The percentage of students who continue to enroll (even if not in consecutive semesters). Persistence is a catch-all term for students outside of the cohort, as well as continued enrollment beyond first to second fall (e.g., first fall to first spring; first fall to third fall).
Graduation Rate	The percentage of cohort students who graduate within six years of their first enrollment.
Completion Rate	The percentage of students who enroll at MSU and graduate at any point.

Traditional students are loosely defined as 18-24 year olds, who start college either the fall immediately following or the fall of the year after they graduate high school. 'Non-traditional students' is a catch-all term for those who start college for the first time several years after they complete high school or who are working adults.



RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: DEVELOP INSTITUTION-WIDE CAPACITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS PRACTICE ACROSS ALL COLLEGES & DIVISIONS.

- Develop a campus-wide student success strategic plan to include the following:
 - » Overall institutional goals for improving first to second year retention & four- and six-year graduation rates; reducing difference between under-represented students degree attainment and white students; increase in overall number of degrees awarded; completion rate overall; transfer student persistence & completion rates
 - » College level goals for improving same measures
- Organize student success efforts with the proposed organizational structure [attached].
- Implement a warning system or expand the BIT warning system to flag students earlier and more easily. Integrate attendance data as appropriate to further inform this process.
- Equip faculty, GTAs, and university employees to meet institutional expectations regarding student achievement and well-being.
 - » Develop a campus-wide student success conference/workshop series/educational program to increase capacity of university employees to understand their role in student success and well-being. Share and disseminate information about promising practices on campus.
 - » Integrate the curricular and co-curricular experiences into a comprehensive learning environment.
- Continue to enhance and promote the use of technology integration between the student success portal and existing systems within BANNER and CANVAS frequently used by faculty, staff, and administrators.

EQUITY-MINDED CONSIDERATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 2: ENCOURAGE GREATER EMPHASIS ON STUDENT SUCCESS FOR FIRST-GENERATION, LOW-INCOME STUDENTS.

- Expand programs to support more first-generation, low-income students based on best practices.
- Organize TRiO/Student Support Services, Thrive, and Promise programs under single leadership structure providing supervision for all three programs.
- Increase participation in New Maroon Camp to include first-generation, low-income students by providing direct outreach & scholarships for participation.

RECOMMENDATION 3: CREATE A CULTURE THAT ADDRESSES DISPARITIES IN RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES AMONG UNDER-REPRESENTED STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS.

- Increase the number of tenure-track faculty of color, particularly African-Americans, by providing additional resources for recruiting, start-up packages, and salary lines.
- Develop a "Bulldog Academy" program for African-American students to include an FYE course, community engagement, career exploration, and campus involvement. Participants to receive a scholarship annually, with a required maintenance of 2.5 GPA and completion of 30 credit hours each year. Upper division students provide mentoring for earlier students. Target participation – 100 students (25 in each year).
- Facilitate additional professional development for faculty on culturally responsive teaching and inclusive excellence practices for the classroom. Assist faculty with infusion of diversity-related content into courses across the curriculum.
- Expand programs [e.g., Men of Excellence & IDEAL Woman] to include additional focus on academic success, career coaching, leadership development, and social support. Provide financial support to participants and student leadership. Provide additional staffing to support program.
- Develop a summer bridge program for students with academic risk factors with financial support that is low or no cost to the student. Evaluate the existing Developmental Program and consider merging it into the newly developed broader summer bridge program. If consolidating these summer programs is not effective, consider shifting the Developmental Program to the fall semester.
- Increase pipeline of underrepresented students into graduate programs.
- Increase participation in SPARK leadership conference and establish a permanent funding source for the program. Offer SPARK attendees who enroll at MSU a one-time SPARK scholarship. Provide additional staffing to support program.

COHORT STUDENTS

RECOMMENDATION 4: INCREASE EFFORTS TO BOLSTER FIRST-YEAR TO SECOND-YEAR RETENTION RATES.

- Redesign the first-year experience program with goals of increased retention and/or behaviors associated with it (class attendance, GPA, etc.); increased knowledge of and use of campus helping resources; and/or providing a small course experience with an instructor who will know and mentor each student individually.
 - » Involve the Director of First-Year Experience Programs and any other FYE expert specialists on campus in decisions regarding FYE courses and products. Expand time available to Director of FYE Programs.
 - » For Fall 2021:
 - Eliminate topical one credit hour courses as FYE offerings. These topical courses may continue outside of the FYE program.
 - For a transitional period, expand offerings of True Maroon one credit course. Convene a working group to review and update existing curriculum. Expand available pool of instructors to include those working in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs with master's degrees.
 - Pilot FYE infusion model sections of COE 1323 Career Planning and FYE infusion model sections of LSK 1023 College Reading and Study Skills. Infusion model delivers FYE content and student success strategies through already existing courses. See Appendix E for detailed explanation and advantages of this model.
 - Update and publish the Insider's Guide to MSU for use in all FYE courses.
 - Expand and require daylong training of all FYE instructors to a level comparable to best practices at peer institutions.
 - » For Fall 2022:
 - Adopt best practices for all FYE course offerings to include small class sizes, journals, undergraduate student teaching assistants, and common FYE content across course offerings in addition to required instructor training and compensation. See Appendix F for best practices document
 - Identify additional existing courses that could become infusion-model courses by adopting common elements above.
 - Develop and implement a 3-credit hour FYE course as a new course. Reduce availability of 1-credit hour True Maroon course.
 - Work with Departments in anticipation of requirement for all first-year students to take an approved FYE course.
 - » For Fall 2023:
 - Require all first-year students to enroll in an approved FYE course.
- Designate student pathways
 - » All traditional cohort students should be restricted from enrolling anywhere other than the Starkville campus at least during their first fall.
 - » Non-traditional cohort students should be able to opt out of programs and courses that are intended to develop maturation.

ALL UNDERGRADUATE POPULATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 5: DELIVER AN EFFECTIVE AND CONSISTENT ADVISING EXPERIENCES ACROSS ALL STUDENT POPULATIONS.

- Utilize a campus-wide proactive/intrusive advising model with centralized training of all advisors conducted by the Undergraduate Academic Advising Center.
- Define and decouple mentorship and scheduling in the advising model. Identify expectations of students and of advisors in this model.
- Allocate sufficient financial resources for the purpose of hiring additional trained advisors in the Undergraduate Academic Advising Center, colleges, and departments. Number of academic advisors

per college would be consistent with the time required for the effective performance of the activity as defined by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA).

- Continue to develop and maintain major pathways for all undergraduate majors. Identify and prevent logjams in scheduling so that students can complete their degrees in a timely manner.
- Mandatory advisement during the first year provided by college/department academic advisors. Develop a mechanism that allows college/department academic advisors to refer academically at-risk students to the centralized advising unit for increased academic support and resources.
- Support faculty engagement and mentoring for students that may include rewards and/or recognition through the promotion and tenure process.

RECOMMENDATION 6: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED ACROSS ALL STUDENT POPULATIONS.

- Implement and enhance completion grants to be awarded proactively to students who are within last year of degree completion.
- Request academic deans to review courses with high DFW rates with department heads to consider new pedagogical approaches and instruction models with the goal of reducing DFW rates without compromising academic standards.
- Substantially increase funds available for supplemental instruction. Encourage all instructors of courses with high DFW rates to make supplemental instruction available to their students.
- Create the Academic Advocacy program which would expand the Center of Student Success' scope from first-time students to all students. Model the program after the University of South Florida's and University of Maryland Baltimore County's successful programs. Start with a dedicated advocate for second-year students, transfer students, and the progression to four- and six-year graduation. This program would provide centralized support for all undergraduate students. The critical parts to the program would be efficient and proper targeting of students in need, effective and timely interventions, and a case management approach with numerous partners across campus.
- Create a pool of resources that can support strong, continuing students who cannot afford tuition and fees and who would otherwise have to return home.
- Develop a program that allows students to recover specific scholarships lost due to academic difficulty. The structured program will allow students two semesters to improve GPA and provide \$500 incentive grants each semester to encourage completion.
- Develop a user-friendly clearinghouse for on-campus work opportunities for students and departments. [Bringing together Career Center, Financial Aid into one easy to use system] Create more on-campus work opportunities for students. Strongly encourage on-campus departments to utilize this centralized system.
- Expand participation in and tracking of "high-impact practices" across all majors and all student populations. Consider creating an Office of Experiential Learning that can provide coordination of these activities.



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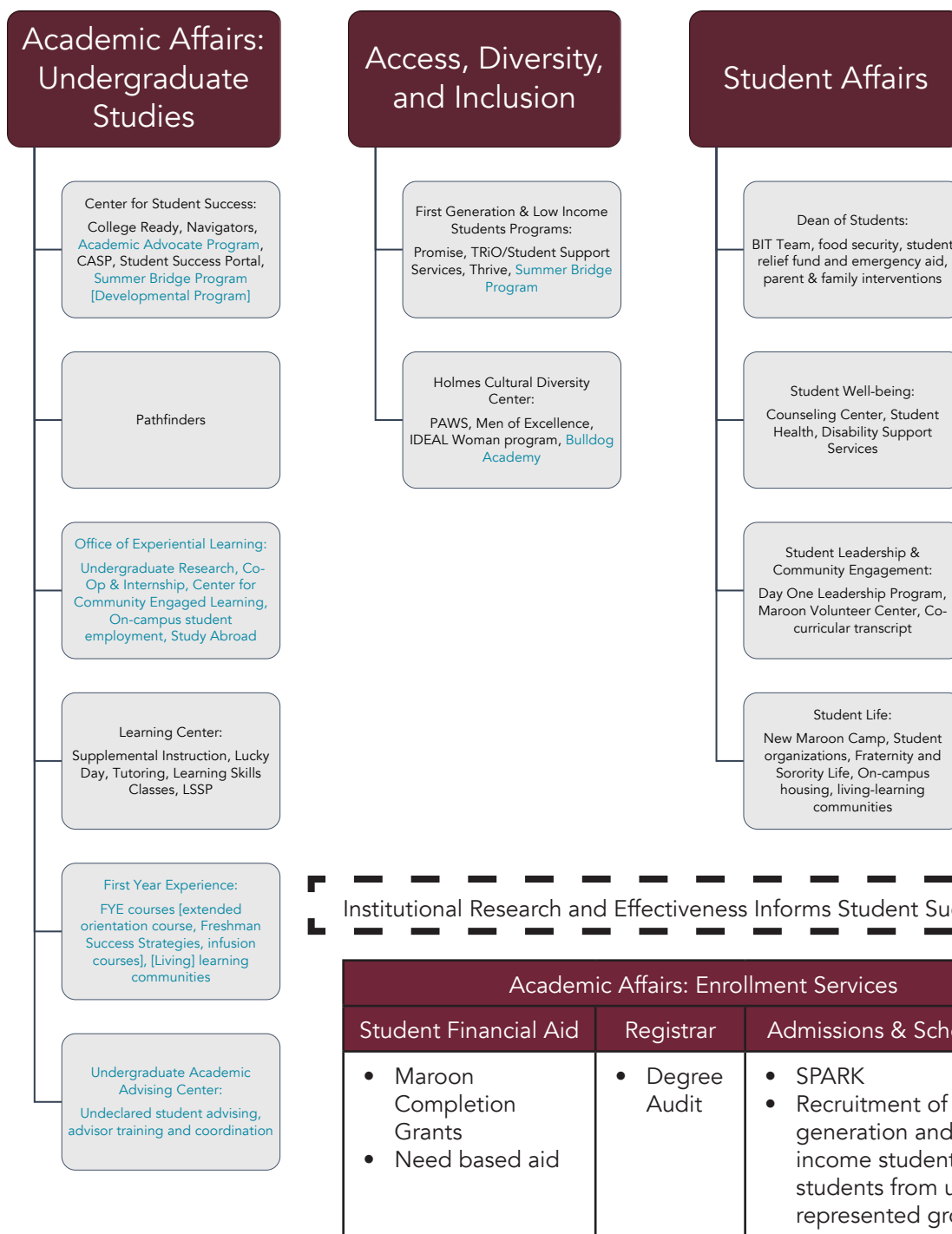
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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SUCCESS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

This set of charts represent the variety of units with responsibility for student success efforts at Mississippi State University. The items listed in **BLUE** indicate new programs or programs currently reporting in a different unit and/or division.

Student Success Standing Committee: The personnel responsible for leadership of Undergraduate Studies will convene the student success standing committee minimally monthly. This committee will be composed of the directors of the related units or related AVP's; and Vice Presidents for Access, Diversity, and Inclusion & Student Affairs. The SSSC will be responsible for the continual monitoring of student success metrics and engage in strategic partnering around student success efforts campus-wide.



APPENDIX B

STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES		
Program	Target Audience	Responsible Unit
Supplemental Instruction	First-year students Historically difficult 1000/2000 level courses	Learning Center
Tutoring	All Students	Learning Center
Promise Program	Low-Income, high achieving students (number of students served)	Learning Center
Thrive Program	Students from foster care, emancipated minors	Learning Center
Lucky Day Program	(10 students – cohort one)	Learning Center
Learning Skills Classes	Students Trying to Improve Academic Performance	Learning Center
Navigators	First-year students New transfer students	Center for Student Success
Pathfinders	First-year students	Provost Office
College Ready	First-year students	Center for Student Success
First-Year Experience Courses	First-year students	First-Year Experience Programs
True Maroon Courses	First-year students	First-Year Experience Programs
FYE Infusion Models	First-year students	First-Year Experience Programs
Maroon U	First-year students New Transfer Students	Provost's Office & Student Affairs
New Maroon Camp	First-year students New Transfer Students (number of students participating: Fall 2019- 1200)	Student Affairs
TRIO	First-generation, low income students (number of students participating: 160 across all classifications)	Student Support Services
Living Learning Communities	First-year students	Housing & Residence Life
BRIDGES	Racially underrepresented freshmen, sophomore and transfer students	Holmes Cultural Diversity Center
Food Security Network	All students (number of students served: average 200 per year)	Student Affairs
Financial Literacy Education	All students	Student Financial Aid

Day One	First-year students (number of students participating: 200)	Student Leadership & Community Engagement
Undergraduate Academic Advising	Undeclared students of all classifications	Undergraduate Academic Advising Center
Orientation	First-year students New Transfer students	Orientation & Special Events
Transfer Student Association	Transfer Students	
Low DFW Fine Arts Class	Fall/Aug Orientation Freshmen	Provost's Office
Pre-group 1 Retention Experiment	½ of the Fall 2019 Pre-group 1 first-time freshmen	Provost's Office

Other:

- Math Domain
- Writing Center
- Advanced Payment Project
- Student Financial Aid
- Student Counseling Services
- On-campus Jobs
- Student Involvement Opportunities
- On-campus Living
- Advising (all)
- Summer Developmental Program
- Honors College
- Center for America's Veterans
- Disability Support Services
- Undergraduate Research
- Athletics
- Behavior Intervention Team
- Canvas LMS & myState Portal
- Maroon Alert
- Cooperative Education and Internships (multiple disciplines)
- Experiential Learning Opportunities (department-level)



APPENDIX C

STUDENT SUCCESS TASK FORCE REVIEW OF PEER INSTITUTIONS & BEST PRACTICES

East Carolina University	Centralized student success center. Student affairs sponsors a student success conference, promoted for faculty and staff at the institution to attend.
University of Mississippi	FYE program is more efficient. 3 credit hour course with 134 small sections. Most first year students advised by their advising center. Organizational structure.
Virginia Commonwealth University	Advisors for all first-year students.
University of Arizona	Job-shadowing program.
University of Nevada Reno	Strategic plan for student success and first-year success guide. Student success has collaborative members and use the student success rhetoric as more a part of the university's public facing conversation.
Iowa State University	APEX program. Men of Color Summit. Academic Program for Excellence. George Washington Carver Program.
Georgia State University (on site visit)	First-Year learning communities. Summer program "Success Academy". AI/Chatbot for admissions through graduation. Academic advising. Perimeter Academy. Keep Hope Alive Program. Panther Retention Grant.
University of South Florida	Jim Dunne, Ra'Sheda Forbes, and Regina Hyatt attended student success conference sponsored by USF. Academic advocacy program.
University of South Carolina	Original/primary model for FYE courses/programs nationwide. National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Organizational structure.
University of North Carolina	Carolina Covenant – need based program that includes financial assistance with co-curricular academic, career, and personal supports.
University of Southern Mississippi	Luckyday Program
Texas A&M	Student Success Strategic Initiative: http://provost.tamu.edu/Initiatives/Student-Success-Initiative . Organizational structure.
Auburn University; Drexel; Georgia Southern; University of Wisconsin Stout; Columbus State University; UMASS- Lowell	Academic advising review.

APPENDIX D

STRATEGIES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES

Link between tenure-track hiring and student success: Increasing the number and diversity of tenure-track faculty has a positive synergistic effect on aspects of student success for students of color. African American students intentionally seek out faculty of color due to initial comfort and to students' inherent belief that faculty and staff of color are more likely to satisfy their desire for student centeredness (Guiffrida 2005).

Infusion of diversity into curriculum: An assorted curriculum exposes all students to enriching cultural legacies of misrepresented societal figures. Quaye et al. (2015) state that coursework that is culturally inclusive and well developed increases the likelihood of engagement amongst students of color in the classroom. Hurtado et al. (1999) explain that institutions can increase multicultural competency amongst all students by influencing them to take courses that are diverse and non-Eurocentric. These classes in turn show them how and what it means to live in a diverse society. According to Quaye et al. (2015), undergraduate students of color examine their syllabus on the first day of class to get a sense of the significance or lack of significance of their cultural communities in regard to their professor. This contributes to the need for professors to deliberately integrate readings and curriculum that reflect experiences that pertain to students of color. Through infusing culturally relative information in classroom curriculum, professors and the institution are promoting positive campus climate.

Deficit models, rethinking remedial classes: Remedial college courses tend to cost universities a lot of money, with a reported \$3 billion being spent across the nation in 2011 and do not contribute to high retention and graduation rates (Complete College America, 2012). In fact, the opposite may be true. Around 20 percent of students enrolled in four-year universities are placed in remedial classes, and, often, these students, upset with their placement, may decide not to take classes at all (Complete College America, 2012). For those that stick around, about a third will earn a bachelor's degree in six years (Complete College America, 2012). This is particularly problematic for students of color where 39.1% of African American students and 20.6% of Hispanic students are placed in remedial courses (Complete College America, 2012). Of these, 69.5% and 64.6% of African American and Hispanic students completed remediation, respectively (Complete College America, 2012). Using co-requisite courses is a better alternative to remedial coursework that occurs in isolation. In a co-requisite model, students are given support in the form of built-in remediation, tutoring, and required self-paced computer labs full credit courses (Complete College America, 2012). Students are also encouraged to take courses that align with their program of study with embedded supports. Those that do are twice as likely to earn a degree or certificate (Complete College America, 2012).



Summer Bridge Programs: Quaye et al. (2015) argue that colleges should implement summer bridge programs, which would aid in the transition process for students of color. In this transition, they can develop peer networks and obtain skills that will prepare them for the academic school year. Quaye et al. (2015) also argue that upperclassmen, who were once a part of this program, should be invited back as mentors. With former students coming back and participating as mentors, they are showing current summer bridge participants that they, too, can succeed at the institution despite their lack of racial/ethnic representation on the campus.



Minority focused initiatives:

- Carver Academy Program: The Carver Academy is structured to enhance, encourage, and support its participants' academic, social, and cultural activities throughout their college experience. Scholars must meet a 2.5 GPA requirement to maintain scholarship and complete 24 new credit hours each year. They must also participate in a minimum of three (3) events per semester. To promote continuous learning, achievement, and integrity, the Carver Academy provides the following:
 - » First Year Experience Course
 - » Personal Crisis Intervention
 - » Campus Involvement
 - » Career Exploration
 - » Community Service

Fiscal responsibilities: Focusing on the financial needs of minority students has shown an increased rate of retention and graduation rates for students of color. There are many intersections between race and socioeconomic status. For most students, working part time is essential to staying in college and graduating on time (Stern, 2014). The issue is that when students work part-time off campus, they view themselves as employees first and students second (Stern, 2014). To combat this, the University of Texas Student Employment Initiative (SEI):

- University Student Employment Initiative (SEI): allows students to work part time on campus for 20 or fewer hours a week (Stern, 2014). In order to be accepted, students are required to have 12 credit hours with a minimum GPA of 2.75 (Stern, 2014). Students work in positions that are geared towards their majors and can make around nine dollars an hour as teaching assistants, doing research in labs, as English and Math tutors, or in Human Resources and Business Affairs departments (Stern, 2014). To improve the student experience further, supervisors of these positions are trained as role models for the students (Stern, 2014). The program has shown to be successful with 95% of the 100 students in the program staying in college and graduating in 4.1 years, which is an improvement to their 5.7 average (Stern, 2014). Students' reports of the program were positive, stating that they gained experience that applied to their majors, strengthening their resumé and ability to communicate (Stern, 2014).

Institutional commitment: human resources and sufficient budgets: Overall, structural diversity is key to retaining students of color in higher education. Lacking diversity in the student body, curriculum, faculty and staff, or having minuscule budgets for diversity initiatives are certain ways to intensify campus racial climate and deepen the attrition of students of color. Through the lens of campus racial climate, institutional leaders should give further consideration to the impact of the portfolio of student success initiatives on retaining students of color.

APPENDIX E

EXPLANATION AND ADVANTAGES OF INFUSION-MODEL FYE COURSES

COMPILED BY TOM CARSKADON, DIRECTOR OF FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

The “infusion model” integrates First-Year Experience (FYE) material into existing regular academic courses, usually core curriculum courses, without subtracting any academic material from those courses.

The older approach to FYE courses has been to design separate courses comprised solely of FYE material, such as student success skills (study skills, note-taking skills, test taking skills, time management, etc.) and introduction to resources on campus that help students (Learning Center, Writing Center, Career Center, etc.).

The infusion model is a newer model that recognizes that not all students can or want to get this material in an entirely separate course. Many majors cannot accommodate an additional course, and many students prefer to get their FYE material as part of a regular academic course they are already going to be taking, and **apply** newly learned FYE material to student success strategies to their regular course where they learned it. It is an integrated approach.

An FYE infusion model core curriculum course subtracts nothing from the regular academic content of that course or from regular class time. The additional material is handled outside of class. Effectively, it applies the **methods** of a conventional best-practices FYE class (small class size; trained instructors who will get to know students individually and spot potential problems; reading and commenting on weekly journals; and providing detailed descriptions of helping resources on campus) to the **regular content** of a course the student would be taking anyway.

For instance, an infusion-model General Psychology course would be a special, small section of General Psychology that is restricted to incoming freshmen. This course satisfies a University core curriculum requirement in almost any major. The lectures and tests would be the same as in the regular, much larger General Psychology classes. Instead of putting abbreviated information about campus resources in the syllabus, expanded information would be provided in *The Insider’s Guide to MSU*, which gives a 4-to-7-page description of each resource. Weekly journals would be assigned where students would: react to the class material for that week; react to any regular academic readings assigned for that week; react to the chapter of the *Insider’s Guide to MSU* assigned for that week; and indicate how their University experiences (and, optionally, life experiences) in general have been going that week.



There are significant advantages to this approach:

Students can have a high-quality FYE experience by taking just **one** course (an infusion-model core curriculum course) instead of **two** courses (a regular core curriculum course plus a conventional FYE course).

Instead of learning academic survival skills in the abstract, students **directly apply them** to a regular core curriculum course they are taking; they **use** the skills where they **learn** the skills.

Recruiting of students is vastly easier, because **they will be taking these core curriculum courses anyway**. They don’t have to be “sold” on a separate FYE course they initially may not want or may not see the value of.

Recruiting of faculty for these courses is much easier, also, because faculty teach courses they are already teaching and whose content they are already experts in. **The infusion model does not add to the number of courses faculty teach.**

Faculty development benefits are greater, because faculty are learning enhanced methods to teach courses that are already part of their regular teaching assignments, courses they will be teaching for years to come.

Best practices dictate 3-hour FYE courses. This is difficult to accomplish on a large scale with a conventional 3-hour FYE course, but much easier to accomplish with an infusion-model course, starting with courses that already have relatively small class sizes.

An infusion model FYE course can fit in any curriculum, because it is based on courses the students already have to take. **No additional hours are added to the student's degree plan.**

All essential elements of high-quality FYE courses are retained: small class sizes; trained faculty who will get to know students individually; weekly journals; and detailed introduction of campus resources. The goals of the FYE course remain the same: increased academic achievement and retention; a small class experience where the instructor will get to know and follow the overall progress of each student individually; and increased student knowledge of, referral to, and use of helping resources on campus. All these goals can be attained using specially developed sections of regular core curriculum courses.

The infusion model has been used very successfully on this campus for decades; it is actually the model preferred by the Director of First-Year Experience Programs. It is time to move from extremely limited implementation of this model to much broader implementation of this model at Mississippi State.



APPENDIX F

BEST PRACTICES FOR FYE COURSES AT MSU (AND ELSEWHERE)

Compiled here by Tom Carskadon, Director of First-Year Experience Programs

Vetted by Dan Friedman, FYE Director at the University of South Carolina's model program

3 credit hours (not 1 credit hour). *[Note: necessary to feel like a "real" course and build momentum.]*

Small class sizes, absolute maximum of 24-25 students; class size of 20 preferable. *[Note: Class sizes at South Carolina and at University of Mississippi are already significantly smaller than the maxima stated here.]*

Purpose-built "textbook" [ours is The Insider's Guide to MSU] covering in detail helping resources on campus (Learning and Tutoring Center, Writing Center, Career Center, Health Center, Counseling Center, etc.), survival skills/success strategies (time management, note taking, test taking, etc.) plus institutional history, traditions, expectations, etc. *[Note: Both South Carolina and University of Mississippi have for years been using textbooks of their own like this.]*

Assigning and commenting on weekly student journals, thus getting to know/encourage students and suggest referrals to campus resources when needs are evident. (We should not assume students will self-refer if they merely know about the resources, although that knowledge does up the odds). *[Note: Both South Carolina and University of Mississippi have been using student journaling assignments for years.]*

Close weekly monitoring of class attendance, grades, study time, and learning experiences with active, individual contact with students falling short [or needing help].

Thorough training of instructors (minimum one day with follow-up during the semester).

Involvement of both Student Affairs professionals and academic faculty in development and teaching of FYE courses. *[Note: Both South Carolina and University of Mississippi have routinely done this; in fact, their FYE courses need Student Affairs professionals in order to get taught in sufficient numbers.]*

Upper-level students involved in individual FYE courses. *[Note: This would be like our Navigators and/or SI leaders here at MSU.]*

Substantial compensation for instructors delivering FYE products. *[They require a great deal of extra time and effort, and require extra training.]*

Two additional notes from John Gardner's group and from Dan Friedman, respectively, that illustrate the appropriateness of infusion-model courses:

"They [successful FYE courses] are centered in, rather than tangential to, the first-year curriculum, serving as an integral part of general education, core, or major requirements. They include academic content—often extra—or interdisciplinary content that is woven into essential process elements such as study skills, library use, writing, etc." *[Note: This is exactly what infusion-model courses do.]*

"The course is only as good as the faculty teaching it. Invest heavily in faculty development. The process of the course is equally as important as the content. *[Note: One outstanding FYE course we tried here was an infusion-model FYE section of College Algebra; the students actually looked forward to it and did better in it.]* Consistency is nice, but quality is better. Don't sacrifice the latter for the former. Give [first-year] seminar instructors flexibility in designing the course experience." *[Note: Teach instructors the basics listed above, and many courses, including regular core-curriculum courses, can become FYE products. The "magic" is in the method.]*

APPENDIX G

ACADEMIC ADVOCACY PROGRAM

The first year of college is a critical year for our cohort students. The probability that a student completes their degree is linked with their performance this first year (see Table 1). Pathfinders, started in 1998, is the first Intervention at MSU designed to improve grades, retention, subsequent graduation by working with all freshmen. This intervention has been extremely effective in raising freshman grades, retention, and graduation during a time when ACT scores and High School grades remained relatively constant. Pathfinders was the only intervention working with all freshmen until the Center for Student Success was founded in 2015. The Center has a staff of two, along with two graduate students. The Center's backbone is the Student Success Portal developed by Rodney Pearson, the founding director of the Center. Among many other tools, the portal provides an extensive dashboard of a student's "academic health." One of the major programs in the Center is the Navigator program. We currently have 34 trained undergraduate navigators who monitor and communicate with about 100 first-year students each. The Navigator program is one of a few programs on campus that focuses on the entire cohort.

Table 1: Importance of a Strong Start (10 years of data)

	First Semester Grades	4-year Graduation	6-year Graduation
Strong Start	A's and B's	47%	79%
MSU Average		30%	60%
Slow Start	C's and D's	5%	26%

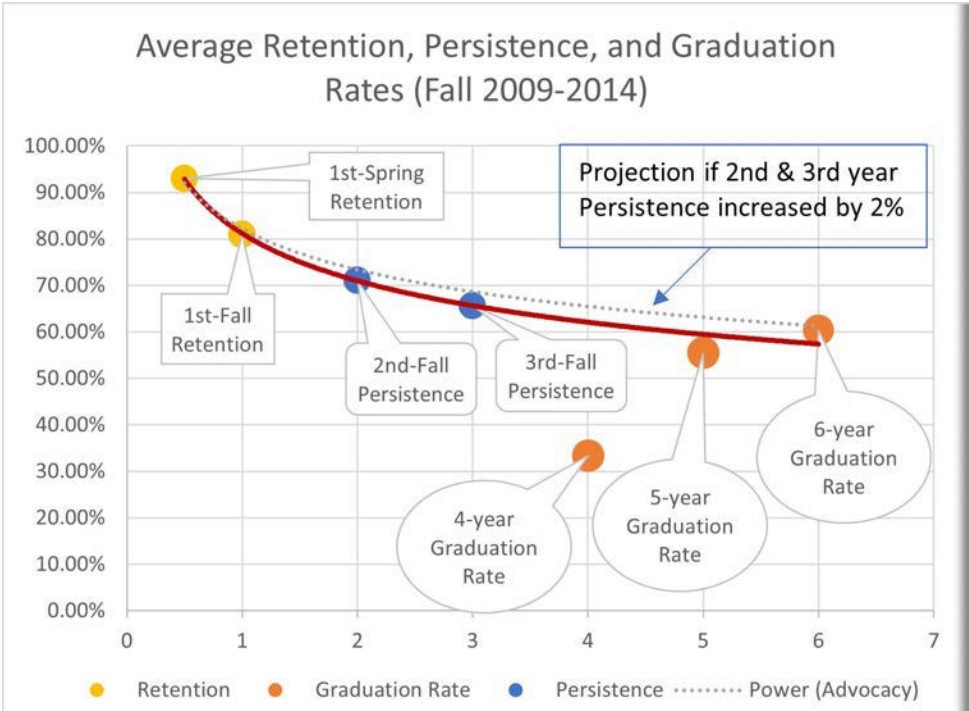
We typically lose about 20% of our cohort after the first year (i.e., ~80% retention). So, it makes complete sense to focus significant effort on helping these students. However, the decreases in years 2 and 3 are 10% and 6%, respectively. Therefore, based on the achievements of our Center for Student Success, we are recommending developing a program that will directly address our out-year declines in persistence. Many universities have graduation help desks that effectively assist upper-class students, and we, too, need a more proactive and inclusive program to help our students after the first year. One such program is the Academic Advocacy Program created at the University of South Florida and replicated at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Our version of the Advocacy Program would start with one advocate for each of the following groups: 2nd, 3rd-6th year students, and transfer students (maybe one for overflow). Struggling students would be referred to the appropriate advocate who would oversee the support in a structured case management style. Faculty would have the ability to easily refer a student to the advocates through Banner/Canvas with tools similar to our BIT referral. Additionally, a data analytic referral system would be continually working in the background to find students in need. The advocate would be the centralized hub of the program. Each advocate would triage the case and determine the appropriate path to getting the student back on track. The advocates would work with the various units on campus to assist students and follow up with both the student and unit to ensure the successful resolution of the student's issues.

From a student outcome point of view, the program's primary goals would be to increase the persistence in years two, three, four and, ultimately, in our graduation rates. We have modeled our 6-year graduation rate by fitting the retention and persistence averages to a power law (e.g., $\text{GradRate}_{6\text{-year}} = 81.2\% \exp(-0.194)$)[†]. The grey dotted curve is the fit if both 2nd-Fall and 3rd-Fall persistence rates increased by 2% absolute. In the 2nd-Fall, this corresponds to 20% of the students that leave, and for the 3rd-Fall, it is about 1/3 of the students who leave after their 3rd year. This would be an aggressive but realistic goal for the program. The model predicts that this would improve the 6-year graduation rate by about 4%. The return on investment for this improvement would be substantial (estimated to be around \$500K).

In conclusion, while the first year is the most important, our model indicates improvements in the out-years can significantly improve persistence and move the graduation needle, as well. We simply cannot afford to

ignore these students, and we should consider adopting a centralized program that assists them every step of the way.

Table 2: Averages of Fall 2009 through 2014 Cohorts (Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rates)



Average # Students	1st Spring	1st Fall	2nd Fall	3rd Fall	4 Yr Grad	5 Yr Grad	6 Yr Grad
2833	93.0%	81.0%	71.1%	65.6%	33.3%	55.5%	60.4%

Figure 2: The average retention, persistence, and graduation rates for the Fall 2009 through 2014 cohorts.

*This equation fits the data well; however, as can be seen in the Figure, it slightly undershoots the actual average 6-year graduation rate (see red curve). It is not overly important that the curve extrapolates precisely to the rate, since we are concerned with the relative effect on the rate if we increase the 2nd- and 3rd-year persistence values. Furthermore, it is the best empirical model with a relatively simple fit equation.





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