Student Success: Goals

- Improve retention from 78% to 90%
- Improve 6-year graduation from 53% to 70% by 2020
- Prepare graduates for seamless career integration

The Student Success Committee:
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iREAL Recommendations 1-3:
1. Dramatically increase the percentage of students graduating in 4-6 years
2. Prepare graduates for seamless career integration and entrepreneurial success in the global marketplace
3. Grow aggressively and strategically

The committee focused on the goals of improved second-year retention, improved year-graduation rate, and seamless career integration—the three BOG Performance Metrics that this committee believes will be improved significantly by implementing the strategies outlined in this paper. Coincidentally, the committee members believe FIU will be achieving our primary goal—that of serving our students better. These strategies will lead to increased learning, increased success in securing meaningful work, and increased sense of affinity for FIU.
While the committee felt that many aspects of the third metric would be more appropriate for the Financial Base/Efficiencies committee, implementation of the Student Success committee’s proposed strategies will aid in recruitment and retention of excellent students. Implementation of these strategies will result as well in more efficient use of resources, and will therefore allow for increased enrollment without sacrificing quality.

The Student Success committee members are passionate about serving our students and therefore feel a sense of urgency in implementing the strategies associated with these goals. While the committee feels strongly that all of these strategies should be implemented immediately, its members understand that there are limited resources. They have therefore prioritized these strategies, many of which should be implemented simultaneously. While perhaps not as urgent, others should be implemented soon because they have a high impact on student success with a relatively low budgetary impact. The committee believes these strategies should be implemented before significant growth can occur, in order to improve and maintain quality of education and to assure the success of our students.

Objectives

A number of sub-committees and work groups prepared individual white papers that were then grouped into the following categories/overall objectives:

- Improve Course Instruction
- Increase Student Support
- Expand the Center for the Advancement of Teaching
- Increase Faculty Support
- Increase Utilization of Technology

Strategies

The following individual reports formulated strategies to realize stated goals and objectives. They are listed in order of priority, although many should be implemented simultaneously. [In addition to reports by fourteen sub-committees of the Student Success committee, reports from an AA On-line task force, the Office of Academic Planning and Accountability, the Undergraduate Education GSI Committee, and the Faculty Senate On-line committee are included. These additional committees included members of the Student Success Committee.] [See Appendix for Individual Reports]

- Redesign 17 Critical Courses
  - Math
The committee felt that the greatest impact on student success was to **Redesign the 17 critical Courses.** FIU has identified 17 gateway courses as critical for increasing undergraduate success (see Appendix A). These are gateway courses with: 1) High enrollment: ≥ 1,600 (2012-2013); 2) high failure rates: ≥ 13% DFWI (2012-2013); and/or 3) high impact: a dropout predictor. The 17 courses were selected using these criteria as part of a successful APLU/Urban Serving Universities planning grant application. Overall, the goal was to identify courses that, if improved, were large enough or had a large enough impact to significantly improve retention.
rates. This list is not absolute: it has already been modified, and will continue to be modified, to reflect changing enrollment patterns driven by changes in UCC requirements, or other factors that would lead to identifying a different course that would have a greater impact on student success. Courses were placed into one of three groups: 1) Science and Social/Behavioral Science, section average enrollment ≥ 100, 2) Mathematics and Statistics, section average enrollment ≤ 100, and 3) Humanities, Writing, and First Year Experience, section average enrollment ≤ 100. By converting adjunct to instructor lines where possible, especially high-impact courses, initially focusing on lower division. Effective course redesign involves significant curricular review and redesign. FIU’s Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) must add personnel with experience in faculty development, especially STEM and Hybrid, as curricular redesign and faculty pedagogy improvement are not one-time, short-term projects, but longer-term projects. Faculty redesign of courses either during terms or over summer needs support, either through stipends or course releases. Chairs need to be involved in significant ways to support the redesign of courses in their departments. Instructors, much more than adjuncts, are capable of benefiting from and implementing changes in pedagogy. We recommend converting adjunct positions to instructor lines where possible, but particularly for courses that produce large numbers of dropouts (high impact courses). Gateway courses benefit significantly from regular meetings of instructors. Course coordination requires time and the attention of a designated faculty member or instructor who has expertise in best practices in domain-specific pedagogy. FIU may need to support increased development of pedagogical skills for faculty in targeted majors and domains. FIU should foster development of departmental and institutional cultures that recognize and reward excellent teaching. For example, instructors should be selected, retained, and rewarded based on their teaching skills.

Recommendations: 27 lines for Math and English. Convert adjunct to instructor lines in the remaining critical courses by 2016-17. Give course releases for “team leaders” and hire full-time administrator to coordinate all 17 courses (LeAnne Wells) by fall of 2015. Recommend implementing “Early Alert” System, spring of 2015. Require and support gateway course instructors to learn to teach students to become a successful university student (reading strategies, study skills, critical thinking, etc.) within the context of their subject areas (e.g., math, chemistry, biology, etc.)

**Math:** Critical need exits in Math and course redesign/discipline-based teams and support from CAT have already resulted in significant gains in Algebra. Recommend same model for all math gateway courses. Recommendations: 8 hires for spring of 2015 and 4 hires for fall of 2015 and 1 full-time administrator, additional 200 seat Master Math lab, 78 LA’s for Fall and 50 for summer at $1500 each.

**English:** Core ENC courses serve 8,000 students a year; over half are multilingual students (generation 1.5 or resident ESL). FIU courses are ideal ones to “teach for retention,” helping students connect to their instructor and to the FIU community. But, while we are innovative and dedicated, FIU lags behind SUS and other benchmark programs in two important ways, both of which are tied to student retention and success: Class size—FIU among the highest in the nation—27 and 30; National survey shows the average is 21; NCTE recommends 15-20 (for courses with multilingual writers). Number of Fulltime faculty—Currently 17 Non Tenure Track Fulltime faculty and 5 Tenured/Tenure Track faculty. Fall 56% (99 sections) taught by adjuncts; 32% (57 sections) taught by FT. Such high percentages of adjuncts are not seen at our
benchmarks—UCF has 50 Full-time NTT writing program faculty and employs only 6 adjuncts; FAU employs 8 more FT faculty than FIU. Recommend lowering class size of ENC 1903, 1101, and 1102 to 20 by 2020. As additional instructors are hired, lower class size incrementally each year. Recommendations: 7 hires for spring of 2015 and 8 for fall of 2015, 1 full time administrator.

Revamp First-Year Experience (SLS 1501). The current SLA course is a 1 credit, one semester course taught primarily by adjuncts— generally staff—with an assigned peer mentor. Class styles and experiences vary widely and engagement and use of peer mentor is based on Instructor. There is limited student interaction both in-classroom and out-of-classroom. Its purpose it to build university affinity, facilitate personal development and teach and reinforce skills need for success at FIU and in career, but with widely varying success rates. It is a high impact course. Revamping of SLS 1501 would include a curriculum redesign, with built-in classroom and out-of-classroom experiences with both the Faculty member and Peer Mentor, and online modules and activities. The curriculum would be redesigned by a task force that would include faculty already teaching the course and CAT as well as Undergraduate Education, the course administrator and organizationally where the curricular unit is housed. Specifically, membership should include the Director of the Academic Advising Center and First Year Programs, Charlie Andrews, and the Associate Director of the Academic Advising Center, Hazel Hooker. It is recommended that it be 2 semesters of 1 hour and 30 minutes each week for 15 weeks, with 0 credits in the fall and 1 in the spring. Students would be grouped into discipline-specific cohorts of 20-25 students of similar major, which would establish a relationship with peers and a peer mentor, critical for second year retention. It would include a hybrid format of interactive and engaging modules. Peer Mentors, who will receive training similar to Learning Instructors, would facilitate in-class instruction and coordinate and facilitate mandatory out-of-classroom experiences, including cultural and athletic events. Fulltime staff members will coordinate the Peer Mentor program. Pilot in several colleges for Fall of 2015; Honors College has already implemented successfully. Remaining colleges in the following year(s).

Recommendations: Course releases or overload compensation for faculty to teach discipline-specific cohorts. $1000 stipends for Peer Mentors ($250 in the Fall and $750 in the spring). One CAT staff dedicated to SLS, hired in spring of 2015. Hire Peer Mentor Coordinators.

Improve Instruction. Preeminent retention theorist and scholar Vincent Tinto (2012) goes as far as to say that “the classroom [is] the domain of institutional action that is given the least attention” in retention efforts. And he points out that this is a considerable shortcoming, writing: The classroom is the building block upon which student retention is built and the pivot around which institutional action for student retention must be organized. If we hope to make significant gains in retention and graduation, institutions must focus on the classroom experience and student success in the classroom and align classrooms to one another in ways that provide students a coherent pathway that propels them to program completion. (p. 124-5). Considerably increase and enhance faculty development. Expand the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT). Centralize, structure, and expand the FIU Learning Assistant
(LA) program. Recommendations: Form an Executive Board for FIU LA Program. Designate LA Faculty Representatives – one from each department, meet 2-3 times per semester either as a group or individually with co-director(s). Foster a cultural shift toward valuing effective teaching. Hire full-time instructors instead of adjuncts to teach critical lower-division courses. Cultivate consistency and alignment among initiatives (Title V, STEM Transformation Institute, HHMI, UT3, etc.). Require CAT staff (or similar party) participation in hiring committee. Development of a reward system to incentivize and celebrate excellent teaching. Establishing a faculty evaluation committee, “composed primarily of faculty, a few key administrators, and perhaps, even a student or two, which is responsible for gathering the information and following the steps outlined in [his] book.” Spring 2016. Purchasing a comprehensive student ratings system.

Expand the Center for the Advancement of Teaching. The Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) is FIU’s most effective source of support for faculty innovation, collaborating with faculty in curricular reform and pedagogical transformation. In fact, although educational and pedagogical reform efforts are known to pose considerable challenges, particularly at large institutions, CAT has already played a key role in successful FIU initiatives, most notably the recent improvements in College Algebra. With only two developers, CAT is vastly under-resourced to assist our thousands of faculty in transforming their teaching (by comparison, the Center at UCF has a staff of 12). Recommendation: Add 5 staff members to CAT by Fall of 2015, including STEM, Hybrid, SLS, Graduate Student developers and 1 full-time office manager. Hire STEM, SLS, and manager in spring of 2015, remaining 2 positions in Fall. Reconfigure space.

Tier Two
Critical/Implement As Soon as Possible

Increase Hybrid Courses. Studies have found that student learning outcomes (such as test scores) were slightly better in online classes than in classroom classes, but that blended (hybrid) classes were best. (“Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies.” United States Department of Education) Substantially increase the number of successful hybrid courses at FIU for improved student learning outcomes, to conserve classroom space and reduce student stress in challenges of FIU access. Provide support for hybrid course development training and pedagogy. Recommendations: $1500 honoraria for all faculty teaching large undergraduate courses to attend the Hybrid Academy in partnership with CAT. Initially 500 faculty members in summer of 2015. ($750,000) Hire additional IT instructional staff. Minimum of 3 Instructional Designers with expertise in Hybrid courses, and 3 Technicians in 2015. While highly successful, it is also extremely expensive and may not sustainable when the online course fee is removed. Therefore should simultaneously invest in faculty development and support. Non-recurring total costs $3.5 million, which includes faculty stipends and classroom conversion. Recurring costs of $1.5 million to hire additional IT support.
**Improve and Increase Online Education.** Collaborate with UFF and online quality assurance to ensure that intellectual property is adequately protected. Develop incentives to adopt low-cost e-textbooks. Enhance FIU support for web-assisted courses. Require students to complete training on how to take online courses. Incentivize faculty to teach online and/or hybrid courses at $1500 each (one-time, not per course). Leverage successful elements of FIU online 2.0 and existing face to face course reform. Substantial increase of classes and degrees in online setting. Recommendations: See budget above.

**Require all Students to Purchase a Personal Computer.** 50,000 instances of computers being checked out from the library in Fall of 2014 alone. If students were required to own computers, financial aid could be used toward the expense. Opportunity for grant application. Little to no budget impact.

**Invest Strategically in Student Financial Support /Improve Financial Literacy.** Students frequently drop out because of issues with financial aid, often over relatively little money. Therefore allocate additional financial aid funds to be used in intentional, data-driven ways to enhance student success based on model being developed by Noel Levitz. Students are often lacking in financial literacy, which affects quality of life in addition to decisions that impact graduation. Recommendations: Luisa Havens, Vice President of Enrollment Services, to lead a task force to identify data-driven strategies. Launch financial literacy program for students and advisors. [Could include Wells Fargo and other big banks offering existing courses, generally on request. Given FIU's relationship with Wells Fargo, they might offer the courses free of charge.] Allocate additional financial aid funds strategically. Expand internal infrastructure, so we can do our own analytics and therefore respond more quickly and effectively to internal and external demands.

**Expand Internships.** Students with internships and/or workstudy have significantly higher rates of graduation. Also national and FIU data evidences the success of the efforts of career services/internships, making the case to amplify reach:

- 63% of 2013 college graduates who participated in a paid-internship received at least one job offer, while only 35% with no internships and 37% with an unpaid internship received job offers.*
- $51,930 avg. starting salary of graduates with a paid-internship compared to $35,721 for starting salary with no internship experience, $37,087 with unpaid internship experience**
- 79% of interns accepted a full-time job offer with their internship employer*
- 75% of new college hire that had internship experience were still retained after one year*
- 89% of employers retained students hired from their internship programs for more than one year in 2013*
- 85.7% FIU students who participated in Career Services programs graduated within six years (Data from FIU Office of Retention and Graduation Success)
- 92.8% of 2011 FTIC cohort who participated in a Career Services programs were still in school after two years (Data from FIU Office of Retention and Graduation Success)

Recommendations: Issue standardized online application and review form for students and employers. Track number of experiential learning offerings and enrollments by program.
Annotate internship experiences on transcript and/or E-Portfolio. Engage FIU Alumni Association to build an externship program. Expand opportunities.

**Expand Service Learning.** Engaged learning, when practiced effectively, is one of the most effective strategies for strengthening both institutional and personal bonds with the community and for deepening student learning. Students who participate in engaged learning demonstrate greater mastery of course material (McKenna and Rizzo, 1999) as well as improved critical thinking skills (Kendrick, 1996), problem solving and reflection skills (Cress, Kerrigan, & Reitenauer, 2003), and communication skills (Jordan, 1994). Although there is a great deal of engaged learning at FIU, there is not necessarily much standardization, even in terms of what we mean by specific pedagogies such as Service Learning (SL) and Community Based Research (CBR). Recommendations: Create a course buy-out to position a "Faculty in Residence" in the Office of Engagement to provide ongoing professional development and research around service learning and community based research. Fund faculty incentives to develop new service learning courses. Ensure ongoing professional development and support for faculty via the Academy for Advanced Teaching. Create a student internship or graduate assistantship to support the Faculty in Residence. Deploy a strategic communications plan to promote best practices/examples of service learning and community based research at FIU. Grow number and quality of service learning and community based research offerings. Recognize service learning excellence in teaching + learning. Record service learning courses and participation (transcript notation etc..) Research impact of service learning on retention, acceleration and degree completion, etc.. Promote best practices.

**Increase Faculty Incentives for Excellent Teaching.** FIU faculty, when asked what types of incentives they needed to improve their teaching, spoke at length about removing obstacles, rather than incentives. They did mention course releases to develop new courses or to be part of discipline-based teams and stipends to attend design workshops. But they were passionate about needing support to succeed. Recommendations: Develop effective, fair, and formative system for evaluating teaching. Implement differentiated assignments to accommodate excellent teaching with reduced research expectations. For Asst Professors, Chairs need to be sensitive about new preps (probably not intro courses very often), repeat the class, mentor for class, etc. Expand technology support for faculty, including support for online teaching. Smaller class sizes. Offer stipends or course releases for faculty to be part of discipline-based teams. Student evaluations should be on-line. Annual monetary awards, with reception (after evaluation system in place), which could be in each college, in addition to Faculty Senate/Provost awards. GA’s need to be assigned to faculty. Individualized support and consultation by CAT, especially early in career. Fully support faculty mentoring program, and expand to all colleges.

**Seek Funding to Continue and to Expand Graduation Success Initiative (GSI).** In GSI’s first three years, the FTIC six year graduation rate has jumped 12 points from the FIU’s historical low
(41%) to its historical high (53%) (see graph). Four year graduation has become the new modal graduation length; for the last two years, more FTICs have graduated in four years than in any other length of time. GSI has become a nationally recognized brand (winner of the 2013 APLU MVP Award). Help students to discern an appropriate goal early (major and career), preferably at admission. Provide a clear path to that goal. Give immediate feedback whether on or off the path. Remove barriers and add supports on the path.

Recommendations:

- Enrollment Services and Undergraduate Education develop and implement recruitment strategies to target students likely to succeed.
- Creating early alert systems for every gateway course (which include the use of Learning Management Systems by faculty, as well as clickers to facilitate automated attendance recording).
- Expanding the use of Learning Assistants and the creation of a central office that would coordinate LA recruiting, training, and strategic deployment.
- Improving gateway course teaching and learning physical environments (e.g., creating discipline specific gateway course learning resource centers and lounges, increasing the number of active learning classrooms).
- Expanding gateway course bridge programs both in the form of FIU Boot Camps but also in terms collaboration with feeder school systems and community colleges.
- Developing strategic faculty development and awards programs that incentivize exemplary pedagogy in gateway courses.
- Developing dependable technological support and training for the use of instructional technology such as Learning Management Systems and clickers.
- Developing new business models that show the savings produced by retention and on-time graduation
- Developing dashboards that provide stakeholders with performance data related to gateway courses at the section level 24X7.
- Disseminating regularly predictive analytics to stakeholders.
- Setting up robust and regular communication systems among feeding and receiving courses, programs, and institutions that provides the basis for curriculum alignment and assessment.
- Creating a teaching initiatives coordinating committee that brings together regularly all of the groups at the institution who are involved in pedagogical reform.

Tier Three

Important/Implement As Soon as Possible*
(*Note that most of these have minimal budget impact and could be implemented soon.)

**Improve Space Management.** Non-cognitive variables such as a sense of belonging, being part of a group, and having a place to study/rest on campus, have a significant impact on retention and graduation rates. This is even more critical for a commuter campus. **Recommendations:** Increase “sticky space” from currently less than 5% to standard of 30% for students to study and work collaboratively, and to encourage commuter students to stay on campus (perhaps by moving some services to off-site locations). Increase computer labs and study space with electrical outlets and Wi-Fi. Use current empty and green space for student seating.

**Support Student Organizations.** Student organizations are an important way to build affinity for FIU and to keep students engaged with a peer group. Additionally, many of the student organizations specifically encourage and support retention and graduation. **Recommendations:** Provide support, space, and technical assistance with coordination and scheduling.

**Improve Communication with Students.** FIU currently relies on methods of communication with students that students themselves report are ineffective or completely ignored. **Recommendations:** Utilize best practices in student communication (including use of social media, Instagram and texting, succinct emails, tabling, give-aways, advertising at major events, and involving students in messaging) to help promote student involvement and retention. Relatively no budget impact.

**Implement Competency-Based education and Increase Prior Learning Assessment.** Competency-Based Education (CBE) is quickly being adopted as a method to provide adult learners with a self-paced approach to degree completion. To implement this approach requires identification of competencies that are verified by both faculty and employers to be the requisite knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for professional success. Establishment of competencies sets the stage for assessment practices which determine which of these knowledge, skills, and behaviors prospective students have already acquired. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) encapsulates this assessment through a fee-based process of waiving requirements or awarding credit for validated competency attainment through exams, portfolio, or third party evaluation. Both CBE and PLA would provide FIU the opportunity to either shorten time-to-degree or improve degree completion rates for adult learners.

**Recommendation 1:** A feasibility study should be conducted to understand the viability of CBE and PLA at FIU. The full recommendation beginning on page 8 describes the potential disciplines which include nursing, public health, interdisciplinary studies, and general education. In addition, the feasibility study should examine alternatives for the organizational structure at FIU for the oversight of such CBE programs, including PLA. Such a study should examine the composition of this office and organizational location. The feasibility study would benefit from the consultancy from experts in this field, like the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

**Recommendation 2:** To implement PLA procedures, FIU must also alter the policies that currently limit the acceptance of PLA credits and place high students’ costs for PLA assessments. The Prior Experiential
Learning and Challenge Exams policies would also need to be modified. To implement PLA would require an organizational structure and extensive faculty input. The feasibility study included in Recommendation 1 needs to consider these factors.

**Recommendation 3:** It is imperative to conduct a small scale pilot study before implementing CBE and PLA practices across the university. Using one of the identified academic programs may be the best option for selecting a program since there are already several models in these disciplines and the faculty are already informed about CBE and PLA.

**Require E-Portfolios.** E-Portfolios can be used to help students with seamless career integration, by tracking internships and work-study, resumes, evidence of competency-based education and prior learning assessment, classroom work, etc. **Recommendations:** Phased implementation to support seamless transition to the workforce.

**Improve Writing Across the Curriculum.** Writing courses play an important role in retention and graduation rates. With further investment, the WAC program could better support university efforts. **WAC-dedicated space by Fall of 2015.** Space and equipment for Digital Writing and Research Studio when possible.