2017 Report
Georgia State University
Complete College Georgia

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When it comes to higher education, the vision of the United States as a land of equal opportunity is far from a reality. Today, it is *eight times* more likely that an individual in the top quartile of Americans by annual household income will hold a college degree than an individual in the lowest quartile.[1] Nationally, white students graduate from college at rates more than 10 points higher than Hispanic students and are more than twice as likely to graduate with a 4-year college degree when compared to black students.[2] According to the United States Department of Education, Pell-eligible students nationally have a six-year graduation-rate of 39%,[3] a rate that is 20 points lower than the national average.[4]

In 2003, Georgia State's institutional graduation rate stood at 32% and underserved populations were foundering. Graduation rates were 22% for Latinos, 29% for African Americans, and 18% for African American males. Pell students were graduating at rates far below those of non-Pell students.

Today, thanks to a campus-wide commitment to student success and more than a dozen strategic programs implemented over the past several years, Georgia State's achievement gaps are gone. The graduation rate for bachelor-degree seeking students has improved 22 points—among the highest increases in the nation over this period **(Appendix, Chart 1)**. Rates are up 33 points for Latinos (to 55%), and 29 points for African Americans (to 58%). Pell-eligible students currently represent 58% of Georgia State University's undergraduate student population, and this year they graduated ate a rate (54%) one-point higher than the rate for non-Pell students **(Chart 2)**. In fact, **over the past three years, African-American, Hispanic, first-generation and Pell-eligible students have, on average, all graduated from Georgia State at or above the rates of the student body overall—making Georgia State the only national public university to achieve this goal.**

Georgia State also continues to set new records for degrees conferred. Twenty months after its consolidation with Perimeter College, the university awarded a record total of 7,047 undergraduate degrees over the 2016-2017 academic year, a 7 % one-year increase. The university established new records for total bachelor degrees awarded (5,062, +4%), as well as bachelor degrees awarded to Pell-eligible (2,957, +5%), black (2,040, +8%), Hispanic (509, +18%)), and first-generation (1,384, +18%) students **(Chart 3)**. Georgia State now awards more bachelor's degrees annually to Hispanic, Asian, first generation, and Pell students than any other university in Georgia. According to *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, for the fifth consecutive years we conferred more bachelor degrees to African Americans than any other non-profit college or university in the

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[1] The Pell Institute (2015) Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States : 45 Year Trend Report (2015 Revised Edition). Retrieved from http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators_of_Higher_Education_Equity_in_the_US_45_Year_Trend_Report.pdf

[2] U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014) Table 326.10: Graduation rate from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree- seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and acceptance rate: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2007. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_326.10.asp.

[3] Horwich, Lloyd (25 November 2015) Report on the Federal Pell Grant Program. Retrieved from http://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Pell0212.pdf.

[4] U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014) Table 326.10.

United States. **This past year, Georgia State University became the first institution in U.S. history to award more than 2,000 bachelor degrees to African American students in a single year.**

Since the launch of its current Strategic Plan in 2011, Georgia State University has seen a 20% increase in its number of bachelor's degrees awarded, with the number topping 5,000 a year for the first time ever in 2016-17, with even stronger gains made with at-risk student populations **(Charts 3 and 4)**. Over the past six years, bachelor's degree conferrals are up 47% for African Americans, 33% for Pell students, and 74% for Hispanics. Just as importantly, students are succeeding in some of the most challenging majors at Georgia State. Over the past six years, the number of bachelor's degrees in STEM fields that are successfully completed annually has increased by 69% for black students, 111% for black males, and 226% for Hispanic students **(Chart 5).**

Despite steep declines in Perimeter College overall enrollments in the years leading up to consolidation, associate degree conferrals were also up significantly in 2016-17 with 1,953 degrees awarded—an increase of 17% over the previous year. Perimeter College associate-degree graduation rates are up by 5.3 percentage points overall and by 6 percentage points for African American and 7 points for Hispanic students since consolidation was announced **(Charts 6-8).**

These gains have been the subject of growing levels of national attention:

- In December 2014, President Barak Obama lauded the exemplary work being done at Georgia State University to assist low-income students through its Panther Retention Grant program in his address at White House Opportunity Day.[5]
- In 2014, Georgia State received the inaugural national MVP Award for Student Success Transformation from the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU), and in 2015 it received the second-ever Institutional Transformation Award from the American Council on Education (ACE). Both awards cited Georgia State's exceptional progress in student success and its elimination of all achievement gaps.
- In August 2015, Georgia State was invited to provide expert testimony on strategies for helping low-income students succeed before the United States Senate.
- In September 2015, Georgia State was awarded a $9 million grant from the Department of Education to lead a four-year study to track the impact of analytics-based proactive advisement on 10,000 low-income and first-generation college students nationally.
- In September 2016, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Georgia State 14th in the nation for its Commitment to Undergraduate Teaching and named it the 4th Most Innovative University in the nation (behind only ASU, Stanford and MIT). Georgia State's First-Year Experience and Freshman Learning Community programs were both ranked among the Top 15 in the nation.
- In March 2017, Georgia State's student-success programs secured the second largest gift in university history, a $14.6 million grant from the State Farm Foundation to fund innovative, data-based programs in support of college completion at Georgia State University's Perimeter College campus in Decatur.
- In July 2017, Bill Gates made a half-day visit to campus specifically to learn more about Georgia State's innovative use of data and technology to promote student success.

Motivated by a desire to make an impact, not only in the lives of its own students, but also in the lives of students nation-wide, Georgia State University has made a conscious and significant commitment of time and

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[5] President Barak Obama (4 December 2014) Remarks by the President at College Opportunity Summit. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/04/remarks-president-college-opportunity-summit.

resources to sharing the lessons that we have learned. Over the past three years, Georgia State has hosted teams from almost 200 colleges and universities that sought to learn more about Georgia State programs, including institutions from the Netherlands, Great Britain, Australia, Hong Kong, China, New Zealand, and South Africa. Every University System of Georgia (USG) institution has worked with Georgia State, as well.

I. Institutional Mission and Student Body Profile

Georgia State University now enrolls more African American, Hispanic, Asian American, first-generation, and Pell students than any college or university in Georgia. In fact, the University set new records for the number of bachelor-degree-seeking students enrolled in *every one* of these categories in 2016-17. With Georgia State's January 2016 consolidation with Georgia Perimeter College, the study body has become even more remarkable. **Georgia State University enrolled 63,200 unique students this past year.** This included 51,000 students during the Fall 2016 semester alone, including 18,515 students pursuing associate degrees on its five Perimeter College campuses. This means that approximately one out of every six students in the entire USG this past year was enrolled at Georgia State. This number includes 25,400 Pell students. (As a comparison, the entire Ivy League last year enrolled 9,800 Pell students.) According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 2017), Georgia State now ranks first among all national universities for the percent of Pell students that it enrolls. We enroll more than 21,000 African Americans per semester (25% of the USG total enrollment of African American students) and 5,200 Hispanic students (21% of the USG total) **(Chart 8)**. Georgia State's diversity is truly exceptional. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, Georgia State University is one of only two universities to rank in the Top 15 in the nation for both its racial/ethnic diversity[6] and for the number of low-income students enrolled.[7]

The most foundational principle guiding our efforts has been a pledge to improve student outcomes through *inclusion* rather *exclusion*. In the 2011 Georgia State University Strategic Plan, we committed ourselves to improving our graduation rates significantly, but not by turning our backs on the low-income, underrepresented and first-generation students who we have traditionally served. On the contrary: we pledged to increase the number of underrepresented, first-generation and Pell students enrolled *and* to serve them better. We committed to achieving improved outcomes for our students not merely at Georgia State but in their lives and careers after graduation. The consolidation with Perimeter College, with its tens of thousands of students who fall into federal at-risk categories, is the latest example of this deep commitment.

The central goal that we have set for our undergraduate success efforts is highly ambitious, but the words were chosen carefully: Georgia State would **"become a national model for undergraduate education by demonstrating that students from all backgrounds can achieve academic and career success at high rates."[8]**

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[6] U.S. News & World Report (n.d.) Campus Ethnic Diversity: National Universities. Retrieved from http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/campus-ethnic-diversity.

[7] U.S. News & World Report (n.d.) Economic Diversity: National Universities. Retrieved http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/economic-diversity.

[8] Georgia State University (2012). Strategic Plan 2011-2016/21. Retrieved from http://strategic.gsu.edu/files/2012/09/GSU_Strategic_Plan_2016-2.pdf

Our goals included a commitment to raise overall institutional graduation rates and degree conferrals by significant margins—graduation rates for bachelor-seeking students would climb 13 points and undergraduate degree completions would increase by 2,500 annually by 2021—and to close all achievement gaps between our student populations. As outlined in this update, we are not only on track to meet these goals, we already have met the latter two—five years ahead of schedule. (See Section II for more the details.)

The Strategic Plan also outlined key strategies to achieve these goals. We made a commitment to overhaul our advising system, to track every student daily with the use of predictive analytics and to intervene with students who are at risk in a proactive fashion, to expand existing high-impact programs such as freshman learning communities and Keep Hope Alive, to raise more scholarship dollars, and to pilot and scale innovative new types of financial interventions. These programs and their impacts are outlined in the next section

II. Institutional Completion Goals, High-Impact Strategies and Activities

A. Completion Goals and Results

In 2011, Georgia State University committed to reach a graduation rate for bachelor-degree-seeking students of 52% by 2016 and 60% by 2021.[9] We also committed to conferring 2,500 more degrees annually than we did in 2010 and to eliminating all significant achievement gaps between student populations. We now have committed to *doubling* the graduation rate of our new associate-degree seeking students from the 2014 baseline over the next five years.

On the surface, attaining these goals seems implausible. Georgia State's demographic trends—characterized in recent years by huge increases in the enrollments of students from at-risk populations—typically would project a steep *decline* in student outcomes. Georgia State University, though, has been able to make dramatic gains towards its success targets even as the student body has become far more diverse and financially distressed. Aided by the consolidation with Perimeter College, **the 7,047 undergraduate degrees conferred during the 2016-2017 academic year represent a 2,825-degree increase (67%) over the baseline year of 2011** (**Chart 3**) and exceeds the Strategic Plan's pledge to increase degrees awarded by 2,500 annually.

The gains have been greatest for at-risk student populations. **In the 2016-2017 academic year, Georgia State University conferred record numbers of bachelor degrees to Pell-eligible, first generation, African American, and Hispanic students (Chart 4)**. Since the 2010-2011 academic year, the number of bachelor degrees conferred to Pell students grew by 33%, conferrals to African American students increased by 47%, and degrees awarded to Hispanic students has increased by 74% [10]. Time to degree is down markedly—by more than half a semester per student since 2011—saving the graduating class of 2016 approximately $15 million in tuition and fees compared to their colleagues just three years earlier **(Chart 10).** Since the launch of Georgia

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[9] Georgia State University (2012) College Completion Plan 2012: A University-wide Plan for Student Success (The Implementation of Goal 1 of the GSU Strategic Plan). Retrieved from http://enrollment.gsu.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/57/files/2013/09/GSU_College_Completion_Plan_09-06-12.pdf

[10] Actual percent increases were much higher in these two categories, but we have controlled for the effects of the University implementing more rigorous processes encouraging students to self-report their race and ethnicity.

State University's Strategic Plan, and the start of our participation in Complete College Georgia, **our institutional graduation rate for bachelor-degree-seeking students has increased by 6 percentage points to 54% (Charts 1 and 2).**

In the short time since consolidation was announced, **graduation rates for associate-degree-seeking students at Perimeter College have increased by 5.3 percentage points overall and by 6 to 7 percentage points for both black and Hispanic students (Chart 8).** Graduation rates for associate-degree-seeking students will increase further in 2017. Associate degrees conferred this year reached a total of 1,953, a 17% increase over the previous year (1,702) and a 35% increase over the 2010-2011 number (1,452).

It is important to note that, due to changes in jobs and economic circumstances, low-income and first-generation students' families move more frequently than do middle- and upper-income college students. This phenomenon significantly impacts Georgia State's institutional graduation rates. Using National Student Clearinghouse data to track Georgia State's most recent 6-year bachelor-seeking cohort across all universities nationally, the success rates are even more encouraging. For the current year, a record 77.7% of the students who started at Georgia State six years ago have either graduated from Georgia State or some other institution or are still actively enrolled in college (**Chart 11**).

This combination of large increases in Pell enrollments and significantly rising graduation rates confounds the conventional wisdom. Nationally, one can track a strong correlation between *increases* in Pell rates and *decreases* in graduation rates. Georgia State's completion efforts have made us a clear outlier nationally. In fact, according to the Hechinger Report, Georgia State has the highest graduation rate in the country for an institution with its number of Pell students. Several strategies that produced these gains are discussed next.

B. High Impact Strategies

1. GPS Advising

High-impact strategy	*Use predictive analytics and a system of more than 800 alerts to track all undergraduates daily, to identify at-risk behaviors, and to have advisors respond to alerts by intervening in a timely fashion to get students back on track.*
Summary of Activities and Lessons Learned	*System went fully live in August 2012. This past academic year, the system generated more than 52,000 individual meetings between advisors and students to discuss specific alerts—all aimed at getting the student back on path to graduation. Since Georgia State went live with GPS Advising three years ago, freshmen fall-to-spring retention rates have increased by 5 percentage points and graduating seniors are taking fewer excess courses in completing their degrees.*

	In 2016, Georgia State University consolidated with Georgia Perimeter College. EDUCAUSE, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (the Helmsley Trust) and in partnership with Achieving the Dream (ATD), has awarded Georgia State University a grant to facilitate our efforts to deploy our technology solution and adapt our advising strategy in order to increase graduation rates for the 20,000 students seeking associate degrees at GPC. In addition to providing much needed support to students seeking associate degrees, the extension of our GPS to encompass the entirety of the new consolidated university provides us with the opportunity to better understand and support transfer pathways between two- and four- year institutions. The GPS platform launched at Perimeter in 2016-17 and the university hired an additional 30 Perimeter academic advisors in support. Early data show that GPS is equally effective in improving outcomes for associate and bachelors' students. In each context, 90% of the upfront costs have been for personnel not technology.
Baseline Status	*Six Year Graduation Rate at Launch:* **48%** Bachelor level (2011) **6%** Associate level (2014) *Degrees Conferred: in the 2013-2014 Academic Year:* **4,155 Bachelors (2011)** **1,702** Associates (2015)
Interim Measures of Progress	*The numbers we are achieving via the programs are exceptionally strong. We have been tracking the use of the system and gathering interim metrics such as* *Credit hours at the time of graduation (which have declined by an average of 8 credit hours per graduating student since 2011)* *Percent of students in majors that fit their academic abilities (up by 13 points)* *Progression rates have increased by 16 points (from 47% to 63%)* *Decline in changes of major in the sophomore, junior and senior years (down by 32%)*
Measures of Success	*Bachelor's degree six-year graduation rates are up 6 percentage points and associate degree three-year rates are up 5 percentage points since their respective launches (2012, 2016)* *Bachelor's degree conferrals up 22% and Associate degree conferrals up 17% since launches* *Wasted credit hours have declined by 8 credit hours per graduating student while average time to degree is down by half a semester, saving students roughly $15 million a year.* *All achievement gaps based on race, ethnicity and income have been eliminated* *Boston Consulting Group has determined a positive ROI for the initiative*
Primary Contacts	*Dr. Timothy Renick (Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success),* *Dr. Allison Calhoun-Brown (Associate Vice President for Student Success)* *Carol Cohen (Director of the University Advisement Center)*

2. Summer Success Academy

High-impact strategy	*Use predictive analytics to identify admitted students for the fall freshman class who are academically at-risk and require that these students attend a seven-week summer session before fall classes.*
Summary of Activities and Lessons Learned	*Program was initiated in 2012 as an alternate to deferring weaker freshmen admits to the Spring semester. Students enroll in 7 credits of college-level (non-remedial) courses and are given the support of all of GSU's tutoring, advising, financial literacy, and academic skills programs at their disposal. All students are in freshmen learning committees. This year's cohort was the second largest ever, with 312 students enrolled. The most recent cohort was retained at a rate of 94%. This compares to an 88% retention rate for reminder of the freshmen class who were, on paper,*

	better academically prepared for college. It is important to note that these same students, when Georgia State was deferring their enrollment until the spring semester (as is the common practice nationally), were being retained at only a 50% clip. This equates to more than 100 additional freshmen being retained via the Summer Success Academy this past year alone than would have been the case under the old model. Academy expanded to Perimeter College for Summer 2016.
Baseline Status	• *Prior to the launch of the program, students with a similar academic profile had a one-year retention rate of 51% (2010). We are launching the Summer Success Academy at Perimeter College for the summer of 2017. The baseline retention rate for Perimeter students overall is 64.5%; once we identify for the first Perimeter cohort, we will create a more accurate baseline retention rate given the profile of the students enrolled.*
Interim Measures	• *Retention rates, graduation rates, degree completions*
Measures of Success	• *Retention rates for the students for the at-risk students enrolled in the Success Academy (**94**%) exceed those of the rest of the freshman class (**88**%) and the baseline of **51**% in 2011.* • *In summer 2016, the program enrolled 312 students, up 207 from summer of 2012.*
Primary Contacts	• *Dr. Allison Calhoun-Brown (Associate Vice President for Student Success)* • *Dr. Eric Cuevas (Director of Student Success Programs)*

3. Panther Retention Grants

High-impact strategy	*Provide micro-grants to students at the fee drop each semester to help cover modest financial shortfalls impacting the students' ability to pay tuition and fees to prevent students from stopping/dropping out. This past fall, more than 18,000 of Georgia State's 25,000+ bachelor-seeking students (72%) had some level of unmet need (we are using Fall 16 data to set a baseline for our associate-seeking students), meaning that even after grants, loans, scholarships, family contributions and the income generated from the student working 20 hours a week, the students lack sufficient funds to attend college. Each semester, hundreds of fully qualified students are dropped from their classes for lack of payment. For as little as $300, Panther Retention Grants provide the emergency funding to allow students who want to get their degrees the opportunity to stay enrolled. Last year, nearly 2,000 Georgia State students were brought back to the classroom—and kept on the path to attaining a college degree—through the program. 61% of the seniors who received PRG support last academic year graduated within two semesters of receiving the grant and 82% either had graduated or were still enrolled one year after receiving the grant. With 9,121 grants awarded over the past five years, the program has prevented literally thousands of students from dropping out of Georgia State.*
Summary of Activities and Lesson Learned	*Staff examine the drop lists for students with genuine unmet need, who are on track for graduation using our academic analytics, and who have modest balances for tuition and fees. Students are offered micro-grants on the condition that they agree to certain activities, including meeting with a financial counselor to map out plans to finance the rest of their education. Last academic year, 2,141 grants were awarded. This included grants awarded to Perimeter College students throughout the academic year. Timeliness and access to good data are the keys to success.*
Baseline Status	• *A California State University study found that, among students who stop out for a semester, only 30% ever return and graduate from the institution. The PRG program is designed to prevent stop out and the negative impact on completion rates that follow.*

Interim Measures of Progress	• *Of freshmen who were offered Panther Retention Grants in fall 2013, 93% enrolled the following spring, a rate higher than that of the student body as a whole. 83% of freshman PRG recipients returned to class in fall 2014. The retention rate for freshmen who were offered the grants in fall 2014 was 88%.* • *We are also tracking the rate of "returnees" to the program, which we have been able to keep under 25%* • *Of the Perimeter College students receiving Panther Retention Grants during the Fall 2016 semester, 73% returned for the Spring 2017 term.*
Measures of Success	• *The ultimate measure of success is college completion. The largest group of recipients last year were seniors, who often are running out of Hope funding or exhausting other aid. 68% of seniors who receive the grant have graduated.*
Primary Contacts	• *Dr. Timothy Renick (Vice President for Enrollment Management & Student Success)* • *Dr. Allison Calhoun-Brown (Associate Vice President for Student Success)*

4. Keep Hope Alive (KHA)

High-impact strategy	*With 59% of Georgia State students coming from Pell-eligible households (where the annual household income last year was less than $30,000), the Hope scholarship can be a mixed blessing. The $6,000+ scholarship provides access to college for thousands of Georgia State students, but for the student who does not maintain a 3.0 college GPA, the loss of Hope often means the student has to drop out for financial reasons. In 2008, the graduation rates for students who lose the Hope scholarship were only 20%, 40-points lower than the rates for those who hold on to it. Gaining the Hope Scholarship back after losing it is a statistical longshot: only about 9% of Georgia State students pull this off. Keep Hope Alive provides a $500 stipend for two semesters to students who have lost Hope as an incentive for them to follow a rigorous academic restoration plan that includes meeting with advisors, attending workshops, and participating in financial literacy training—all designed to help students improve their GPAs and to regain the scholarship. Since 2008, the program has helped to almost* <u>*double*</u> *the graduation rates of Georgia State students who lose the Hope scholarship.*
Summary of Activities and Lessons Learned	*By signing a contract to receive $500 for each of the first two semesters after losing Hope, students agree to participate in a series of programs and interventions designed to get them back on track academically and to make wise financial choices in the aftermath of losing the scholarship. Scholarship Criteria:* • *Program is open to freshman and sophomore students with a 2.75 – 2.99 HOPE grade point average.* • *Students must pursue a minimum of 30 credit hours within the next academic year.* • *Students must attend Student Success workshops facilitated by the Office of Undergraduate Studies.* • *Students must meet with their academic coaches on a regular basis.* • *Students are required to attend mandatory advisement sessions facilitated by the University Advisement Center.* During the coming academic year, we are exploring models for the use of KHA for our associate-degree seeking students. It is critical to identify students at risk of losing Hope as early as possible, when the interventions are far more likely to change outcomes. Good tracking data are essential.
Baseline Status	• *Retention rates for students receiving the HOPE scholarship were 50% in 2008.* • *Six-year graduation rates for students who lost their HOPE scholarship at some point in their academic career were 21% in 2008*

Interim Measures of Progress	• *For students in KHA in the period from 2011 to 2015, better than 55% gained the scholarship back at the next marker, in the process leveraging our $1,000 scholarship investment by gaining between $6,000 and $12,000 of Hope dollars back again.*
Measures of Success	• *Since 2008, institutional HOPE retention rates have increased by 50%, from 49% to 75% in 2015.* • *Compared to 2008, the six-year graduation rate for students who lost their HOPE scholarship at some point in their academic career has almost doubled, from 21% in 2008 to 38% in 2015.*
Primary Contacts	• *Dr. Eric Cuevas (Director of Student Success Programs)* • *Dr. Allison Calhoun-Brown*

5. Meta-Majors

High-impact strategy	*At a large public university such as Georgia State, freshmen can feel overwhelmed by the size and scope of the campus and choices that they face. This fall, Georgia State is offering 96 majors and more than 3,400 courses. Freshmen Learning Communities are now required of all non-Honors freshmen at Georgia State. They organize the freshmen class into cohorts of 25 students arranged by common academic interests, otherwise known as "meta majors" (STEM, business, arts and humanities, policy, health, education and social sciences). Students travel through their classes together, building friendships, study partners and support along the way. Block schedules—FLCs in which all courses might be between, for example, 8:30 AM and 1:30 PM three days a week— accommodate students' work schedules and help to improve class attendance. FLC students have one-year retention rates that are 5 percentage points higher than freshmen not enrolled in FLCs. Almost 70% of this fall's freshmen class are in FLCs. Requiring all students to choose a meta-major puts students on a path to degree that allows for flexibility in future specialization in a particular program of study, while also ensuring the applicability of early course credits to their final majors. Implemented in conjunction with major maps and a suite of faculty-led programming that exposes students to the differences between specific academic majors during their first semester, meta-majors provide clarity and direction in what would otherwise be a confusing and unstructured registration process.*
Summary of Activities and Lessons Learned	*Upon registration, all students are required to enroll in one of seven **meta-majors**: STEM, Arts & Humanities, Health, Education, Policy & Social Science, and Exploratory. Once students have selected their meta-major, they are given a choice of several **block schedules**, which are pre-populated course timetables including courses relevant to their first year of study. On the basis of their timetable selection, students are assigned to **Freshman Learning Communities** consisting of 25 students who are in the same meta-major and take classes according to the same block schedules of 5 – 6 courses in addition to GSU1010, a 1 credit hour course providing students with essential information and survival skills to help them navigate the logistical, academic, and social demands of the University. Academic department deliver programming to students—alumni panels, departmental open houses—that help students to understand the practical differences between majors within each meta major. A new career-related portal allows students in meta majors and beyond to explore live job data including number of jobs available in the Atlanta region, starting salaries, and correlative to majors and degree programs. The portal also suggests cognate careers that students may be unaware of and shared live job data about them. It is critical to make career preparation part of the curriculum, from first semester on. Doing so also promotes voluntary students visits to Career Services, which have increased by 70% since meta majors.*
Baseline Status	• *48% FLC participation with opt-in model (2010)* • *Retention rates of 81% for non-FLC students (2011).*

	• *Average bachelor-degree graduate going through 2.4 majors before graduating (2008). In the 2013-2014 academic year, enrollment in a Freshman Learning Community according to meta-major resulted in an average increase in GPA of 8%.* • *In the 2016-2017 academic year, enrollment in a Freshman Learning Community by meta-major was found to increase a student's likelihood of being retained through to the following year by 5%.*
Interim Measures	• *Adopting an opt-out model has meant that almost 70% of freshmen now participate in FLCs.*
Measures of Success	• *One-year retention rates reached 84% for FLC freshmen (2016)* • *Changes in majors at GSU are down by 32% since 2011.*
Primary Contacts	• *Dr. Allison Calhoun-Brown (Associate Vice President for Student Success)* • *Dr. Eric Cuevas (Director of Student Success Programs)*

6. Chat-Bot Technology to Reduce Summer Melt

High-impact strategy	*In the Fall 2015, almost 18% of Georgia State's incoming freshman class were victims of "summer melt." Having been accepted to GSU and having confirmed their plans to attend, these students never showed up for fall classes. We tracked these students using National Student Clearinghouse data and found that, one year later, 274 of these students (74% of whom were low-income) never attended a single day of college classes at any institution. We knew we needed to be far more proactive and personal with interacting with students between high-school graduation and the first day of college classes. Towards this end, we launched a new portal to track students through the fourteen steps they needed to complete during the summer (e.g., completing their FAFSA, supplying proof of immunization, taking placement exams) to be ready for the first day of college classes. We also become one of the first universities nationally to deploy a chat-bot in support of student success.*
Summary of Activities and Lessons Learned	*In the summer of 2016, we piloted a new student portal with partner EAB to track where incoming freshmen are in the steps they need to complete during the summer before fall classes. With the help of Admit Hub, we deployed an artificial-intelligence-enhanced texting system—a chat bot—that allowed students to text 24/7 from their smart devices any questions that they had about financial aid, registration, housing, admissions, and academic advising. We built a knowledge-base of 2,000 answers to commonly asked questions that served as the responses. We secured the services of Dr. Lindsey Page of the University of Pittsburgh as an independent evaluator of the project. From these efforts, we lowered "summer melt" by 22% in one year. This translates into 324 more students, mostly low-income and first-generation, enrolling for freshman fall who, one year earlier, were sitting out the college experience. Critical to success is building an adequate knowledge base of answers so students can rely on the system. Many students reported that they preferred the impersonal nature of the chat-bot.*
Baseline Status	• *Summer Melt rate of 18% for the incoming freshman class of 2015.*
Interim Measures	• *In the three months leading up to the start of Fall 2016 classes, the chat-bot replied to 201,000 student questions, with an average response time of 7 seconds.*
Measures of Success	• *Summer Melt was reduced by 22% in one year, translating into 324 more students, mostly low-income, who matriculated for the Fall 2016 semester. Dr. Lindsey Page has published a research article confirming these results. See* https://www.ecampusnews.com/top-news/gsu-summer-melt-enrollment/
Primary Contacts	• *Dr. Timothy Renick* • *Mr. Scott Burke, AVP for Admissions*

III. Observations

Georgia State University is testimony to the fact that students from all backgrounds can succeed at high rates. Moreover, our efforts over the past few years show that dramatic gains are indeed possible—not through changing the nature of the students served but through changing the nature of the institution that serves them. How has Georgia State University made the gains outlined above? How do we propose to reach our ambitious future targets? In one sense, the answer is simple. We employ a consistent, evidenced-based strategy. Our general approach can be summarized as follows:

- Use data aggressively in order to identify and to understand the most pervasive obstacles to our students' progressions and completion.
- Be willing to address the problems by becoming an early adopter. This means piloting new strategies and experimenting with new technologies. After all, we will not solve decades-old problems by the same old means.
- Track the impacts of the new interventions via data and make adjustments as necessary to improve results.
- Scale the initiatives that prove effective to have maximal impact. In fact, many of the programs that we offer are currently benefitting 10,000 students or more annually.

Our work to promote student success at Georgia State has steadily increased graduation rates among our traditionally high-risk student populations, but it has also served to foster a culture of student success among faculty, staff, and administration. As the story of Georgia State University demonstrates, institutional transformation in the service of student success does not come about from a single program, but grows from a series of changes that undergo continual evaluation and refinement. It also shows how a series of initially small initiatives, when scaled over time, can significantly transform an institution's culture. Student-success planning must be flexible since the removal of each impediment to student progress reveals a new challenge that was previously invisible. When retention rates improved and thousands of additional students began progressing through their academic programs, for instance, we faced a growing problem of students running out of financial aid just short of the finish line, promoting the creation of the Panther Retention Grant program. It also led to a new analytics-based initiative to better predict and address student demand in upper-level courses. For a timeline of where we have been and where we are going next, please see **Chart 12.**

Georgia State still has much work to do, but our progress in recent years demonstrates that significant improvements in student success outcomes can come through embracing inclusion rather than exclusion, and that such gains can be made even amid a context of constrained resources. It shows that, even at very large public universities, we can provide students with personalized supports that have transformative impacts. **Perhaps most importantly, the example of Georgia State shows that, despite the conventional wisdom, demographics are not destiny and achievement gaps are not inevitable.** Low-income and underrepresented students can succeed at the same levels as their peers.

APPENDIX

Chart 1

GSU Bachelor Degree Graduation Rates by Year
2003 to Present
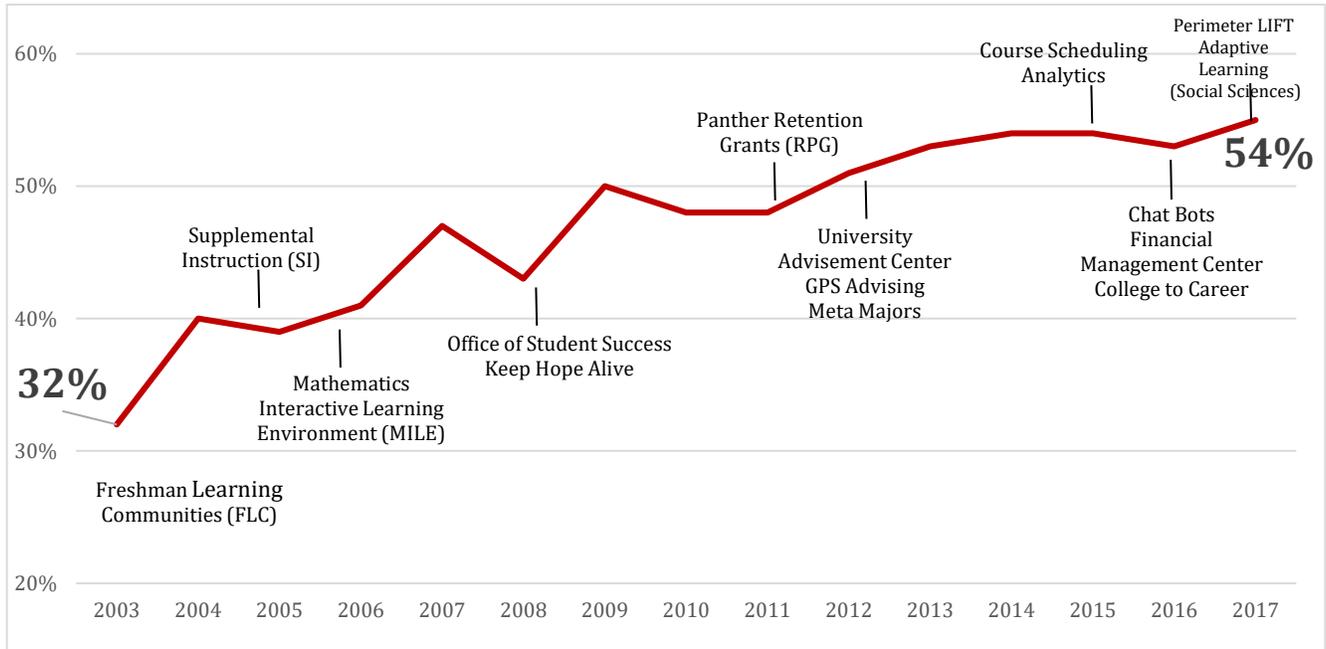
Chart 2

GSU Bachelor Graduation Rates by Population
2010 to Present

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*
6-Year Graduation Rate	48%	48%	51%	53%	54%	54%	53%	54%
6-Year: African American	51%	52%	54%	57%	55%	58%	56%	58%
6-Year: White	46%	45%	49%	52%	53%	50%	52%	50%
6-Year: Hispanic	58%	48%	53%	54%	56%	58%	52%	55%
6-Year: Pell	51%	49%	51%	53%	51%	55%	52%	54%
5-Year Graduation Rate	40%	43%	44%	46%	46%	46%	47%	48%
4-Year Graduation Rate	21%	22%	22%	24%	23%	23%	27%	28%

*2017 Rates are pre-census and are therefore subject to change.

Chart 3

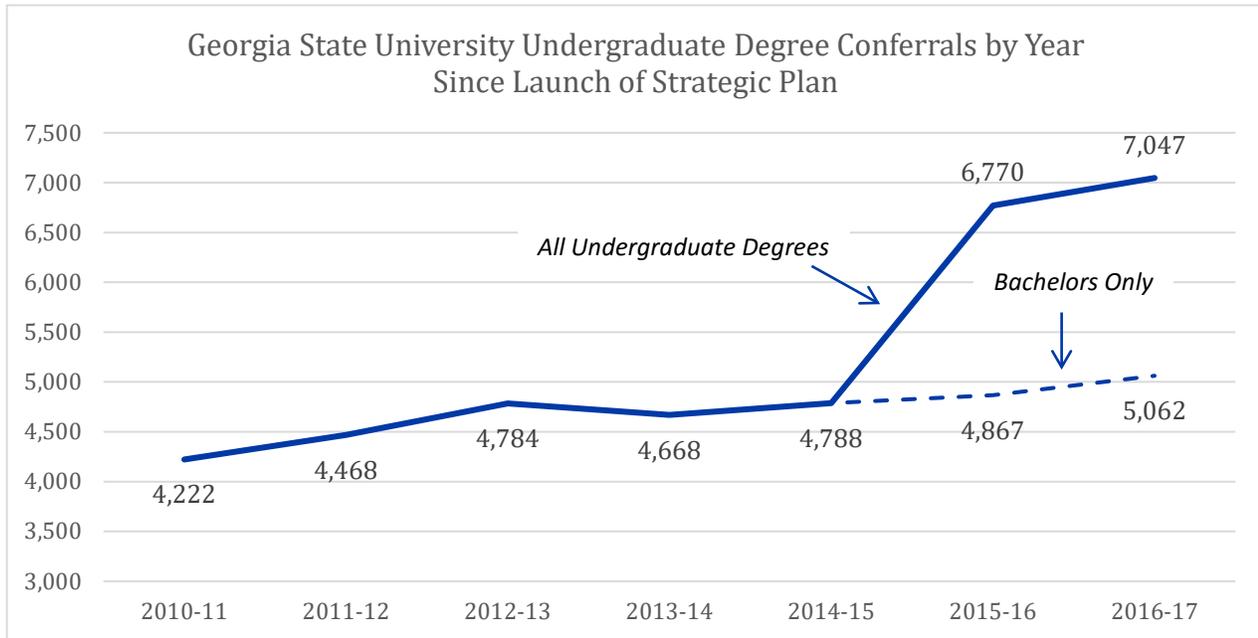Georgia State University Undergraduate Degree Conferrals by Year
Since Launch of Strategic Plan

All Undergraduate Degrees

Bachelors Only

4,222 4,468 4,784 4,668 4,788 6,770 7,047

4,867 5,062

Chart 4

GSU Bachelor Degrees Conferred by Academic Year
2010 to Present

		Academic Year						
		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Status	Adult Learners	1,562	1,625	1,808	1,768	1,697	1,701	1,520
	Pell-eligible Students	2,218	2,551	2,872	2,808	2,912	2,944	2,957
	First Generation Students	927	1,113	1,149	1,146	1,171	1,210	1,384
Race	White	1,884	2,002	2,006	1,915	1,855	1,778	1,728
	Black or African American	1,386	1,550	1,664	1,726	1,829	1,975	2,040
	Asian	543	507	633	541	536	568	711
	More Than One Race	170	154	167	175	184	276	315
	American Indian or Alaska Native	13	9	18	12	19	11	15
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	19	14	9	10	8	0	0
	Not Reported	207	232	287	289	357	259	253
Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic	3,682	3,919	4,123	4,006	4,107	4,233	4,353
	Hispanic	292	339	394	409	435	443	509
	Not Reported	248	210	267	253	246	191	200
Total Bachelor's Degrees Conferred		4,222	4,468	4,784	4,668	4,788	4,867	5,062

Chart 5

Chart 6

Perimeter College Degrees conferred by FY

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Associate degree conferrals overall	1,452	1,626	1,919	1,813	1,685	1,702	1,953

*Fiscal Year defined as Fall-Spring-Summer (e.g. FY 2014 Summer 2013, Fall 2013 and Spring 2014).
**Data retrieved from http://www.info.usg.edu/, Degrees Conferred Report

Chart 7

Perimeter College Associates Degrees Conferred by Academic Year
2014-15 to Present

		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Status	Adult Learners	1,035	1,134	1,077
	Pell-eligible Students	1,110	1,196	1,153
	First Generation Students	570	601	653
Race	White	648	682	666
	Black or African American	786	900	884
	Asian	183	203	216
	More Than One Race	77	83	94
	American Indian or Alaska Native	9	8	5
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	4	2
	Not Reported	163	117	86
Ethnicity	Hispanic	143	173	219
				1,953

Chart 8

Perimeter College Associate Graduation Rates by Population
2011 to Present

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
3-Year Graduation Rate	8%	8%	9%	7%	9%	12%
3-Year: African American	6%	6%	6%	4%	7%	10%
3-Year: White	9%	10%	10%	10%	11%	13%
3-Year: Hispanic	8%	11%	10%	6%	11%	13%
3-Year: Pell	7%	7%	8%	5%	8%	10%

Chart 9

Enrollment of Minority Students at
Georgia State (Atlanta Campus) by Year
Fall 2008 - Fall 2016

Underrepresented Minority Students
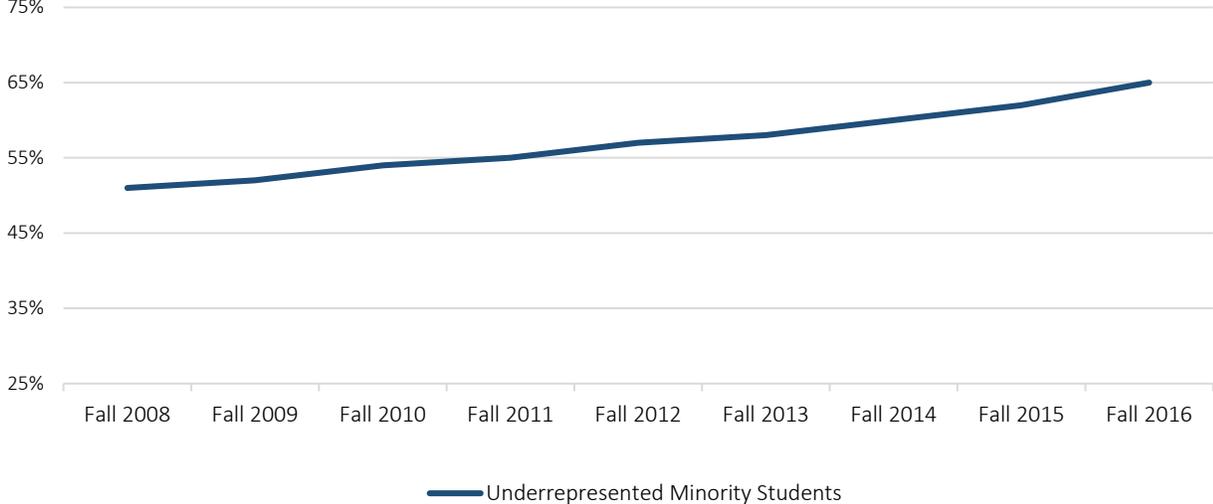
Chart 10

Credit Hours at Completion: Bachelor Students

140   140   141   141   138   135   133   133

2009-10   2010-11   2011-12   20012-13   2013-14   2014-15   2015-16   2016-17

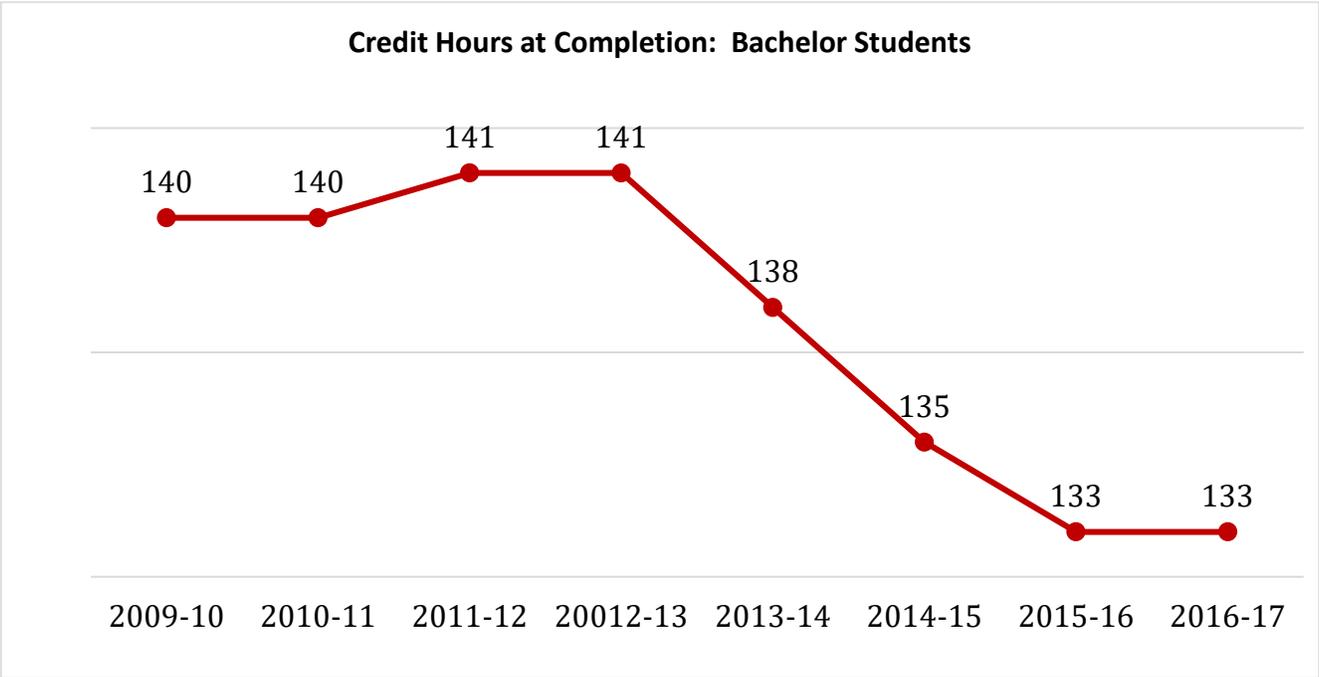**Chart 11**

6 Year Bachelor Graduation Rates Among First Time First Year Freshman who Started at Georgia State University

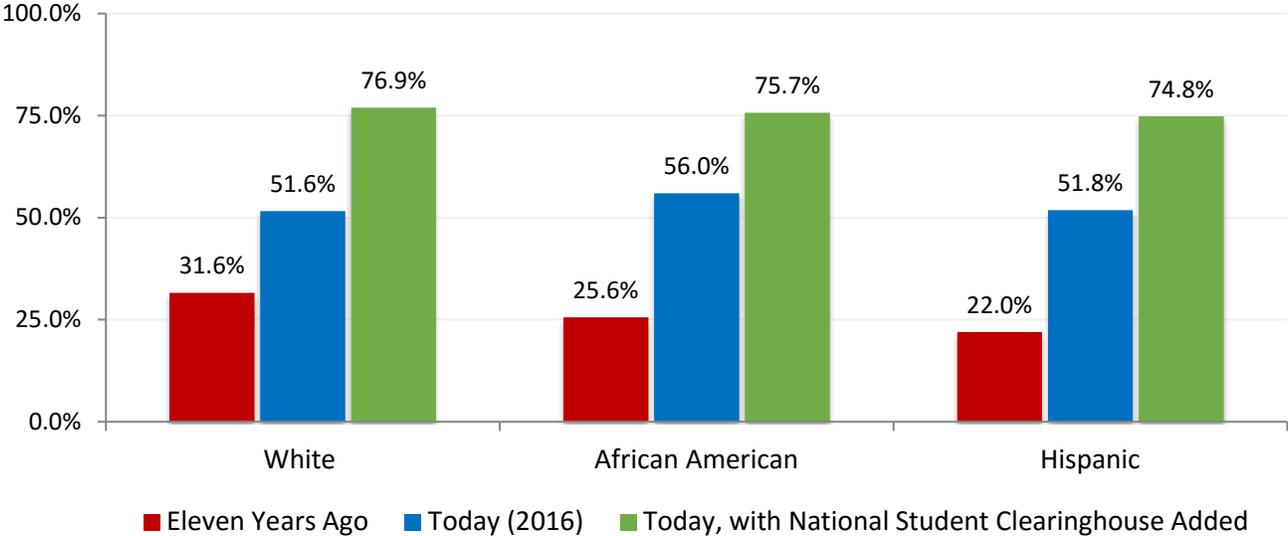|	Eleven Years Ago	Today (2016)	Today, with National Student Clearinghouse Added
White	31.6%	51.6%	76.9%
African American	25.6%	56.0%	75.7%
Hispanic	22.0%	51.8%	74.8%

Chart 12

Timeline of Student Success Initiatives at Georgia State University

Initiative	Year Started	Summary	Scale
Freshman Learning Communities	1999	First-year students sorted into cohorts of 25 based on meta-major; take all courses together in block schedule.	70% of first-year students in 2016-17
Supplemental Instruction	2005	Students who are most successful in courses hired as peer tutors for other students in the course; many tutors eligible for work-study.	10,000+ students in 2016-17
Mathematics Interactive Learning Environment	2006	Redesign of introductory math courses (algebra, statistics, and pre-calculus) using a hybrid, emporium model of face-to-face and machine-guided instruction.	8,500 students in 2016-17
Keep HOPE Alive Scholarship	2008	Small grants to students who lose eligibility for Georgia's HOPE merit scholarship, combined with academic and financial counseling.	1,100 students since 2009
Panther Retention Grants	2011	Small grants (combined with academic and financial counseling) to juniors and seniors who are on-track academically, but are required by a state of Georgia rule to be dropped from classes because they have small outstanding balances on tuition or fees.	9,000+ students since 2011
Graduation and Progression System	2012	Sophisticated dashboard for advisers that displays real-time analyses of student academic progress and raises alerts calling for intervention; coupled with consolidating undergraduate advising and more than doubling the number of advisers.	Prompted 52,000 student-adviser meetings in 2016-17
Summer Success Academy	2012	Opportunity for the most academically at-risk 10 percent of incoming freshmen to take 7 credit hours and receive intensive academic advisement and financial literacy training during the summer before their first year.	300+ students in Summer 2016; 1,400 students since launch
Meta Majors	2013	Onboarding program that enrolls new students according to broad areas of academic interests and then delivers programming to help students understand the differences between majors within each area; has significantly reduced the number of students changing majors after their freshman years	Approximately 3,700 freshmen during the 2016-17 academic year
Course Scheduling Analytics	2015	Predictive Analytics deployed to determine the number of course sections and seats needed each semester; establishment of a university Strategic Courser Scheduling Committee	Capacity added in 800 courses in 2016-17
Chat Bots	2016	Artificial-intelligence-enhanced automatic texting platform that has been developed to answer thousands of common freshman questions immediately via texts. Has reduced summer melt by 22%.	4,000 incoming freshman during Summer 2017
SunTrust Student Financial Management Center	2016	Office using predictive analytics to proactively identify students who are at financial risk and reach out to them with help. Delivers financial competencies programming.	31,000 in-person student visits during the Spring 2017 term
College to Career	2016	Undergraduate curriculum that promotes career readiness each year a student is enrolled leveraging new technologies, e.g. career-based e-portfolios for each student, career component of academic advising, live regional job data	700,000 student postings to e-portfolios in 2016-17
Perimeter LIFT	2017	Integrated suite of 16 different student support programs to take students from high school to college graduation> program is in cooperation with DeKalb Public Schools and supported by State Farm	300 Perimeter College students in 2017
Adaptive Learning in the Social Sciences	2017	A collaborative, funded project in which faculty members in Psychology, Economics, and Political Science are converting 20,000 seats of introductory courses to hybrid, flipped classes assisted by adaptive-learning technology.	20,000 students a year by 2018

Source: Building A Pathway to Student Success at Georgia State University