

Where Students Thrive: A Florida State University Blueprint for Building Student Success

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Abstract

Florida State University (FSU) has a long-standing commitment to promoting success for all students. FSU's strategies for student success and equity have resulted in increased and more equitable graduation rates and record fall-to-fall retention rates. This article provides an inventory of student success and equity initiatives at FSU. The inventory covers FSU's holistic practices designed to support students of all backgrounds, including targeted practices for students from historically underrepresented groups. The article also highlights and describes in detail salient student success programs and practices at FSU. This article aims to serve as a guide for those in higher education who seek to understand and learn from FSU's systematic efforts to promote and sustain student success and narrow success gaps. It also offers a profile of how to effectively implement a comprehensive and interconnected network of student success initiatives that respond to the critical needs of students and deliver impactful results.

Keywords: student success, equity, higher education

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Student success and equity have been at the center of higher education discussion for many years. For example, the Commission on the Future of Undergraduate Education (2017) called for colleges and universities to increase completion rates while reducing inequities among institutional priorities. More recently, the Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (2022) declared an “equity/excellence imperative,” asserting “that excellence without equity (privilege reproducing privilege) is not true excellence, and equity (mere access) without excellence is unfulfilled promise” (p. 3). Many colleges and universities around the country have made strides toward this imperative, advancing student success and equity as two of the top priorities in undergraduate education.

Florida State University (FSU) has a long-standing commitment to promoting success for all students. FSU’s focus on student success and narrowing success gaps is embedded in its mission and institutional culture through a campus-wide strategic planning process, which is also the driving force for continuous improvement in retaining and supporting every student it enrolls. As a result of the university’s strategic efforts to improve student success and narrow success gaps, FSU was awarded the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities 2021 Degree Completion Award for achieving a record-high 74% graduation rate while eliminating disparities by race/ethnicity and income level (FSU Office of Institutional Research, 2022). The university provides extensive opportunities and resources for undergraduate students that support their academic and personal success at FSU and beyond.

In this article, we seek to develop a comprehensive inventory of student success programs and practices at FSU. The university works holistically and collaboratively, inside and outside the classroom and across multiple divisions, to ensure its practices meet students’ academic, financial, and social needs, and support the development of the whole student (Tinto, 2010). FSU’s strategies for student success and equity have resulted in increased and more equitable graduation rates and record fall-to-fall retention rates. These initiatives are the foundation for FSU’s commitment to achieving even greater student success moving forward.

This inventory of student success initiatives consists of four major sections covering FSU’s holistic practices supporting students of all backgrounds. The first section provides a brief introduction to FSU’s institutional context including its undergraduate student characteristics, student academic outcomes, and rationales for implementing equity-focused initiatives. In the second section, we offer an illustration of FSU’s overall student success initiatives and detailed narratives addressing how FSU’s infrastructure and operations were designed or redesigned for advancing student success and narrowing success gaps. The third section highlights salient practices designed to support the success of all students, with a focus on targeted practices for students from historically

underrepresented backgrounds. The inventory concludes with evidence-based practices that may be adapted for use at other higher education institutions. This inventory can serve as a guide for those in higher education who seek to understand and learn from FSU's systematic efforts to promote and sustain student success and narrow success gaps.

Introduction: A Mission-Driven School and the Students It Serves

Founded in 1851, FSU developed from one of the nation's preeminent women's colleges into a comprehensive national research university offering more than 280 academic and professional degrees within 18 academic colleges at all degree levels (FSU Office of Institutional Research, 2021). In Fall 2020, FSU's total enrollment was 43,953 with 32,520 (73.9%) undergraduates. Undergraduate students enrolled full-time represented nearly 90% of those undergraduates in attendance. First-Time-in-College (FTIC) students comprise 74.5% of new undergraduates, while about 25% of undergraduates are transfer students from Florida community colleges (18.8%) or from other colleges/universities (5.9%). FSU serves a large portion of minority students and other underrepresented student populations. For example, students of color make up 38.7% of undergraduates, with 22.3% Hispanic/Latino and 8.6% Black/African American. Nearly 30% of undergraduates are first-generation college students and 26.2% are Pell Grant recipients.

FSU has a longstanding tradition of rigorously analyzing its student data and student academic outcomes to identify areas in need of improvement to ensure that the university's strategic planning process remains evidence-driven (Kurzweil & Rossman, 2016). For the 2017–2022 strategic plan, FSU's strategic priorities included:

Deepening our distinctive commitment to continuous innovation; amplifying excellence across our academic and research programs; realizing the full potential of diversity and inclusion; ensuring student success on campus and beyond; preparing our graduates for 21st century careers; and investing strategically in our institution and reputation (FSU Office of Institutional Research, 2021, p. 1).

Each strategic priority is informed by equity-minded data analysis and assessment. Student success and equity are critical components of FSU's strategic priorities, deeply rooted in an institutional culture consistent with the university's mission of supporting individual learning and growth and ensuring the success of all students.

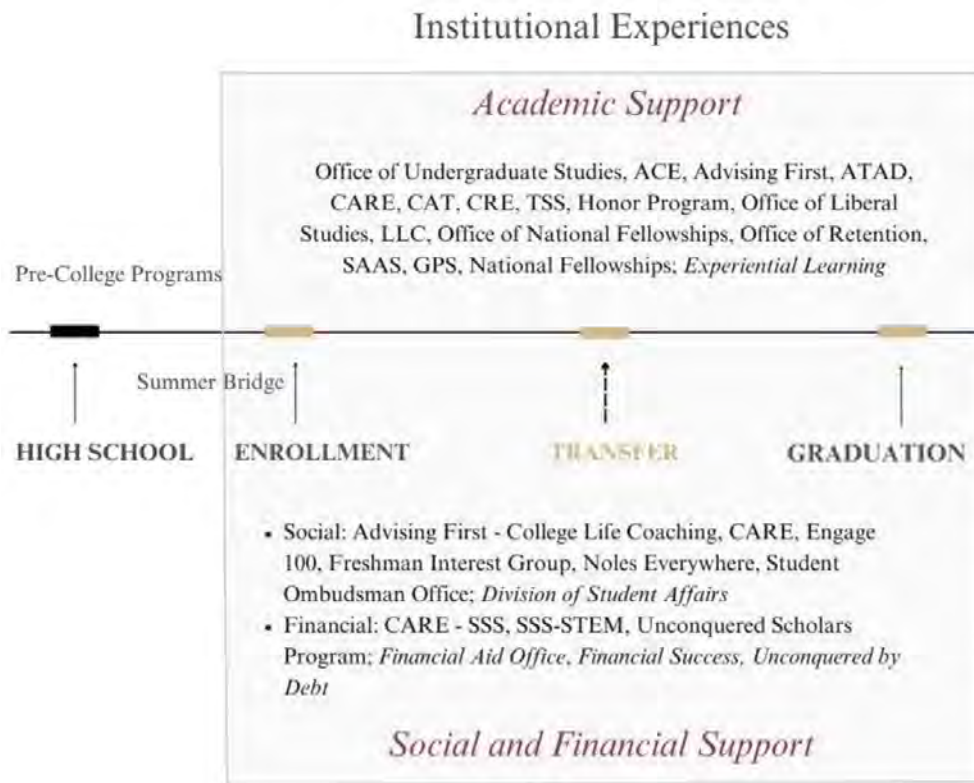
The effectiveness of FSU's strategic efforts to promote student success and narrow success gaps are reflected in its student achievement data. In 2013, the overall four-year graduation rate for the 2009 FTIC student cohort was 61.6%. By 2020, the 2016 FTIC student cohort achieved a 73.8% four-year graduation rate, which represented a

12.2% increase over the 2017–2022 strategic plan implementation period (FSU Office of Institutional Research, 2021). In addition, FSU closed gaps in four-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity and income level over the same period. In 2013, the four-year graduation rate for students of color was 58.3%, 52.9% for Black students, 60.7% for Hispanic students, and 57.8% for Pell-eligible students. There was a large gap (nearly 9%) in the four-year graduation rate between Black students and the overall population, as well as graduation gaps among different student subgroups. By 2020, the four-year graduation rates had increased for FTIC students overall (73.8%) and by subpopulation (e.g., 73.3% for students of color, 73.9% for Black students, 73.7% for Hispanic students, and 70.6% for Pell-eligible students). Furthermore, the gap in four-year graduation rates for Black students went from 9% below the overall population to 0.1% above all students. There were virtually no differences in four-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity or income level by 2020.

Meeting Students Where They Are: An Inventory of FSU's Student Success and Equity Initiatives

FSU offers an array of academic and student support services to meet student needs and support student learning. The university's holistic approach to student success and narrowing success gaps is guided by the theoretical foundation known as its "Six Pillars," which propose: (a) A Success Team for Every Student; (b) Learning Communities; (c) Enhanced Support for Teaching; (d) Experiential and Global Learning; (e) Leadership and Personal Development; and (f) College to Career. Guided by this foundation, FSU allocates resources to relevant units and divisions within the university to form a student success ecosystem that meets students' academic, social, and financial needs, as well as support the success of students of all backgrounds (Tinto, 2010). In Figure 1, we present a visualization of FSU's student success and equity initiatives including programs provided by the offices within the Division of Undergraduate Studies (Undergraduate Studies) and campus-wide efforts. The primary goal of this visualization is to provide a clear understanding of FSU's infrastructure and operations for undergraduate student success that address the academic, social, and financial needs of students of all backgrounds (Tinto, 2010).

Undergraduate Studies provides students with opportunities and supports for them to thrive (FSU Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2020). There are multiple offices and programs that report to or are affiliated with Undergraduate Studies designed to bolster its mission (see Figure 1). These offices and programs include: the Office of Undergraduate Studies, Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), Advising First, Advisor for Training and Development, Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE), Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Center for Undergraduate Research and Academic Engagement (CRE), Transfer Student Services, Honors Program, Office of Liberal Studies, Living-Learning Communities (LLC), Office of National Fellowships,

Figure 1. Student Success and Equity Initiatives at Florida State University

Note. ACE = Academic Center for Excellence; ATAD = Advisor for Training and Development; CARE = Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement; CAT = Center for the Advancement of Teaching; CRE = Center for Undergraduate Research and Academic Engagement; TSS = Transfer Student Services; LLC = Living-Learning Communities; SAAS = Student Athlete Academic Services; GPS = Graduation Planning & Strategies Office; SSS = Student Support Services; SSS-STEM = Student Support Services-STEM.

Office of Retention, Student Athlete Academic Services, Graduation Planning & Strategies Office, and Student Ombudsman Office. These offices and programs aim to support and enrich students' institutional experience from enrollment to graduation (Kurzweil & Rossman, 2016).

FSU offers relevant and timely support to ensure that all students (including prospective students) with different levels of pre-college preparation have opportunities to grow and succeed in college and beyond (Kurzweil & Rossman, 2016). For example, CARE—a center committed to serving students with identities traditionally underrepresented in higher education—provides pre-college programs to prepare first-generation and other underrepresented students for admission and enrollment into higher education (Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement [CARE], n.d.-a). CARE's pre-collegiate programs include two specific practices: Upward Bound Classic and Upward Bound

Math & Science. Upward Bound Classic provides academic instruction, counseling, tutoring, and other educational activities to enrich high school students' educational experience while preparing them for college life. The Upward Bound Math & Science program aims to expand students' learning in math and science and prepare students to pursue college degrees while providing the same services as the Upward Bound Classic program. For high school graduates who are newly accepted to FSU and identify as first-generation college students, CARE's Summer Bridge Program provides comprehensive orientation and transition classes to help ease these students' adjustment from high school to college while building a solid foundation for their academic success (CARE, n.d.-b).

Undergraduate Studies works closely with FSU's academic colleges, the Division of Student Affairs, and other campus units to make a variety of resources and opportunities available to all undergraduate students from their time of enrollment through graduation (FSU Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2020; Kurzweil & Rossman, 2016). Multiple offices within Undergraduate Studies provide academic support for undergraduates at all levels (e.g., first-year students, transfer students) in alignment with the Division's mission. For undergraduates who have not yet been formally admitted to any major, the Office of Undergraduate Studies provides information and services on all academic matters (e.g., course exemptions, academic standing) and monitors student progress until they are formally admitted to a major (Division of Undergraduate Studies, n.d.-a). To assist students in selecting their majors, the Advising First Center offers the Exploratory Advising Program to help students develop greater awareness of the major options at FSU and choose their majors with confidence (Advising First, n.d.-a). In addition to the academic support for students exploring majors, ACE, CARE, CRE, Transfer Student Services, Living-Learning Communities, Office of Retention, Student Athlete Academic Services, Graduation Planning & Strategies Office, Honors Program, and National Fellowships provide resources to support the academic achievement of specific subgroups of student such as first-generation, transfer, and student athletes (FSU Office of Institutional Research, 2021). Other academic support programs, such as Advisor Training and Development and the Center for the Advancement of Teaching, are focused on supporting academic advisors and faculty to ensure that all undergraduates receive high-quality advising and teaching. More details on the academic support programs and services for undergraduates provided by the offices within the Undergraduate Studies are charted in Table 1.

The Career Center and other units within the Division of Student Affairs provide valuable experiential learning opportunities that enhance undergraduates' academic experiences and contribute to their post-graduation success. The Career Center offers various resources to equip undergraduates with the skills and information they need for career success and life planning (The Career Center, n.d.-a), such as the FSUshadow program. This program connects undergraduates with employers, community partners, alumni, and friends of the university for one-day job shadowing opportunities to provide exposure to a wide variety of career fields and industries. Many students who participate in the FSUshadow program receive internship and job offers from the employers they

Table 1. Academic Support Interventions for Undergraduates at Florida State University

Offices/Programs	Academic Support Interventions	Student Type
Office of Undergraduate Studies	Information and services on all academic matters; student progress monitoring	Undergraduates who have not been fully admitted to a major (primarily freshmen and sophomores)
Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)	Tutoring; workshops; study tools and tips; Proactive Referral Engagement (PRE)	All undergraduates; PRE coordinates academic early alert outreach and support for undergraduates experiencing academic challenges in specific classes
Advising First	Center for Exploratory Students; Center for Academic Planning (CAP)	Primarily for freshmen; CAP also supports second-year students or above and transfer students
Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE)	Advising and Coaching (Academic Advising); Tutoring and Computer Lab	CARE students (first-generation college students, racial/ethnic minority students, low-income students)
Center for Undergraduate Research & Academic Engagement (CRE)	Undergraduate research (i.e., Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program); global programming	All undergraduates
Transfer Student Services (TSS)	Choosing a major; pre-transfer advising and transcript evaluation; academic success strategies for transfer students; tutoring, research, and writing assistance; community college transition programs	Transfer students
Living-Learning Communities (LLC)	10 unique LLC on the Tallahassee campus; collaborative efforts between undergraduate studies, university housing, and academic colleges	Primarily for freshmen
Office of Retention	Engage 100 (first-year student success and transition courses); Freshman Interest Groups (FIG); course registration assistance; re-enrollment campaigns and individual outreach	All undergraduates; Engage 100 and FIG are specifically for freshmen

Table 1. Academic Support Interventions for Undergraduates at Florida State University (*continued*)

Offices/Programs	Academic Support Interventions	Student Type
Student Athlete Academic Services (SAAS)	Academic support services; study hall, tutoring, learning specialists; academic progress reports; priority scheduling; computer lab	NCAA student athletes
Graduation Planning & Strategies Office (GPS)	Degree in Three; More in Four; High School AA Support	Degree in Three is for students who wish to graduate in less than four years; More in Four is for high-achieving students to complete multiple degrees; High School AA Support is to support students who earned an AA degree while in high school
Honors Program	University honors; honors in the major	High-achieving students
Office of National Fellowships (ONF)	Fellowship promotion; applicant identification; student mentoring	High-achieving students
Advisor Training and Development (ATAD)	Provide training and materials to support academic advisors	All undergraduates
Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT)	The Learning Assistant program; course re-design consultation; instructor support and development	All undergraduates; faculty

Note. Among the broad range of student success initiatives offered by the programs and offices within the Undergraduate Studies, only *academic* support related interventions are included in this table.

shadowed. Other experiential career planning and networking programs and services provided by the Career Center include Employer in Residence Program, Experience Recognition Program, Garnet & Gold Scholar Society, InternFSU, ProfessioNole Mentors Program, ProfessioNole Pathways and Badges, and ProfessioNole Ready (The Career Center, n.d.-b). In addition to these programs, FSU also offers other experiential learning opportunities, such as service-learning and leadership through the Center for Leadership & Service, undergraduate research or creative activity through CRE, international education opportunities, and experiential learning/formative experience courses through the university's Liberal Studies curriculum (FSU Foundation, n.d.). By participating in these programs and services, undergraduates not only gain practical skills and knowledge, but also build valuable networks and connections that can further support their post-graduation success.

In addition to academic support, the offices within the Undergraduate Studies and other campus units provide a variety of social and financial supports for undergraduates (see Figure 1). For example, the Advising First Center for College Life Coaching is designed to help students get the most out of the college experience (Advising First, n.d.-b). College Life Coaches meet with pre-selected first-year students and second-year CARE students one-on-one, twice a month, during the academic year. Coaches discuss a wide range of topics (e.g., networking, leadership development) with students; they are also knowledgeable about campus resources to help ease students' adjustment to the college setting and unlock their greatest potential to succeed. CARE's Transition Programs, FGEN Noles Living-Learning Community, and Student Networks provide opportunities for social engagement and support for minority students at FSU (CARE, n.d.-c).

To enhance freshmen students' engagement and involvement during their time at FSU, the Office of Retention executes first-year student success and transition courses through the Engage 100 initiative and Freshman Interest Groups program. Additionally, the office manages Noles Everywhere to provide social support and enhance sense of belonging for out-of-state students and new students who are living off-campus their freshman year (Division of Undergraduate Studies, n.d.-b). All undergraduates also benefit from campus-wide social support resources within the Division of Student Affairs, including Counseling & Psychological Services, Campus Recreation, FSU Career Center, New Student & Family Programs, University Health Services, University Housing, FSU Student Union, Student Government Association, and Student Organizations and Involvement (Division of Student Affairs, n.d.). These departments provide an array of programs and services that support students' well-being, health, social engagement, and career development.

Students from low-income backgrounds are likely to experience larger financial challenges in college, which will ultimately impact their academic success and overall well-being. To address financial barriers for low-income and first-generation students, one service provided by CARE's Student Support Services (SSS) program and Student Support Services-STEM (SSS-STEM) program, which are federally funded TRIO programs, is a program developed to improve CARE students' financial literacy (CARE, n.d.-d). The Unconquered Scholars Program provides an array of support services, including financial aid assistance and advocacy, to help promote the success of students who have experienced foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the state status (CARE, n.d.-e). Understanding that many undergraduates are experiencing financial independence for the first time in college, FSU's Office of Financial Aid provides financial assistance, information, options, and advice that serve to remove financial barriers for students, enabling them to enroll and continue their studies until graduation (Office of Financial Aid, n.d.). In addition, the Gus A. Stavros Center for the Advancement of Free Enterprise and Economic Education implemented the Unconquered by Debt program to enhance financial literacy and transform decision making so that students become wealth creators, through a series of free financial

wellness workshops (Gus A. Stavros Center, n.d.). The university also created the Financial Success website, an online hub of financial literacy tools to better arm students with financial literacy and foster responsibility (Financial Success, n.d.-a). We describe the Financial Success Online Hub in more detail in the following section.

Identifying Needs and Offering Solutions: An Expanded View of FSU's Efforts to Overcome Barriers to Success and Equity

In this section, we highlight student success programs and practices at FSU that were intentionally designed for the success of undergraduates of all backgrounds (see Table 2). These initiatives have reached a large number of students and enriched their college experiences over time. Descriptions of these programs and practices illustrate the effective educational practices FSU has built and successfully implemented to promote student success for all.

Hub of Academic, Social, and Financial Support— Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement

CARE provides wraparound services for first-generation and other students traditionally underrepresented in higher education from admissions to graduation (CARE, n.d.-f). CARE students are supported by a suite of services designed to meet their needs and promote their academic success, retention, and timely graduation from enrollment to their post-graduation lives. As mentioned in the previous section, CARE provides Pre-Collegiate Programs, Summer Bridge Program, Unconquered Scholars Program, CARE Tutoring and Computer Lab, Advising and Coaching, and Bridge to Graduate School to support the academic, social, and financial needs of all CARE students including potential incoming CARE students. The Pre-Collegiate Programs, including the Upward Bound Classic and Upward Bound Math & Science programs, connect students to resources (e.g., counseling and tutoring) that enrich their high school educational experience and motivate and promote their access, enrollment, and completion of a college education (CARE, n.d.-a). The Summer Bridge Program is a seven-week comprehensive program designed to ease students' transition from high school to college while building a strong academic foundation (CARE, n.d.-b). CARE staff continuously conduct semester check-ins with students after their completion of the summer. The Summer Bridge Program is open to new, first-year, first-generation undergraduates who have a 3.0 weighted grade point average (GPA), 19 ACT composite score, or 990 total SAT score. Summer Bridge Program participants also have access to tutoring, academic advising, college success workshops, financial wellness and literacy workshops, social engagement, and peer mentoring.

CARE's Unconquered Scholars Program (USP) was established in 2012 to provide additional support services to students who have experienced foster care, homelessness,

Table 2. Student Success and Equity Initiatives at Florida State University

Student Success Initiatives	Description
<i>Hub of Academic, Social, and Financial Support</i>	
Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE)	CARE provides preparation, orientation, and academic support programming for students who are among the first in their family to attend college and may face unique challenges in college because of educational or economic circumstances.
<i>Academic Support</i>	
Academic Center for Excellence (ACE)	ACE is a university learning center that offers several different types of tutoring, academic workshops, study tools and tips, and Proactive Referral and Engagement service to address students' academic needs.
Center for Undergraduate Research & Academic Engagement (CRE)	CRE offers opportunities for undergraduates to engage in groundbreaking research, global study, and social innovation projects.
<i>Social Support</i>	
The Office of Retention	The Office of Retention supports students through programming designed to engage undergraduates during their first year.
Office of Student Organizations and Involvement (SOI)	SOI supports student organizations and promotes student involvement through small- and large-scale programming.
<i>Financial Support</i>	
Financial Success	The Financial Success website provides resources related to paying for college, planning and budgeting, banking and credit, investments and insurance, and taxes for students.

relative care, or ward of the State status (CARE, n.d.-e). Through collaboration with campus partners, USP offers one-on-one advising, coaching, tutoring, financial aid assistance and advocacy, mental health counseling, and academic and skills workshops. USP has boosted student retention and graduation rates at FSU—98% of students enrolled in USP since the program's inception were retained following their first year, and the graduation rate of USP students is 85%—and been named a “Model of Excellence” by University Business magazine. CARE also partners with the Advising First and Center for College Life Coaching to support the overall success of CARE students (CARE, n.d.-g). Students can meet one-on-one with their CARE academic advisors to explore majors, develop course schedules, and plan their academic paths to graduation. Through College Life Coaching, CARE students receive personal coaching to increase their success in and out of the classroom. Other resources, such as CARE Tutoring and Computer Lab, are available to all CARE students to assist them in developing study skills and building their confidence in academic success (CARE, n.d.-h). For first-generation and other minority students, CARE serves as a one-stop center to help

students navigate college life and empower them to reach their full potential (Kurzweil & Rossman, 2016; Starke, 2020). With successful implementation of these targeted interventions, CARE students achieved a high level of success—95% are in good academic standing, with a cumulative GPA above 2.0.

Academic Support—Academic Center for Excellence

ACE is a university learning center established in 2007 to help students develop the study skills and habits that are necessary to achieve academic success and be valued by future employers (Academic Center for Excellence [ACE], n.d.-a). ACE provides free tutoring, academic workshops, Personal Academic Consultations, Proactive Referral and Engagement, study tools and tips, and study rooms for all undergraduates. To better meet the different academic needs of undergraduates, ACE offers several different types of tutoring services, including course-based tutoring, group tutoring, math tutoring, and study skills tutoring (ACE, n.d.-b). In 2019–2020, ACE offered 15,664 tutoring sessions with a trained tutor to help students make the most of their study time (FSU Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2020).

ACE also offers free academic workshops on various topics such as time management, test preparation, starting a paper or essay, and preparation for graduate school. The calendar of these academic workshops is available on the ACE website and on social media. Students can choose to participate in one or more workshops that best fit their schedules. For undergraduates who desire individualized academic support, Personal Academic Consultations offer opportunities for students to meet one-on-one with ACE faculty to review their study habits, assess their academic needs, and develop plans for their academic success (ACE, n.d.-c). ACE's Proactive Referral and Engagement program was designed to support students experiencing academic challenges who need additional academic support, with a distinct focus on student progress in FSU's most traditionally difficult gateway courses (ACE, n.d.-d). Program coordinators work closely with faculty and students to identify whether additional help is needed. Once faculty submits referrals, the coordinators personally reach out to each referred student to encourage them to schedule a meeting with a study skills tutor or ACE faculty member based on students' general academic needs.

Academic Support—Center for Undergraduate Research and Academic Engagement

CRE is leading a movement to involve undergraduate students in the highest levels of academic engagement through offering a variety of high-impact programs (Center for Undergraduate Research and Academic Engagement [CRE], n.d.-a). CRE provides undergraduate research programs, such as Undergraduate Research Opportunity (UROP), IDEA Grants, and Florida Georgia Louis Stoke Alliance for Minority Participation (FGLSAMP), to involve undergraduates and historically underrepresented students in research and scholarship and to showcase the work of student researchers

through symposia and publication. UROP is open to first- and second-year undergraduates and transfer students in all majors to provide these students the opportunity to serve as research assistants for a wide array of research and creative projects led by FSU faculty members and advanced graduate students (CRE, n.d.-b). The program components include conducting 5–10 hours of research work per week assisting research mentors (a faculty member, doctoral student, or company); meeting twice a month with a UROP student leader and receiving personalized guidance about research; and presenting at the annual undergraduate research symposium. In 2019–2020, 424 students and 61 faculty members joined the UROP program, and 456 undergraduates presented posters at the annual symposium (FSU Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2020).

For underrepresented undergraduates in the STEM disciplines, the FSU chapter of the National Science Foundation-funded FGLSAMP provides programming, mentorship, and financial support in an effort to increase the number of STEM baccalaureate and graduate degrees awarded to racially underrepresented student groups (CRE, n.d.-c). All undergraduate researchers can also apply for IDEA Grants to support their research projects. IDEA Grants fund independent research, creative projects, and the development or evaluation of new or existing ideas (CRE, n.d.-d). In 2019–2020, FSU awarded 47 grants (a total of \$68,000) for undergraduate research projects. In addition to the programs in undergraduate research, CRE provides Global Engagement programs and Social Innovation projects for students' experiential learning (FSU Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2020).

Social Support—The Office of Retention

The Office of Retention supports undergraduates to ensure that they have ample opportunity to succeed in college (Division of Undergraduate Studies, n.d.-b). The office collaborates with colleges and university programs to promote student engagement and involvement. Two social support initiatives offered by the office are the Engage 100 initiative and Noles Everywhere.

Engage 100 is an immersive program designed for first-year undergraduate students (Engage 100, n.d.). Unlike traditional first-year experience programs, FSU has adopted a cross-divisional, collaborative approach to offering over 30 course-based student engagement and transition programs for students. Centered on five key learning objectives, this collection of 0- or 1-credit courses allows students to choose the program best aligned with their individual academic and co-curricular interests. Engage 100 courses are reviewed and approved by a faculty committee to ensure they enhance sense of belonging and campus acclimation through peer mentor-supported, small, intentional learning environments. Students can explore all approved Engage 100 experiences online and consult with an academic advisor to decide which course matches their interests and goals. Examples of approved Engage 100 experiences include Freshman Interest Groups, major-based seminars,

undergraduate research through UROP, and involvement-focused courses like Chart Your Course. Freshman Interest Groups is one of the largest programs, which clusters high-demand freshman classes and a small-group colloquium course based on majors and academic themes. Through participating in Engage 100, students invest in their own success by building community, exploring their passions, and exploring what university life offers. In 2019–2020, 34% of the incoming freshmen participated in an Engage 100 program, and many participated in more than one (FSU Division of Undergraduate Studies, 2020). Engage 100 was brought to scale in Fall 2022, the first semester that all new incoming FTIC students were required to enroll in an Engage 100 course. This change ensures each new first-year undergraduate student receives the benefits of this support program, while offering them an array of offerings to meet their individual needs.

The Office of Retention also facilitates social support programming through Noles Everywhere. Launched in 2020, Noles Everywhere is a collection of events, programs, and outreach initiatives focused on enhancing belonging for first-year students from out-of-state or living off-campus (Division of Undergraduate Studies, n.d.-c). The program employs a group of upper-division undergraduate ambassadors who share these identities. The ambassadors plan and execute events such as the Out-of-State Welcome Mixer, Family Weekend Out-of-State Family Reception, and small-group interactive events throughout the school year. Combined with individual, student-to-student outreach, the Noles Everywhere Ambassadors have forged intentional connections with students who experience a difficult transition to the college environment.

Social Support—Student Organizations and Involvement

The Office of Student Organizations and Involvement (SOI) recognizes that student involvement outside of the classroom contributes to important learning gains and a well-rounded college experience that prepares students for life after graduation (FSU Student Union, n.d.). The office is more than just a physical place on campus; it serves as a hub for cultivating a diverse and engaging community that fosters interactions among different groups through various programming and student activities. As part of its social initiatives, SOI provides guidance for students to get involved in activities and organizations offered at FSU through multiple channels, including browsing Nole Central, the online hub for all recognized student organizations; scheduling a consultation with an Involvement Ambassador; attending the Involvement Fair; or attending a weekly Market Wednesday. The Involvement Fair provides students with an opportunity to learn about the more than 750 Recognized Student Organizations on campus and find a community that aligns with their interests. SOI also provides advising, training, and mentoring to student leaders and advisors of Recognized Student Organizations, offering services, resources, and programs for deepening their engagement with their organizations and the overall campus community. SOI collaborates with other campus partners to deliver campus-wide programs and events for student involvement and engagement, such as Homecoming, the Involvement Fair, and the Annual Leadership Awards Night.

Financial Support—Financial Success Online Hub

FSU recognizes that affordability is key to promoting student success and supporting first-generation and low-income students. To better prepare students for the financial responsibility of college life and to equip them with essential skills for the future, FSU created a financial success website (financialsuccess.fsu.edu)—an online hub of financial literacy tools for students (Financial Success, n.d.-a). The financial success website provides resources related to paying for college, planning and budgeting, banking and credit, investments and insurance, and taxes with the goal of creating a space where students can go to find key financial support information. The financial success hub features easy access to the Financial Success Badge program, which allows students to document the skills and experiences they gain through financial course training (Financial Success, n.d.-b). The badge program, coordinated through the Division of Student Affairs, includes: (a) “Live Well Financially,” offered by the Center for Health Advocacy and Wellness, which covers a range of topics, such as creating a budget and financial wellness; (b) “Fiscally Fit,” offered by the Career Center, which aims to increase financial literacy and develop career skills; and (c) “ProfessioNole Ready,” which helps students navigate common early career concerns, such as calculating the cost of living and evaluating job offers and benefits packages. The hub also directs students to the Financial Aid Office and FSU Foundation Scholarships, FS4U, to help meet students’ financial needs.

Next Steps: Building on the Student Success Blueprint

The inventory of FSU’s student success and equity initiatives provides several implications for policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and scholars invested in promoting student success and narrowing success gaps. First, the inventory presents a comprehensive image of FSU’s student success and equity initiatives and illustrates how these programs and services were designed or redesigned to meet the academic, social, and financial needs of undergraduates of all backgrounds. With a strong understanding of FSU’s robust student success ecosystem and infrastructure, policymakers and practitioners can reflect on how one university has achieved student success results by adopting a holistic understanding of its student body’s needs and building a comprehensive support system that ensures the success of all students. Second, the inventory highlights effective programs and practices at FSU that address barriers to success and empower all students to reach their full potential. The detailed descriptions of each of these programs may provide context and guidance for practitioners interested in implementing similar practices in their own institutions. Researchers who are interested in student success and equity, student needs, and institutional improvement can use this inventory to guide their research and evaluation on student needs and program effectiveness. Finally, the model of student success and equity illustrated in this manuscript provides a set of programs and practices institutional leaders can explore that considers the student lifespan, from pre-college programs through post-graduation outcomes.

This lens highlights the various touchpoints in which individualized attention and a cross-divisional approach can be implemented. Looking at these efforts holistically, as modeled through this inventory of student success and equity programs at FSU, provides higher education leaders the perspective necessary to identify gaps in offerings, areas for collaborative problem solving, and the development of new practices and structures to meet the changing needs of undergraduate students.

Conclusions

While gaps in college completion by race/ethnicity and income level exist widely in U.S. higher education institutions, FSU addresses this challenge head-on and demonstrates effectiveness in promoting student success of undergraduates of all backgrounds. Empowered by the equitable graduation and retention rates achieved over the past five years—the same period as the 2017–2022 strategic plan—researchers at FSU have developed a comprehensive inventory of the institution’s student success and equity initiatives to show how each program and practice contributed to student success, including its student characteristics, institutional mission, strategic plan priorities, and student performance. The importance of student success and narrowing success gaps is featured in FSU’s mission statement and clearly articulated in its 2017–2022 strategic priorities, which has helped guide the institutional practice in allocating resources and implementing programs and services to enrich students’ experiences.

The inventory not only provides a comprehensive view of the initiatives undertaken by FSU to ensure student success and equity but also highlights the university’s systematic efforts in meeting students’ academic, social, and financial needs from enrollment to graduation. We highlight salient student success programs and practices at FSU and describe these programs in detail. The student success initiative overview and program descriptions together can serve as a valuable guide for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to better understand FSU’s extensive work to achieve equitable student success, and to implement relevant lessons accordingly.

As universities around the country seek to elevate their student success rates, the FSU blueprint can offer a profile of how to effectively implement a comprehensive and interconnected network of student success initiatives that respond to the critical needs of students and deliver impactful results. Promising programs and practices have emerged at institutions around the country, yet university leaders must explore models that focus on coordinated, individualized support at scale. Profiles of institutions that model coordinated, comprehensive student success initiatives and a history of achievement on key metrics can serve as examples for institutional leaders seeking to re-imagine equitable outcomes for students.

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