VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Mission:

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

Geographic Service Area:

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

Composition of the Student Population:

In Fall 2019, VSU is serving 11,270 students (headcount) with FTE of 9,739 of which:

- 77.8% are undergraduate students; 22.2% are graduate students
- 62.0% are female
- 71.4% enrolled full-time
- 27.1% of undergraduates lived on campus
- 55.0% are white, 33.1% are black, 2.6% are Asian
- 1,387 enrolled as beginning first-year students
- 18.0% attend fully-online programs

MOMENTUM YEAR UPDATE

Overall, the changes required on our campus to improve student success and specifically, to implement the Momentum Approach, are broad and deep, involving significant cultural changes, as well as structural and procedural changes. Our efforts began with creating a separate Division of Student Success in 2017, which included a new cadre of professional academic advisors. We hired a new Executive Director of Academic Advising in January 2018 and had a full team of professional advisors in place by July 2018, at which point, we began transitioning all undergraduate students to the professional advisors. Coincident with this work was a broad effort to change the conversation on campus to focus on student success. In the past two years, we have altered a whole host of practices, all focused on one goal: improving our retention and graduation rates. Completed efforts included such things as:

- Hiring permanent leadership in departments and colleges, replacing an unusually large number of interim department heads, directors and deans.
- Implementing Banner waitlists institution-wide and putting in place a process for managing the lists.
- Empowering deans and department heads to immediately open additional seats in courses when sections fill, making sure that we meet students' needs for courses in a timely fashion.
- Completely revamping VSU's summer model, allowing departments to offer as many classes as will fill and providing departments with incentives for offering those classes that will meet students' needs, instead of offering the same classes year after year.
- Moved summer registration five months earlier, so that students could register for Spring and Summer classes at the same time.
- Developed 4-year program maps for all majors and 2-year program maps for all Focus Areas and posted these to each department's website.
- Pressure-tested Fall 2019 schedules prior to registration, to ensure that students could build schedules that reflect the program maps, eliminating scheduling conflicts wherever possible.
- Streamlined and standardized the faculty search process, to improve the efficiency of the process and our effectiveness at recruiting diverse faculty and moving searches to conclusion more quickly.
- Revised VSU's GPA calculation/course repeat policy, bringing it in line with USG norms. The old calculations needlessly punished students for a poor performance in a course, particularly when a student repeated a course more than once.

Deepen Purposeful Choice

In Spring 2018, VSU developed a set of eight Focus Areas (see Appendix I) that are aligned with our undergraduate programs of study. During the summer of 2018, we developed coding within Banner for delineating a student's chosen Focus Area and we implemented these Focus Areas for all incoming new students who were exploratory (undecided) majors. This implementation, included helping these students to better understand the choice they were making, with the help of Career Services staff. The Director of Career Opportunities and the Executive Director of Academic Advising have coordinated the implementation of a newly developed Career Guidance Survey, to be used as part of advisement during Summer 2019 orientation sessions, for all students expressing an interest in any of the established Focus Areas.

Each College's Academic Advising Center is now actively monitoring students in all majors and all focus areas within that college. The advising center for Exploratory and Honors students is actively monitoring all exploratory students and helping students to select an appropriate focus area. Advisors are also working with Career Services to assist students in making an informed, intentional choice.

A first year career plan learning module is currently under development in partnership between Career Opportunities and Student Success, for implementation with the pilot first year experience course for students in established Focus Areas.

- A new Pre-Enrollment Survey asks for major AND future career interests. When advisors see incongruence between the two, we are calling the student prior to arrival at orientation to discuss, helping the student to make a more informed decision.
- Students meet with faculty and the academic deans during their orientation, to hear about their selected major. During convocation in the fall, students also spend time with the faculty, which allows for a more in-depth exploration of the major, along with ways to get involved on campus to help confirm the major decision.
- Advisor meetings, from the point of orientation until graduation include:
  - Guiding students in appropriate academic planning by providing 4-year maps.
  - Creating individualized plans in DegreeWorks.
  - Encouraging 9 credit hours of major/career choices within the first year.
  - Discussing pre-requisite courses and sequencing.
  - Covering program admission requirements for undergraduate programs with secondary admit and/or for graduate school.
  - Connecting students with clubs and organizations related to their major to help them engage with their campus community.
  - Ensuring that students who are considering schedule changes understand the impact those changes might have on their time to degree completion.
  - Referring students to campus partners such as Career Services and the Counseling Center.
- For our exploratory students:
  - An Academic Focus Area sheet (attached) is provided to all students at orientation and students have a one-on-one conversation about focus areas and course selection.
  - At Fall Convocation, exploratory students meet with the COHNEX Advising Team and Career Services. As part of this meet up, each student takes the Focus 2 Career assessment. As students move through the fall semester, they also often take the Jung Typology test and Meyer's Briggs to further understand themselves and discover possible majors.
  - Throughout the fall semester, Academic Focus Area students are highlighted on a weekly basis. For instance, if the focus of the week is Mass Media, a student will receive a major infographic (attached), a text invitation from a student or faculty member to attend a major-related event happening within the next two weeks, and an email from the major Advising Center with an invitation to come in to get more information.
- For students participating in the First Year Learning Communities in the fall, PERS 2160 – Perspectives on Leadership, provides students an opportunity to reflect on their major and career selection, after taking Focus 2, StrengthsQuest, or True Colors assessments. For students who do not perform well in the Fall semester, VSU 1101 is offered in the Spring and requires completion of Focus 2. Students entering over the summer term as part of Summer Ignite (summer admission program for special admit students) also take VSU 1101.
- As we move forward, we plan to continue to add enhancements to assist students with purposeful choice. A few examples include:
  - When a student signs up for first year orientation, he/she will be provided with information to take the Focus 2. This request will go out before we begin sending Pre-Enrollment Surveys. Advisors will then use the Focus 2, and Pre-Enrollment Surveys to build fall schedules prior to the student arriving at on campus for orientation. As of the writing of this plan, we have begun initial conversations with MyMajors, an online tool designed to improve student degree selection, advising, and completion. This tool has been adopted by a couple of USG institutions previously and has yielded positive results.
  - Currently, we are emailing the students their fall schedules prior to orientation. We hope to add the appropriate academic infographic to the email as well, so that the student can hear a bit more about the major prior to attending orientation.

The information above was pulled directly from the 2019 Momentum Approach Development Plan, submitted by VSU on June 17th, 2019. Please note, this entire plan may be reviewed in Appendix II.

OTHER INSTITUTIONAL HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES, ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

Below is our list of Institutional High-Impact Strategies, Activities & Outcomes, including a brief overview of each strategy.

VSU Solution Center:

The Solutions Center employs VSU students with competitive pay, essential skills, and provides experiential learning opportunities to students in our majors. In addition, VSU I.T. utilizes artificial intelligence technology, in the form of a "chat-bot", *to create a more effective, quick and accessible system for answering frequently asked questions by the VSU community* thus allowing our 16 members to focus on resolving more complex technical issues. The Center also provides experiential learning as Student Assistants are on the design team and help provide their insight into the A.I. "personality."

Academic Dashboards:

In AY2018-2019, VSU Office of Institutional Research developed and implemented dashboards in which the goal was to turn Business Intelligence into Blazer Insights regarding enrollment and success for academic units. The purpose of the first phase of Blazer Insights was to provide critical information in regards to enrollment, course availability and success, and RPG efforts. Each Dean and Department Head has the ability to see information for his or her respective area. Additionally, Blazer Insights allow individuals to ask the data questions through filters to see improvements or areas in need of improvements. For the upcoming year, additional dashboards will be developed and incorporated into Blazer Insights pertaining to targeted enrollment—admissions and retention—and advising goals. These additional dashboards will provide key performance indicators to assist in moving the needle in student success. Appendix II provides an example screen shot of one of our academic dashboards.

Campus Wide Professional Advising:

As mentioned above in the Momentum Update section, VSU hired a new Executive Director of Academic Advising in January 2018 and had a full team of professional advisors in place by July 2018, at which point, we began transitioning all undergraduate students to the professional advisors.

University Advising & Student Transitions provides academic advising and student transition support for all Valdosta State University undergraduate students. Through a collaborative partnership, advisors, faculty, and staff work proactively with students to develop academic, career, and life goals. Advisors and staff provide timely and accurate information to students as they establish and navigate a clear educational pathway, which complements their strengths, talents, and abilities.

The advising team is focused on implementing the momentum approach components with our students.

VSU Engagement Data:

In Fall 2017, Valdosta State began consistently collected student participation at events funded by student activity fees. This initiative was made possible through the purchase of a new software, Presence (branded as BlazerLink), that offered scanning student barcodes located on their ID using a smartphone camera and software app. The Vice President for Student Affairs also mandated that student participation data was going to be required as part of all future student activity fee allocation requests to further reinforce the importance of collecting the data. Student organizations and fee-funded department staff embraced the ease of promoting their events through the software and capturing student attendance.

After the first academic year of data collection Student Affairs and Information Technology partnered to build an enterprise dashboard to compare student participation in campus events with student persistence and retention. In analyzing the data there was a significant difference in the retention of students that attended 10 or more events in a semester versus those students that did not.

The chart below shows the Fall to Spring retention of first-year students (indicated by the red line) and the first-year to second-year retention (indicated by the green line) as impacted by the number of events students attended (indicated by blue bars). We learned that students that attended no events had a fall to spring retention rate of 82% but a first to second year retention rate of 53%. Yet students that attended 10 or more events had a fall to spring retention rate of 97% and a first to second year retention rate of 80%!
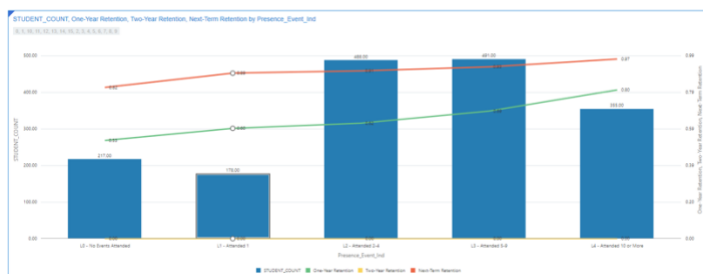
With a goal of improving overall student retention we wanted to better understand if student participation in events had a direct causation to student retention as we believed to happen based on initial data. During the 2018-2019 academic year Dr. Jin Wang, professor of mathematics, was asked to establish a formula for important indicators that impacted student retention at Valdosta State. As part of his analysis he considered student event attendance as a factor. His research validated that students who attend 10 or more events in a semester has a positive impact to student retention and is the second most important factor behind student probation which had statistically negative impact on student success.

As a result, student event participation has been added as a University strategic plan outcome and efforts continue to expand the capture of student participation to athletics, arts, and academic out-of-class programming.

Undergraduate Retention Formula:

During the 2018-2019 academic year Dr. Jin Wang, professor of mathematics, was asked by the Division of Student Success to establish a formula for important indicators that impacted student retention at Valdosta State. The model was used to discover important predictors for retention on VSU's campus. The top five predictors include:

1. Probation standing
2. Event attendance
3. English (First English course with a passing score)
4. Which College the student is declared into
5. Math (First Math course with a passing score)

Considering the information above, here is a bit more about what we discovered:

- Students who attended 10 or more events are retained at a 15% higher rate than those who do not.
- Passing the first English course resulted in students being retained at a 17% higher rate.
- Pass the first math course resulted in students being retained at a 13% higher rate.

Dr. Rodney Carr, Dr. Vince Miller, Dr. Jin Wang, and Mr. Brian Haugabrook presented the undergraduate retention formula at the recent USG Advising Academy. Anyone interested in seeing the powerpoint, may email Dr. Carr at rodneycarr@valdosta.edu.

First-Year Seminar Task Force:

In Spring 2019, a group was assembled to develop a First-Year Seminar (FYS) for VSU. The group consisted of faculty members from the Departments of English, Biology, and Math as well as staff from the Division of Student Success. In May 2019, this group attended the USG FYS Workshop together and began developing course goals and learning outcomes.

The goal of the FYS is to provide a common intellectual experience for incoming VSU students that falls within Core Curriculum requirements. It was designed as a topical course with consistent learning outcomes. Faculty will choose topic of interest/passion on which to develop their course. The learning outcomes were designed to encourage metacognitive learning, connections across disciplines, and intellectual inquiry while embedding the necessary skills to be a successful student. They are intended to be broad enough to allow faculty across disciplines and within specific topics to reach them. The four common learning outcomes are:

1. Students will describe one or more contemporary and enduring questions about their lives and their relationships to human cultures or the physical and natural world.
2. Students will analyze and reflect on the intellectual and practical skills of the course's theme or topic.
3. Students will summarize the benefits and challenges of a diverse society.
4. Students will identify and evaluate linkages among academic disciplines.

The course has been approved as pilot for the Fall 2020 semester by Academic Affairs. The pilot project will consist of 10-12 sections, allowing for 1-2 sections in each college/focus area. Some sections may be embedded in First-Year Learning Communities (FLCs), allowing for integrated learning across the FLC courses. The remaining will be stand-alone sections.

Currently, the group is being expanded to include representatives from education, business, nursing and health sciences, and humanities and social sciences. The newly expanded group will finalize the application process, assessment plan, and training of faculty during the Fall 2019 semester.

OBSERVATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

While we are encouraged by all of the efforts we currently have going at VSU, we are most excited about the Undergraduate Retention Tool and our Academic Dashboards. Both of these resources leverage our institutional data and provide insights on how we can quickly, and efficiently, impact student success on our campus. Both of these tools are in their infancy and we are excited to continue see how we can evolve them to further assist our retention and graduation efforts.

Of the items discussed in this report, we have the most work left to do related to implementing our First Year Seminar (FYS). We understand the important role an FYS course plays in the success of first-year students. While we have numerous decisions still to make, a few of the more important aspects we must decide include: the overall structure of the course; determining who will be

teaching the courses; the developing a robust assessment plan; and how we will fund FYS. Our team is diligently at work and we look forward to a successful pilot courses being offered in Spring and Fall 2020.

As an institution, we have continued to focus on communicating the good work we are doing with the greater campus community. In the past, we had solid work occurring, but it was not broadly shared. With the implementation of the Student Success Council a few years back, we have improved how we discuss our big initiatives and have been able to vet many of the ideas/concepts before proceeding forward.

Moving into the new year, we must stay focused on the many initiatives we already have in progress (those listed above in Section 3). We have seen a 5% increase in Fall-to-Fall retention this past fall, which indicates our efforts are fruitful. Now, we need to provide more time for these initiatives to mature and grow. While we will be tweaking as we move forward, piling on several new initiatives right now could pull our focus away from these efforts that have afforded us some solid momentum.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND COMPLETION TEAM

Below are the names and titles for the individuals on our campus responsible for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating our Student Success and Completion Strategies:

Brian A Haugabrook, Chief Information Officer
Chere L Peguesse, Associate Professor and Director of Academic Support Center
Douglas Ray Tanner, Director of Financial Aid
Jennifer Grubbs, Director of Student-Athlete Development
Keisha Roberts, Data Warehouse Information Analyst
Keith Warburg, Executive Director of Communications and Marketing
Lee E. Grimes, Associate Professor College of Education and Human Services
Michael Thomas Schmidt, Associate Dean College of the Arts & Professor of Arts | Ceramics
P. Nathan Metzner, Assistant Director of Adult and Military Programs
Robert C Freidhoff, Executive Director of Advising
Robert T Smith, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Amea J Thompson, Vice President Student Government Association
Shani Wilfred, Professor in Sociology, Anthropology, & Criminal Justice, G2C Liaison, and Gen Ed Coordinator
Sharon L Gravett, Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Services
Rodney B Carr, Vice President of Student Success
Stanley Jones, Registrar
Tee Mitchell, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Services
Vincent A Miller, Vice President of Student Affairs
Shauna Branch, Assistant to the Vice President for Student Success
Kathy L Warner, Interim Associate Dean College of Education and Human Services
Donna Newberry Sewell, Department Head and Professor of English
Keith A Walters, Associate Dean College of Science and Mathematics
Carla C Jordan, Interim Director Career Counseling