

Student Success and Academic Achievement Task Force Report and Recommendations

Overview and Background

The Student Success and Academic Achievement Task Force believes student success is at the heart of what we do at San Diego State University, and with that in mind, we recognize that everything in which we are engaged—research, teaching, internationalization, faculty, campus life, facilities, and outreach activities—plays a key role in helping students achieve at the highest levels. The task force also notes that SDSU has had remarkable success related to achievement of our students over the past decade. We lead the nation in the improvement of graduation and retention rates; we are more diverse now than we were ten years ago; and we have erased the achievement gap. Because we believe it is important to build on our success, we will list some of the programs and initiatives that have contributed to our achievements (See Appendix A).

Recommendations:

- Establish an Office of Commuter Life and Engagement;
- Establish a University Honors College to serve high-achieving students;
- Create a Learning Center to promote critical thinking and writing excellence;
- Build institutional capacity to use learning analytics tools;
- Increase institutional commitment to a campus-wide approach to high quality design, development, evaluation, and support of hybrid/online courses, programs and degrees; and
- Provide additional support for the campus community to address issues related to alcohol and other drugs.

Our discussions in response to the charge we received were wide ranging but focused on core commitments related to student success and academic achievement. These core commitments include:

- Increasing overall graduation rates with a special emphasis on increasing our four-year graduation rate;
- Increasing emphasis on attracting and supporting high achieving students, through the development of a University Honors College;
- Continuing focus on the integrity of the degree, which includes a focus on campus life and student engagement; and
- Continuing efforts to establish policies, processes, support mechanisms, and educational opportunities to address challenges and problems related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Practically, these core commitments are interrelated; success and achievement in one area will inevitably contribute to success overall. Goals related to these core commitments and specific recommendations as to concrete steps we can take now and in the future follow.



Goal 1 – Increase graduation and retention rates with a particular focus on increasing our four-year graduation rate while also supporting the level of student learning particularly in regards to writing and quantitative reasoning:

Recommendation 1 – Establish an Office of Commuter Life and Engagement. (\$200k/year for a director, support staff, programing, graduate interns, and faculty “in residence.”) (See Appendix B)

Rationale and context: We know from background research already completed that the students living off campus are less likely to continue and to graduate than their peers who do live on campus. This is true for both ‘college-ready’ and not ‘college-ready’ cohorts. A Director of Commuter Life and Engagement will oversee programs, coordinate activities for commuter students, identify barriers, and help provide both academic and engagement support structures.

We recommend appointing a Director of Commuter Life and Engagement; and providing staff support and funds to support one or two graduate interns. This office would be responsible for:

- Providing services and space to meet the basic needs of commuter and off-campus students as determined by campus research and assessment;
- Ensuring that commuter and off-campus students benefit equitably from San Diego State University’s educational programs - both curricular and co-curricular programs and services offered;
- Coordinating with key campus partners to provide engagement opportunities to assist commuter and off-campus students learning and development;
- Working with key campus partners to identify and meet the academic support needs of commuter and off-campus students;
- Outreach and partner with relavent individuals, groups, communities and organizations external to the campus in support of commuter and off-campus student transition, integration and success;
- Develop and implement a clearly articulated assessment plan to document achievement of stated goals and learning outcomes, demonstrate accountability, providence evidence of improvement, and describe resulting changes in program and services.

Recommendation II - Create a Learning Center to promote critical thinking, quantitative and information literacy, presentation and communication skills, and writing excellence (\$470,651/initial cost; See Appendix C). This Center will:

- Foster student success and degree completion;
- assist in closing the educational achievement gap by offering all students—including the less prepared—equal opportunities to receive one-to-one instruction in multiple academic subjects;
- build academic community among students by providing learning spaces and individualized tutoring;
- make Love Library the academic center of the campus by connecting research and learning.

Rationale and context: Currently, students living on campus have an excellent suite of services to support their academic achievement and co-curricular leadership opportunities. As we seek to improve our retention and four-year graduation rates, we need to ensure that all students, commuter as well as those who have moved out of the residence halls, also receive the academic support critical to their success. A Learning Center is an important step toward achieving that goal. In 2011 the Provost invested \$150,000 to create a tutoring center in the Love Library. The SDSU Learning Center will substantially expand these tutoring services by not only including tutoring in writing but also in quantitative and information literacy, as well as in presentation and communication skills. It will provide the administrative and support staff that is necessary for the future success of the Center.

Recommendation III – *Build the institutional capacity of Instructional Technology Services to use learning analytics tools and data to improve retention and graduation rates, and decrease the number of students on academic probation.* (See Appendix D)

Rationale and context: One of the ways we have been successful in improving graduation and retention rates has been through using data to identify populations of students with varying levels of readiness and need for assistance, and through using data to make strategic decisions regarding our programs and the support we provide with limited resources. Building on this capacity and commitment is important as we address increasing four-year graduation rates. The Center for Learning Analytics will allow SDSU to:

- Provide information related to high-impact educational practices such as undergraduate research, study abroad, writing intensive courses, and residential learning communities;
- Align data mined from the Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS) with other sources of student data to create robust, predictive models of student academic behavior and success;
- Utilize LMS student data to provide students, faculty, staff, and administrators with critical and timely feedback, interventions, and assistance:
 - Identify students who are not making progress toward graduation, and determine how best to support those students with actionable data on their performance and areas for improvement, with targeted interventions based on pre-set criteria:
 - Assign students to an “at-risk group” determined by a predictive student achievement algorithm (e.g., students receiving 60% or less on an exam);
 - Provide system alerts to students when they have poor attendance and/or are under-performing in a course;

- Recommend interventions such as advising or supplemental instruction.
- Personalize learning via adaptive systems that change dynamically in response to student activities, tailoring recommendations based on performance criteria;
- Provide information related to student engagement that enables students to see in real time how their levels of engagement compare with that of their peers.

Recommendation IV – *Increase the institutional commitment to a campus-wide approach to high quality design, development, evaluation, and support of face-to-face as well as hybrid/online courses, programs and degrees (\$200k/year for college-based instructional designers and IT support). (See Appendix E)*

Rationale and context: Interest in online learning at the course level at SDSU and across the CSU is immense, and institutional program-level interest is expanding. Online education demands just as much, if not more, of the combined academic technology resources of the university. Putting more resources into online and hybrid education, and strengthening partnerships between colleges and the Instructional Technology Services area of Academic Affairs, is important to address increasing four-year graduation rates. This commitment will enable SDSU to :

- Increase online efforts at the program level, as well as the course level
 - Experiment with general fund degree programs;
 - Monitor online education initiatives across the CSU and beyond;
 - Reframe the Course Design Institute as the *Curriculum Design Institute* and evolve from a course-centric to a program-level focus.
- Modify processes and policies to support online and blended learning, e.g., rethink course designations, pilot an on-campus testing center for proctored exams, and build accessibility into the course approval and review process;
- Improve core technologies for delivery, interaction and engagement, both online and virtual learning spaces;
- Extend formal collaborations between colleges and ITS:
 - Expand strategic collaboration between ITS faculty consultants and college-based instructional designers to provide opportunities for faculty development and exchange effective practices between ITS and colleges, and across campus;
 - Recruit discipline-specific faculty champions from each college to work closely with ITS and serve as an example, resource, and mentor, providing their colleagues with information and expertise about instructional technology and pedagogy, and providing ITS staff with further insight into faculty and student needs.

Goal 2 – Attract and support more high-achieving students across the university

Recommendation I – *Establish a University Honors College to serve high-achieving students, broadly defined, across the university. (\$180k/year for a director and staff support). (See Appendix F)*

Rationale and context: While the University Honors Program has gained in stature over the past decade, and while we enroll many high-achieving students, more students could benefit from an Honors College model. Such a program would allow us to establish a more inclusive definition of

what it means to be a high-achieving student at San Diego State, recognize students with diverse backgrounds and talents, and continue to build an identity of achievement and excellence.

To reach this goal, we recommend establishing a University Honors College office that would house an academic leader at the associate dean level and that would have administrative support. This office would:

- Help define the parameters of the Honors College;
- Work collaboratively with existing colleges to identify curricular pathways for diverse students in the Honors College;
- Work collaboratively with Student Affairs with regards to residence hall programming, co-curricular, and leadership activities for Honors College students;
- Work with International Programs to identify study abroad and international service components for students in the Honors College;
- Collaborate as needed with Enrollment Services to assist with recruiting strategies for high-achieving students;
- Work with University Relations and Development, and others, to find ways to increase financial resources for scholarships, instruction, programming, and staff support.

Goal 3 – Address issues related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.

The Student Success and Academic Achievement Task Force received a broad charge that touched on many issues related to student success. Among these charges were questions related to issues dealing with alcohol and other drugs. Given the importance of this particular topic, we have chosen to make a separate set of recommendations related to these challenges. (See Appendix G) Briefly the recommendations from the ad hoc working group and supported by the Student Success Task Force include:

- The development of an Annual AOD Strategic Assessment Report to Faculty Senate. The report will also form the basis for the federally mandated biennial Drug Free Schools and Community Act review, and the CSU mandated biennial reporting. The assessment will require funding for two graduate assistants to be supervised by the Coordinator of AOD Initiatives and \$7,500 in data collection costs.
- The Greek community comprises a disproportionate share of the problems associated with AOD use at SDSU. To make inroads in this community, we recommend restructuring the way student organizations are recognized. Each organization should be capable of periodically demonstrating that their recognition fits within the broader SDSU institutional mission.
- Many of the opportunities to engage students in AOD prevention occur in the context of judicial action. Therefore, we recommend contacting students before problems are noticed; and that a screening and brief intervention or referral to treatment (SBIRT) program be implemented within Student Health Services. Costs for this program are noted in the full set of recommendations in Appendix G and would include staff for intern supervision, and counselors for students who meet the referral criteria.