



A Retention and Graduation Report for the Regents' Graduation Rate Taskforce

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About VSU

- One of two 4-year regional universities
- Located in south Georgia with a service region of 41 counties
- Fall 2009 enrollment: 12,391
 - 10,328 Undergraduate; 2,063 Graduate
 - 8% increase - largest one-year increase in 16 years



About VSU (cont.)

- Offers programs leading to 58 undergraduate degree majors and 49 graduate degree majors
- Nationally accredited programs in many disciplines
- Budget exceeds \$165 million and VSU employs over 1,500 faculty, staff, and administrators



Graduation Challenges



STUDENT CHALLENGES

- Academic Factors
- Financial Factors
- Engagement Factors



VSU CHALLENGES

- Academic Factors
- Financial Factors
- Engagement Factors

National Challenges

Challenges students face are three-fold:

- Academic Factors: attending a college that matches or is close to the student's academic ability
- Financial Factors: lowest income quartile students have historically been least likely to attend college and have lower graduation rates
- Engagement Factors: fewer on-campus interactions produce students who are less connected and committed to the institution, thus are less likely to graduate



National Institutional Challenges

Challenges students face are three-fold:

- Academic Factors: trickle down major effect
- Financial Factors: tuition level is set by a state governing board
- Engagement Factors: distance of institution's location from home



VSU Challenges—Student

Academic Challenges

- Serves rural south Georgia, students in this area tend to be first generation college students.
- The graduation rate of feeder high schools is lower than the average graduation rate of the state.
- SAT scores, a predictor of graduation, have declined for the third consecutive year, and Georgia's average score ranked third lowest in the nation.



Solutions

- VSU has been awarded a federal TRiO grant to begin an Upward Bound program.
- VSU provides academic support via the Student Success Center.
- Valdosta Early College Academy blends middle/high school and college into a seamless educational program.



VSU Challenges—Student

Financial Challenges

- Students from rural areas tend to have a lower SES than students from other areas.
- The per capita income in Georgia is \$33,975 and many of VSU's students are first generation students.
- Due to rising costs, more students are working while in college to supplement or entirely fund education costs.



Solutions

- VSU seeks external donors to increase financial aid through the Annual Giving campaign.
- In 2008, 52% of first-time freshmen received the HOPE scholarship. Students who receive HOPE are more likely to be retained and graduate.



VSU Challenges—Student

Engagement Challenges

- Students who did not matriculate to their first-choice institution may plan to transfer shortly after entering VSU.
- Technology serves as students' principal form of entertainment, resulting in them being less civically and socially engaged with VSU and the surrounding area.



Solutions

- One-third of the incoming freshmen class will participate in one of 50 learning communities in Fall 2010.
- VSU has also recently completed a new Student Union and residence halls.
- VSU can better incorporate technology into current programming or redesign activities to further engage students.



VSU Challenges—Institutional

Academic Challenges

- VSU does not currently offer degree programs in advanced nursing, medical technology, advanced design and technology, medicine, pharmacology, or engineering.
- 52.9% (in 2008) and 50.5% (in 2009) of incoming freshmen claimed VSU as their first-choice institution
- Some students may not move through their degree program in a timely manner.



Solutions

- VSU is expanding its degree program offerings.
- In fall 2009, VSU implemented DegreeWorks, an online, real-time student advisement system, to assist students in reducing time to graduation and streamlining the graduation process.



VSU Challenges—Institutional

Financial Challenges

- VSU is serving more students with less state appropriations. From fall 2008 to fall 2009, VSU enrollment increased 7.8% while state appropriations decreased 13.6%. [Equivalent of 1,000 students not funded by state appropriations.]



Solutions

- With no additional state dollars, VSU accommodated the increase in students and no additional faculty by expanding selected course section sizes.



VSU Challenges—Institutional

Engagement Challenges

- In Fall 2009, approximately 50% of VSU's incoming freshmen are from the metro Atlanta region; therefore they are attending college 4 hours away from home.
- VSU cannot accommodate all students who apply to live on-campus. Students living off-campus have less opportunity to be engaged in VSU's academic and social events.



Solutions

- Increase the recruitment presence in Atlanta and promote online education opportunities for students living more than 50 miles from VSU.
- VSU is examining efficiencies in current residence halls in order to increase occupancy and continues to investigate locations for new residence halls.



Successes and Barriers to Success

Student Success Center (SSC)

- Students who use the SSC are more likely to be retained compared to non-users.
- Students who utilized the SSC averaged 0.13 points more in their grade point average than students who did not use the SSC.
- Students who utilized the SSC three or more times per semester averaged 0.29 points more in their grade point average than students who did not use the SSC.

Student Success Enhancement Team (SSET)

- The Team identifies and supports students who are highly unlikely to be retained.
- Student success services are targeted to students that are: on probation, first-generation, or have a low freshmen index score.
- Results indicated that each group of students are retained at rates higher than predicted by the model as a result of the SSET.

Mid-Term Grades Process

- Students in all lower division courses are sent mid-term grades and encouraged to discuss progress with professors. An increase in the number of non-required advising appointments coupled with an increase in graduation rates suggests that this effort is successful.



Metrics

- **National Graduation Rates**
 - National graduation rates remain stable at 50%
 - VSU is currently at 40% for the six-year bachelor graduation rate; the median graduation rate of aspirational institutions is 41%.
- **VSU Retention and Graduation Rates**
 - VSU currently has a retention rate of 71.5%; the median retention rate of aspirational institutions is 71%. The highest retention rate of the aspirational institutions was 77% and the lowest was 62%.
 - VSU's system-wide retention rates and graduation rates have been approximately 10% higher than VSU's institutional rates, suggesting that VSU's loss is an overall gain for the System.



Metrics

Several factors contribute to the graduation rate:

- Distance of VSU from the Atlanta metropolitan area
- Socioeconomic status differences between VSU's service area and the metropolitan Atlanta area
- Lower high school graduation rates and lower average SAT scores of feeder schools into VSU
- VSU can only accommodate 25% of its undergraduate population in on-campus housing
- Students with higher degree aspirations are more likely going to complete a bachelor's degree
- Transfers from VSU may be reported in overall USG retention and graduation rates, but not necessarily in the rates of VSU



Three-Year Plan

- Strategic Focus
 - New and Targeted Recruitment Efforts
 - Expansion of Academic Programs
 - Student Support Services
 - Emphasis on Diversity
 - Additional Athletic Opportunities to Student Life
- Maximizing Data Support
- Dedicated Funding Pools



Three-Year Plan

Strategic Focus — a continuous, cyclical institutional planning process that is designed to foster growth.

- **New and Targeted Recruitment Efforts**
 - 12 City Tour, Additional Admissions Counselor for the Atlanta Area, Expansion of the Athletic Band, Chamber Singers Tour, Annual Fundraising Campaign for Merit Scholarships, Interactive Admissions Website and Virtual Tour
- **Expansion of Academic Programs**
 - Online Degrees in Office Administration and Technology and Criminal Justice
- **Additional Athletic Opportunities**
 - Women's Soccer



Three-Year Plan

- **Emphasis on Diversity**
 - Online Certificate in Spanish for Community Professionals, TESOL, Student Organizations
- **Student Support Services**
 - One-stop Student Services, Summer Student Success Bridge Program, Block Scheduling/Prioritized Scheduling, Preferential Scheduling for 15 credit hours, Limited Withdrawals, Early Alert System, Living Learning Communities, Stop-Out Intervention Program, Opportunities for Families to be Involved with Campus Life, Leadership Programs
- **Maximizing Data Support**
 - Backlog Analysis and Weekly Enrollment Model
- **Dedicated Funding Pools**
 - Graduate Stipends, Academic/Maintenance and Major Scientific Equipment Purchases , Reassigned Time for Engagement in Research, etc.



Graduation as a Campus Priority

- Foster innovation and growth through Strategic Focus
- Connect faculty and staff merit increases to retention efforts
- Connect promotion and tenure to retention efforts



Questions and Comments

