

## Fact Sheet:

# Comprehensive, Integrated Academic Advising

There are many benefits to moving advisement beyond a transactional function (e.g., course registration) to a sustained relationship with a focus on holistic student support. Although there is evidence that smaller advising caseloads have had positive impacts, it is also possible to achieve success by positioning advising as a core campus function and by implementing technologies that enable advisors to have more opportunities to reach students proactively and have substantive meetings with students. Campus advising models should prioritize sustained, personalized student interaction.

### Top Strategies:

- Holistic Student Support
- Data-Informed Advising
- Advisor Training

**Holistic Student Support:** Comprehensive advising models ensure holistic student support and replace transactional and passive advising methods. There is a strong correlation between holistic advisement, student belonging, and likelihood of persisting.

A holistic approach meets students where they are, addresses their individual needs, leverages their strengths, and focuses on student development and learning. Achieving the Dream (2018) offers a [Holistic Student Supports Redesign toolkit](#) to aid institutions in redesigning student supports in an integrated and collaborative manner.

Florida State University implemented an especially comprehensive, integrated approach across multiple campus units that resulted in improved retention and completion rates and closing of opportunity gaps ([Hu et al., 2023](#)).

A case management model is used in North Carolina to provide comprehensive student support. Students who meet bi-weekly with an academic case manager complete significantly more credit hours in their first semester, have higher fall-to-spring retention, and perform better than those not assigned to case managers ([Dills & Traywick, 2024](#)).

To provide holistic support, campuses need to map their processes to identify available resources, gaps, and overlaps, then use these maps to create student-facing visuals that clarify requirements and supports along the student journey ([WWC: Effective Advising for Postsecondary Students](#)).

**Data-Informed Advising:** Technology should be used to *enhance* advising, not replace it. The cornerstone of proactive advising is an institution's data systems,

which enable staff to track student progress and deliver timely, targeted support ([Holistic Student Supports Redesign Toolkit](#)). By intervening at the first sign of trouble, proactive support prevents challenges from escalating into crises. Georgia State University (GSU) utilizes a well-evaluated data-driven approach to carefully monitor student outcomes that has been found to significantly increase graduation rates for all students ([Calhoun-Brown, 2023](#)).

Early alerts and predictive analytics help advisors distinguish which students need intensive support and which require only light intervention, as shown in the Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success ([iPASS](#)) Initiative. By using persistence probabilities and early risk indicators, advisors can provide more individualized guidance ([Miller et al., 2020](#)).

**Advisor Training:** It is vital for staff and faculty advisors to receive professional development and ongoing training in best practices for advisement. Training for advisors should include techniques to develop meaningful, sustained relationships with students as well as information on functioning as part of a holistic support team to best position advisors to connect students with the support they need ([WWC: Effective Advising for Postsecondary Students](#)).

Campuses should ensure that advisors have the capacity to develop meaningful relationships and be given the training necessary to support students with a variety of student identities ([Mowreader, 2025](#)). For marginalized student groups, especially, the quality of advising interactions is more impactful than the frequency of advising interactions.

Investing in advisor training and professional development has been found to improve professional practice, increase student persistence, and heighten student engagement ([NACADA, 2025](#)). The University of Southern Maine offers ongoing structured professional development through a standing committee of professional advisors across its three campuses. Professional development offerings vary throughout the year based on the specific areas of growth for advisors so they may best meet the needs of students ([Bannon and Eaton, 2024](#)).

## Fact Sheet:

# Improved Graduation Rates

In addition to the well-documented impacts of the ASAP|ACE model ([WWC Summary of Evidence; Scuello & Strumbos, 2024](#)), the strategies described below highlight additional evidence-based practices that have been successful in improving graduation rates. These strategies are best utilized in concert with comprehensive, integrated academic advising, monitoring of student outcomes, and holistic student support strategies (described in the Comprehensive, Integrated Academic Advising Fact Sheet).

### Top Strategies:

- Pre-College Summer Programs
- Academic Recovery
- Course Scheduling Review

**Pre-College Summer Programs:** Participation in summer bridge programs prior to the first year in college has been found to help foster students' sense of belonging and improve academic outcomes.

Summer bridge programs provide opportunities for incoming students to acclimate to college before they begin their formal studies and to establish relationships with other students, faculty, advisors, and staff. Offerings range from residential and non-residential models that allow students to get an early start on required course work (i.e., general education courses), participate in structured activities that develop time management and study skills, learn about and engage with campus resources and supports, and establish bonds with other incoming students.

The pre-college summer program at the University of Houston focuses on foundational calculus and chemistry courses as well as academic skills building and time management. The program is delivered by faculty and peer mentors, building on prior models of successful pre-college readiness programs. Findings showed a positive impact on graduation rates and retention for first-time underrepresented students enrolled in STEM fields who participated in this programming ([Ghazzawi et al., 2021](#)).

**Academic Recovery:** When students get off track, support through academic recovery sustains the path forward to graduation. Starting with the notification of probation or dismissal, campuses should aim to reduce shame and preserve sense of belonging through the process.

For students who experience academic challenges resulting in probation or dismissal, carefully constructed messaging that frames setbacks with a growth mindset and reduces shame and stigma can help students return to good standing. [The Institute for Higher Education Policy](#) (2024) recommends revision of communications, such as academic probation letters, to acknowledge that academic setbacks are part of the learning process and do not reflect a student's potential for success.

The University of South Carolina requires participation in the [#RecommitToYourSuccess](#) Initiative for students returning to campus after academic suspension. Support is provided through academic planning with an academic coach to address strategies and goals to be successful upon return. Texas State University's [Bobcats Bounce Back](#) intervention seeks to build on students' strengths and resiliency to improve their academic trajectory.

**Course Scheduling Review:** The lack of availability of course sections and rigid scheduling can impact timely completion. There may be unintended bottlenecks for students due to capacity and out-of-date scheduling practices that unnecessarily delay time to degree.

[Complete College America](#) offers several strategies for campuses to review and adapt their scheduling practices to realize sustained cultural change and student progress. Examples of successful strategies include cohort and block scheduling and the availability of shorter terms for working adults.

## Fact Sheet:

# Improved Fall-to-Fall Retention

Many academic and non-academic factors impact student retention. Effective retention strategies seek to prevent student attrition through building strong connectedness, a sense of belonging on campus, and providing students with support for basic needs to minimize life stressors during college. Early interventions are recommended to support students at the first sign of struggle, before a challenge becomes insurmountable.

### Top Strategies:

- Early Alert Systems
- Retention Grant Programs
- Non-Academic Supports
- First Year Experience

**Early Alert Systems:** Early intervention can lessen the probability of a student failing a course or not being retained, due to academic or non-academic factors. In an early alert system, faculty or staff are prompted to initiate a process to send a message to a student who is struggling (usually referred to as a “flag”), and in many of these systems, an alert is also sent to the student’s academic advisor, who follows up to schedule an advising session to assess the risk factors and assist the student in the development of a plan to move forward successfully.

An example of a comprehensive early alert system is found within the [Georgia State University](#) system, which has programmed more than 800 types of alerts. Some alerts are built from automatic processes that refresh daily for the most up-to-date picture of student academic performance. Non-automated alerts, such as faculty-driven progress reports in the early part of each term, also identify students who may be off-track. Students who are flagged receive email messages directing them to schedule an appointment with both a Student Success Coach, who partners with students to develop an academic strategy for success, as well as their faculty member, to develop a plan for improvement. Since its launch in 2022, first-year fall-to-spring retention rates have increased by five percentage points.

**Retention Grant Programs:** A lack of finances to pay for school is a top reason that students consider withdrawing. Students may experience an acute emergency situation requiring financial resources that are not covered through the scholarships, grants, or loans being used to finance their education. Retention grant programs aim to support students with immediate financial need by awarding emergency financial aid to reduce leaves of absence or stop-outs.

Programs such as the [Panther Retention Grant](#) program at Georgia State University are available to students in good academic standing who have modest unpaid balances and unmet need, allowing thousands of students to continue their academic program ([Rossman et al., 2022](#)). Georgia State University has awarded over 10,000 of

these grants to cover unpaid tuition balances and reduce student debt over the past four years.

CUNY Graduate Center's [Student Emergency Grants](#) program affords students the opportunity to apply for funding up to \$3,000 to cover emergency expenses with a wide range of qualifying experiences such as: medical or dental bills, emergency child care expenses, travel due to illness or death of an immediate family member, overdue utility or rent bills, and more.

**Non-Academic Supports:** Programs supporting students with their non-academic needs have also had positive impacts on retention. Millions of students experience basic needs insecurity, so offering a wide range of non-academic support can help make college more accessible.

One of the pillars of California State University's Graduation Initiative 2025 is student engagement and well-being. CSU Stanislaus State developed a [Basic Needs department](#) which includes a food pantry and other nutritional programs, emergency housing support, emergency grants to cover food, housing, transportation, childcare, or medical needs, and support through case management. Students who utilized services from the Basic Needs department were retained at 83.7% ([AASCU, 2025](#)).

The [Advocacy and Resource Center](#) at Amarillo College provides four programs targeted at providing non-academic supports. The Center provides a referral service for students in need of shelter or affordable housing, utilities, transportation, food, clothing, childcare, substance abuse, medical, dental, or vision assistance, counseling, and legal services. For student parents, the Center has collated specific resources including spaces on campus that are family friendly.

The [Hope Center for Student Basic Needs](#) at Temple University partnered with ten Texas community colleges to get a better understanding of their population's non-academic needs and take a data-informed approach to developing interventions through the completion of a Student Basic Needs survey. The availability of that data aided Lee College in securing a donation to create a [Student Resource and Advocacy Center](#) on campus, which serves as a one-stop-shop for non-academic resources.

**First Year Experience:** A strong First Year Experience approach can help students hone their college skills and resilience and develop a strong connection to campus. First Year Experience approaches often include a college-skills course coupled with intentional programming to foster community. A First Year Experience course helps to streamline advising by providing information about program planning procedures, availability of holistic student supports, financial aid, and other issues commonly addressed in individual advising sessions in a group setting. Providing students with these skills early in their academic career provides them with the tools to overcome obstacles that can otherwise lead to attrition. Some campuses use learning communities to link students with peers who are enrolled in the same major, have similar interests, or share housing to build connection within the college experience.

First-Year Experience courses are associated with an average nine percentage point increase in credit accumulation, degree attainment, and general academic achievement for first-year college students ([WWC: First Year Experience Courses](#)).

[LSU Shreveport](#) redesigned their First Year Experience to holistically support students' transition to university life. The experience includes a fall seminar course, a foundational professional development program for faculty teaching the first-year seminar, a peer leader program, and specially developed early alert systems for students in the first year. The fall-to-spring retention for participants of this program in the Fall 2023 cohort increased 5.6% compared to the Fall 2022 cohort.

First-year courses offer an opportunity for campuses to teach student resiliency and learning mindsets, an integral part of both [Louisiana's Meauxmentum](#) campaign and Georgia's Momentum Approach. Faculty in Georgia have integrated storytelling about metamorphosis and resilience into their First Year Experience courses, which not only promotes growth mindset but also positively contributes to students' sense of belonging ([Trivedi, 2019](#)).

## Fact Sheet:

# Credit Accumulation

Completion of thirty credits per academic year directly correlates to on-time graduation. There is a wide body of evidence finding first-year credit loads to be especially important predictors of overall credit accumulation and graduation (Adelman, 2006; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Attewell, et al., 2012). For populations of students who are part-time, due to balancing work and other commitments in addition to school, leveraging intersessions to accumulate credit across the academic year can make completion of thirty credits each year possible.

### Top Strategies:

- Winter/Summer Coursework
- Intentional Degree Planning

**Winter/Summer Coursework:** Many campuses promote enrollment in intersession terms as a way to accumulate credits and reduce time to completion. This promotion can take several forms.

Texas A& M University Corpus Christi's [Finish In 4](#) initiative encourages students to complete 30 credits per academic year, acknowledging that it may not be possible to take 15 credits every semester, and encouraging students to use the summer semester to catch up.

Advisor outreach at the University of South Carolina aimed at enrolling students in summer courses to stay on track and retain their state-based scholarships has improved retention and persistence ([Mowreader, 2024](#)). Using data from the Office of Financial Aid to identify students at risk of losing scholarships, advisors use disaggregated data to identify students who can leverage the summer semester to get back on track and make up credit deficits. Each student receives individualized advisement to create a plan to retain their scholarship.

Through the Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment ([EASE](#)) initiative, which targeted Pell-eligible community college students in Ohio with personalized nudges, enrollment in summer sessions increased by 5 percentage points. The impact was even greater with students receiving a "last dollar" grant that helped to fully fund their summer session attendance. Both groups earned more credits in their first summer (average of 4.3 credits).

**Intentional Degree Planning:** Individualized degree planning ensures that students stay on track, have awareness of recommended course sequences and credit loads, and do not accumulate excess credit. One tool used in effective degree planning is a Degree Map that clearly defines the requirements for a degree and outlines the recommended course-taking sequence to graduate on time.

Including options for acceleration provides students with the ability to complete their program in less time. Degree maps are often used in conjunction with the catalog, advisement meetings, and the degree audit in scheduling and planning.

The historical model of allowing students to self-select into courses can lead to students accumulating excess credit and debt, causing delays to degree attainment. Advisors at Harrisburg Area Community College recognized that their “cafeteria model” of course selection and lack of degree plans was problematic, so they revamped their degree planning model by phasing in required degree maps and training faculty and staff advisors to track student progress. As a result, retention increased the following year by 4%. There were also increases in early registration and a significant decrease in ineligible class registrations after introducing degree maps ([Barshinger et al., 2024](#)).

## Fact Sheet:

# Gateway English / Math Completion in Year One

Gateway English and math courses are defined as initial credit-bearing courses that satisfy general education requirements in English and math based on the major a student is pursuing. Gateway courses can hinder student progress if not successfully completed in a student's first year, preventing their ability to progress toward their major courses and halting their momentum. Pell-eligible and first-generation students disproportionately either withdraw from or earn D/F grades in gateway courses, leading many to stop out without earning a degree or credential.

As the initial credit-bearing courses required of students, completion within the first year is crucial for establishing and maintaining academic momentum. Completion of math in the first year is an integral component of both [Georgia's Momentum Year](#) and [Louisiana's Meauxmentum](#) framework.

### Top Strategies:

- Corequisite Support Models
- Math Aligned to Majors

**Corequisite Support Models:** Students who are enrolled in non-credit remedial work often get “stuck” and do not progress to gateway course completion ([CCA, 2021](#)). A promising approach for supporting students in building needed skills in English and math is to enroll students in corequisite coursework. Corequisite support models replace traditional remedial courses. Students identified with need for additional support, based on campus assessment methods, enroll directly into gateway English and math courses that also include integrated supports, such as supplemental instruction, embedded tutoring, or workshops.

In Georgia, students enroll directly into a college-level math or English course that satisfies a general education requirement. Students also register for a concurrent 1-3 credit co-requisite course designed to help students master the skills and knowledge required for success. The percentage of students completing gateway courses doubled for all students, regardless of race or entrance exam scores, after adopting the corequisite model ([Denley, 2021](#)).

Further refining the strategy, the University System of Georgia has seen significant improvement in structuring a co-requisite support course in English with the same instructor as the gateway course. Additionally, scheduling of the corequisite English course with the same cohort of students has significant positive impact ([Denley, 2021](#)).

The [Accelerated Learning Program](#) (ALP), developed by the Community College of Baltimore County and replicated in Texas, requires students to enroll in both a 3-credit college-level writing course and a remedial support course taught by the same instructor. Students are significantly more likely to pass their gateway course and persist to their second year in this model ([Miller et al., 2021](#)).

In addition to corequisite support in the form of a course, other supplemental instruction is beneficial in increasing gateway course completion. Northern Illinois University offers faculty teaching gateway courses an online repository of best practices. The [Toolkit to Promote Student Success in Gateway Courses](#) is a comprehensive example of a repository of supplemental instruction methods for students in gateway courses. Other campuses embed tutors or academic coaches into gateway courses. Community colleges in Tennessee launched the [Tennessee Coaching Project](#) to support first-year students by embedding academic coaches in corequisite learning support experiences. Academic coaches help students learn to navigate the campus and connect with resources through multiple touch points during the first year.

**Math Aligned to Majors:** Students who are guided to take math courses that align to their program of study or meta major are more likely to succeed. Instead of identifying College Algebra as the only gateway math course, [national math faculty leaders](#) recommend that students in non-STEM majors enroll in statistics or quantitative reasoning courses. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach to gateway math completion, these focus-area specific math courses deliver the competencies and knowledge required for the major and career path.

Ivy Tech Community College reformed their approach to requiring college algebra for all majors and now offers three [Math Pathways](#) for each major focus area. Students at Ivy Tech are now more likely to pass their gateway math course and to graduate.

**For campuses that continue to offer standalone developmental education coursework:**

**Placement Utilizing Multiple Measures:** English and math placement based on standalone assessment tests is not a reliable predictor of academic readiness. Using multiple measures, including high school GPA, standardized exam scores (SAT/ACT, Regents exams), and completion of specified high school coursework are widely considered better predictors of college readiness for both math and English ([WWC: Strategies for Postsecondary Students in Developmental Education](#)).

## Fact Sheet:

# FAFSA Completion

The lack of appropriate funding for education is a top barrier for new students to matriculate, and for continuing and transfer students to accumulate credit and establish academic momentum to reach degree completion. Increasing completion of the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a goal targeted at ensuring first-time, transfer, and continuing students are well-informed about their options for funding their education and supported in their ability to do so. Students who are aware of financial aid services at their institution identify it as critical to their decision to remain in school ([Tyton Partners, 2023](#)). The call to action is even more vital for first-generation students. [A national survey sponsored by Sallie Mae](#) found that only 38% of first-generation college students are confident in their ability to cover the cost of college. Additionally, 61% of first-generation students who considered leaving college indicated additional financial resources would help retain them.

### Top Strategies:

- Text and Chatbot Outreach Campaigns
- FAFSA Completion Events
- Peer-Led Models
- Coordination of Completion Efforts

**Text and Chatbot Outreach Campaigns:** Sending students proactive, well-timed reminder messages increases FAFSA completion for first-time and continuing students. This lessens the instance of students who are unaware of the necessity or benefits of yearly FAFSA renewal.

A text-based FAFSA campaign in Texas that provided financial aid-focused outreach to students influenced not only FAFSA completion rates, but the timeliness of completion ([Page, Castleman, & Meyer, 2020](#)). Weekly text messages provided students with personalized, data-informed updates on their FAFSA submission and completion status, encouragement to utilize supports for FAFSA completion, and a chat feature to submit questions.

Georgia State University found that students responded positively to nudges sent by their AI-powered chatbot to complete administrative processes, including filing the FAFSA. At the end of the pilot year, rates of FAFSA filing and registration for the subsequent fall semester were approximately three percentage points higher ([Page, Lee, & Gehlbach 2020](#)).

**FAFSA Completion Events:** Successful campaigns to increase completion of the FAFSA for first-time and continuing students leverage community partnerships in hosting events to provide support and encouragement to file. In the community, events can take place at schools, places of worship, or at local libraries or community centers ([National College Attainment Network, 2023](#)). On campus, tabling events in campus centers can bring support to high-traffic areas. Virtual events have also been successful. The [UT System of Higher Education](#) created a resource for high schools to

increase FAFSA completion. Offering raffle prizes to students and their caregivers provides motivation to attend events or submit proof of completion of the FAFSA for prizes.

**Peer-Led Models:** [The National College Attainment Network](#) highlights many strategies to increase FAFSA completion. One of the strategies is to utilize high school and college students to act as peer coaches to motivate students to complete the FAFSA and intervene if there are challenges.

[The Fort Wayne Community Schools](#) district selects high school seniors to serve as FAFSA Student Ambassadors, who are trained to build awareness of the FAFSA and events planned in the community. A similar program in [Mesa Public Schools](#) found the peer coaching model highly effective in legitimizing the efforts of staff to increase FAFSA completion.

**Coordination of Completion Efforts:** To provide a holistic approach to FAFSA completion and renewal, data on student FAFSA completion and unpaid balances should be included in advisor dashboards and visible to users of the student information system, allowing for continuity of messaging and additional referrals for support.

Georgia State University (GSU) applied predictive analytics on financial aid metrics to their early alert system for advisors. Students who have unmet need and modest balances receive [retention grants](#) and agree to attend meetings with financial counselors to plan how to finance the rest of their degree. The modest funding allows students to remain enrolled and has prevented thousands of students from dropping out ([Rossman et al., 2022](#)).