

REGENTS' MOMENTUM YEAR AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
IN ADVISING AND STUDENT SUCCESS



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

November 2, 2020

Dear Members of the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success Committee:

On behalf of Valdosta State University, I am very pleased to nominate University Advising and Student Transitions (UAST), an office within our division of Student Success, for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success. Slightly more than two years ago, Valdosta State transitioned all academic advising to a team of professional academic advisors as part of a major push to increase retention and graduation rates. This transition required hiring a team of professional advisors, as well as our new Director of Academic Advising, Mr. Rob Freidhoff, who joined us nearly two years ago. This effort proved to be an enormously successful one. In fact, over the past two years, we have seen large gains in retention of first-time, full-time students. Preliminary numbers show a nearly unheard-of 7.5 percentage point gain in retention over this period. The attached packet points to the strategies that have enabled this significant increase.

While everyone on the VSU campus shares responsibility for retention, UAST has spearheaded our efforts, in part by coordinating student academic alerts generated by faculty using our Student Success Portal. The significant retention increases we have seen have been made possible by the strong cooperation between UAST (which houses all our college undergraduate advising centers) in our Student Success Division and our academic colleges and departments in Academic Affairs.

Our advising team has been remarkably successful and quite innovative. This new approach to advising has created a more seamless process in moving students from acceptance to orientation to matriculation. UAST starts reaching out to students even before orientation, not only to help them identify their majors but also to look at areas where they may anticipate some struggle. Even with the disruptions caused by the pandemic and a wholly virtual orientation this summer, UAST was able to devise and deploy a pre-enrollment survey in My Majors to help target areas where students may need additional support. Once students are ready to register, UAST has worked with academic departments to assure that students will face fewer conflicts in getting the courses they need and that they will also have a clear academic map to assist them. Additionally, students plan to enroll in 15 hours per semester as well as register for the appropriate English and Math classes. However, advising's role does not end with a student's enrollment in the appropriate classes; as I mentioned earlier, advisors work hand-in-hand with faculty who post early alerts so advisors can intervene as needed if students are struggling. The group is well organized and acts as a swat team to intervene with students at the first sign of trouble.

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REGENTS' MOMENTUM YEAR AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
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As with all groups on campus, UAST has had to adapt to changes caused by the pandemic, starting a unique concierge coaching program in Spring 2020 to assist students in the transition to fully online learning. Their efforts continue to help us as we navigate these most unusual times.

This office exemplifies the focus on student success shared by both the Division of Student Success and the Division of Academic Affairs; our Deans' Council suggested this nomination because of the positive impact the advising centers have made in each of their colleges. I am proud to support this nomination.

Sincerely yours,



Robert T. Smith, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Professor of Mathematics



VALDOSTA STATE
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VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY: 2020-2021 APPLICATION

Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success

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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

REGENTS' MOMENTUM YEAR AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN ADVISING AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The overall changes required on our campus to improve student success and specifically, to implement the Momentum Approach, have been broad and deep, involving significant cultural changes, as well as structural and procedural changes. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the full-campus efforts of our faculty, staff, administration, and our students to successfully implement this approach. As an institution we have been laser focused on one goal: improving our retention and graduation rates. To that end, academic advising on campus has played an instrumental role in these efforts. ***From Fall 2017 to Fall 2019, VSU Fall-to-Fall first-year retention has climbed from 65.2% to 72.8%, an increase of 7.6 in just two years. The 4-year graduation rate is up 5.1% since the Fall 2013 cohort. Similarly, our 6-year graduation rate is up 3.1% since the Fall 2011 cohort.***

We are pleased to submit this application for consideration for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success, as we believe academic advising has played an integral role in moving the student success needle.

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

Before digging into academic advising efforts, we wanted to share a few important numbers that have us excited about our campus' path towards stronger student success:

All information below is a three-year trend.

Black male Fall-to-Fall first-year retention: Up 14.1%

Black female Fall-to-Fall first-year retention: Up 3.4%

First generation Fall-to-Fall first-year retention: Up 10.2%

Male underrepresented minority (URM - American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander) Fall-to-Fall first-year retention: Up 11.2%

Female URM Fall-to-Fall first-year retention: Up 4.3%

4-Year graduation rate URM male: Up 1.5%

4-Year graduation rate URM female: Up 4.8%

4-Year graduation rate first generation: Up 3.1%

6-Year graduation rate URM male: Up 6.1%

6-Year graduation rate first generation: Up 4.0%

The numbers above are indicative of our entire campus working tirelessly to achieve our University's Strategic Plan and to positively impact all of our students. Academic advising sits in a pivotal position on campus and we would like to share our efforts below.

ADVISING REIMAGINED

Academic advising on campus has undergone numerous changes over the past two decades, but none more substantial, and impactful, than our recent reorganization. In 2017, Valdosta State University created a Division of Student Success tasked with improving retention and graduation rates. Guided by a university-led taskforce and a National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) consultant's review recommendations moved forward to enhance the student experience through a more robust advising structure. A fully-professional advising framework was implemented in July 2018. All undergraduate academic advising now is provided by seven academic advising centers. All VSU students begin, and end, with one of the fully-trained and dedicated academic advising teams below:

- College of the Arts Advising Center
- College of Business Administration Advising Center
- College of Education and Human Services Advising Center
- College of Honors and Exploratory Advising Center
- College of Humanities and Social Sciences Advising Center
- College of Nursing and Health Sciences Advising Center
- College of Science and Mathematics Advising Center

Each advising center is led by an advising center director, and includes academic advisors, graduate assistants, administrative support, and student workers. All seven centers report into the Interim Associate Vice President of Student Success/Executive Director of Advising, who reports directly to the Vice President for Student Success. While the reporting structure is administratively centralized, the centers reside in and/or near the Colleges they serve. While the advising center directors do not report to the College Deans, all of them do sit on the executive leadership team in each College. We are very pleased with this new structure and will come back to it towards the end of this application.

PURPOSEFUL CHOICE FROM THE START

At VSU, we believe students should engage in purposeful major choice *before* attending orientation. In late fall 2019, we partnered with MyMajors to provide a major assessment to all incoming first year students. Additionally, VSU became the first institution to build a pre-enrollment survey inside the MyMajors system. By coupling our pre-enrollment survey with the MyMajors assessment we were able to streamline our advising process for both the student and advisors. This efficiency was immensely helpful given the challenges presented to us with a fully virtual orientation experience this past summer. This summer we had 3,046 students complete the MyMajors Assessment and 97% of those students also fully completed the Pre-Enrollment survey.

For those unfamiliar with MyMajors, the assessment tool provides a set of best-fit majors based on the student's responses to their interest, aspirations, and aptitude in academic coursework completed to date. Once the assessment is completed, a student receives a personalized report with their Top 10 majors. Since this is tailored to our campus, all majors are offered by our institution. VSU believes purposeful choice does empower students to make early, informed choices about majors and programs, and in doing so, increases their likelihood of success towards graduation.

While the Top 10 report is helpful for the student, and advisors, we were able to glean additional insights from the assessment including major confidence of students, top motivations for attending college, and major concerns that could hinder degree completion (see Appendix I). With this information, we were able to provide targeted outreach. For example, for students who had concerns about completing their degree due to food insecurity issues, our advising teams could point them to resources on campus and in the community. We have also partnered with the Office of First-Year Programs and the Academic Support Center to provide workshops to address poor study habits, motivation, and goal setting as a result of the student responses. This fall, we have begun to utilize the MyMajors assessment for students who are in their second or third year and are now undecided. The earlier we can connect students to their final major, the more likely they are to persist and graduate.

ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

A critical component to momentum efforts includes the development of clear and accurate academic roadmaps. In 2018, through much effort between the Division of Academic Affairs and the Division of Student Success, we were able to post accurate program maps into DegreeWorks and onto Departmental websites. In addition, we created Academic Focus Areas

(see Appendix II) for students to begin more targeted exploration if they are undecided at the start of college. The program maps do include 15 hours of coursework each semester, place English and the most appropriate Math course based on major into the first year, and include 9 hours of focused major work.

As part of the creation of the academic program maps, we pressure-tested the proposed schedules inside of our Visual Schedule Builder (VSB) tool. In doing so, we were able to identify and remedy pressure points and course scheduling conflicts prior to registration resulting in fewer time conflicts during open registration.

While the creation of the academic program maps was an important first step, we have continued to tweak and customize programs for students as they arrive at the door, often with numerous college credits. Advisors update the plans and ensure the student knows how to access the plans. VSU utilizes VSB for registration, which allows for DegreeWorks plans to be pulled in directly to the platform for easy registration. This feature is frequently utilized by our students during open registration and helps to ensure students stay on path.

MOMENTUM EFFORTS

Completion of English and Math in First Year

Over the past two years, we have worked to identify a three-year trend for the completion of a student's first English and Math course by end of the first year of study. We looked at successful completers with a grade of C as well as a grade of D. For some majors a D in Math/English is a successful completion. The completion percentages for those who earned a C or higher are: 65.8% (F17), 68.3% (F18), and 70.8% (F19). The completion percentages for those who earned a D or higher are: 78.5% (F17), 79.4% (F18), and 79.9% (F19).

We have realized a positive trend in the number of students completing ENGL and MATH. Over the past three years, we have increased by 5% in the past three years with students completing both ENGL and MATH with a C or higher. For students completing both ENGL and MATH with a D or higher, we have seen a modest gain of 1.4%. Knowing the benefit to student retention our advising teams will continue to stress the importance of registering for, and completing, both ENGL and MATH by the end of year one.

9 Hours in an Academic Focus Area

Through the creation of Academic Focus Areas (Appendix III) and Academic Program Maps, we have embedded this momentum component into guided pathways for all students. As noted earlier, advisors must provide further personalization for students and do so inside DegreeWorks. The academic plans that are created in DegreeWorks are able to be pulled directly into Visual Schedule Builder (VSB) by the student during registration. A simplified registration process has helped our advising teams keep students on pathway.

30 Hours of a Clear Pathway in First Year

Much like the 9 hours of academic focus area above, our Focus Areas and Academic Program Maps clearly outline a 30-credit pathway in year one. With the implementation of professional advising, we anticipate a direct impact with the number of students registering for, and

completing, 30 credits per year. In this past year, we saw a small increase of .7% in the number of students completing 30 credits. Given the impacts of the pandemic, we see this increase as a step in the correct direction and will continue to focus our students on completing 30 credits.

Related to this goal, we are pleased to report that the total number of credits at graduation has decreased by two credits from an average of 136.5 credits in academic year 17/18 to 134.1 credits in academic year 19/20.

SYSTEMIC APPROACHES TOWARD STUDENT SUCCESS

At VSU, we understand our role in advising is to build a support structure where the student experience is filled with teams of people who care deeply about the success of each student. We aim to truly get to know our student and to minimize administrative and procedural barriers for the best benefit of our students. Below are some of the areas we have been working on over the last couple of years.

Unified Advising Philosophy

Relationships matter. At VSU, our advising philosophy is based on [Appreciative Advising](#) and is taught as part of our Advisor 101 training. We have found it important to have a common language amongst our team and appreciative advising provides a strengths-based approach to fostering the advising relationship. Appreciative advising is defined as the intentional collaborative practice of asking generative, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experiences and achieve their dreams, goals, and potentials. This advising model is derived from appreciative inquiry, positive psychology, and strengths-based ideas and is comprised of the following six phases:

Disarm: Make a positive first impression with the student, build rapport, and create a safe, welcoming space.

Discover: Ask positive open-ended questions that help advisors learn about students' strengths, skills, and abilities.

Dream: Inquire about students' hopes and dreams for their futures.

Design: Co-create a plan for making their dreams a reality.

Deliver: The student delivers on the plan created during the Design phase and the advisor is available to encourage and support students.

Don't Settle: Advisors and students determine to set their own internal bars of expectations high.

For our campus, this model keeps us grounded and focused on the real goal: student success. We have learned the importance of looking at our data through the lens of relationship with our student and it has served us well.

Equity Efforts Through Success Identification

As can be seen in our "Points of Pride" section above, we are making important gains in retention, along with 4 and 6-year graduation rates, for our underrepresented students on campus. We are encouraged by these numbers, yet remain dedicated to see continuous improvement. Our goal is to get rid of the equity gap on our campus.

Towards this ambitious goal, we have recently partnered with Civitas on a propensity matching software geared to the identification of practices which most positively impact persistence. In the near future, we will be running our data through this tool to determine areas where we are seeing good success, and to identify areas of opportunity.

Where we find positive success metrics, we will work to engage more students in those activities. Advisors will be at the forefront of this process to ensure students are steered towards high impact practices and programs on our campus that have a known positive persistence indicator.

Where we find opportunities, we plan to explore the data and determine what steps need to be made in order to enhance success. The feedback from advising will become a critical component of our ability to turn opportunities into strength.

Since the inception of the Division of Student Success in 2017, we have been aggressive and creative in our work to ensure student success. As a campus, we anticipate this tool to provide clarity on what success efforts have the potential to most positively impact all of our students.

Early Alerts

Gone are the days when advisors waited until midterm to determine student performance. Academic advisors now receive daily early alerts from faculty through our VSU Student Success Portal. These alerts come directly to the student's assigned advisor and typically provide insight into the student's academic performance, course participation, or wellness concerns. Action is taken within three business days, often much faster, and the record of outreach is captured for future conversations. In Fall 2019, 4,570 early alerts were entered into our system. Through Week 10 of Fall 2020, we have already received 6,824 early alert notifications.

In addition to our early alert system, the advising teams have built excellent relationships with the faculty in their Colleges. Many faculty members now reach directly out to the Advising Center Director and/or the advising center liaisons through phone, in-person, or vial email. Fostering this professional relationship has afforded a quick response when students are struggling and the advising teams are able to quickly mobilize.

An additional benefit of our advising structure is that many faculty and staff members report student concerns directly to the Executive Director for Advising. Having a clearly delineated person responsible for advising on campus has afforded staff and faculty a place to share concerns when they are not certain exactly who needs to be looped in to care for a student. Once these concerns reach the Executive Director for Advising, the appropriate offices and people are connected to support the student.

Small Grants, At the Right Time, Equal More Graduates

Economic barriers, often small financial holds, can significantly impede a student's path to graduation. In advising, we connect students to campus partners who can provide small grants to cover books, course materials, and other unexpected costs. In addition, the VSU Finisher Scholarships has helped pay for credits in a student's final semester to assist the student in getting across the graduation stage. During Spring 2020, as we moved to fully online

instruction, we were able to connect students to the VSU Cares Foundation, which was able to provide WiFi devices and laptops/iPads for students to complete their courses.

Academic Advisors also assist students in making connections to the Financial Aid Office. When an advisor sees a hold bursary/financial hold, students are put in connection with Financial Aid to take care of what is needed so a hold can be removed and registration can move forward with any impediments.

Learning Support Placements

While VSU has traditionally had few students participating in Learning Support (LS) courses, this past academic year saw a large increase of LS students as ACT/SAT scores were not required for admissions and the GPA requirement was lowered to a 2.3. A quick partnership between the Registrar, Information Technology, Admissions, and Advising resulted in LS codes becoming available to academic advisors inside of our VSU Student Success Portal. Having this information at the fingertips of advisors allowed them to accurately place students into the appropriate courses at registration. While this effort did not come without some obstacles, the teams adapted quickly and our students were registered appropriately.

Registration Holds

Any barrier to registration provides an opportunity for students to stop out. In advising meetings, our advising teams have access to any holds that may be on a student account. As part of the advising session, advisors ensure students know how to take appropriate next steps to remove these registration holds. Examples of common holds at our institution include: immunization, parking/transportation, bursary holds, discipline, housing, library, High School or final college transcript. Early identification of these holds, along with steps to remove the hold, allows another barrier to be removed and moves the student closer to a successful registration experience.

Visual Schedule Builder (VSB)

The implementation of Visual Schedule Builder (VSB) on campus has greatly simplified the advising process. Before VSB, students reported the registration process could take up to a couple of hours to complete. Now, DegreeWorks Planners are pulled directly into VSB and students are able to quickly determine their desired schedule.

Students are able to go in and save multiple schedule options and can share those with their academic advisor. Advisors, also can create a schedule for students and save the schedule for the student to pull up at registration time.

Engagement Data

In early 2019, the Division of Student Success partnered with a math faculty member to create our very own retention formula. As a result of this process, we were able to determine the importance of active student engagement as it relates to persistence. On our campus, a student who attends 10 or more events in the fall semester is 17% more likely to be enrolled in the following fall semester, than those students with minimal engagement. We are able to track our student's engagement via swipe access at campus events. This data is made available to advisors through our VSU Student Success Portal. Academic advisors are then able to converse

with students who have not yet participated in campus events. The relationships advisors build affords them a chance to help a student get connected to a club or organization on campus, which we all know increases a student's sense of belonging to campus.

Feedback Loops to College Executive Committees

Earlier in this document, we outlined the unique structure of our advising organization. A major positive to our setup is we have far fewer people involved in the advising process. While this helps with hiring and training advisors, we have also realized the added benefit of identifying barriers inside of Colleges, and at the University level. With advising loads between 325 – 375 students per advisor, it is much easier to identify trends occurring in a major and to provide that feedback directly to College Executive Teams.

A great example of this is related to prerequisite structures within majors. Since we have moved to the professional advising structure, we have been able to work with departments to help clean up unnecessary prerequisites in courses that were causing registration problems for students. Additionally, we have been able to provide quick feedback to department heads and deans related to course conflicts occurring with required courses from other disciplines, which has resulted in an optimization process to ensure students are able to access appropriate course sequences to continue progression in the major.

Athletic Advising Committee

Within the past year, we have launched our Athletic Advising Committee to better support the needs of our student-athletes. This committee is chaired by our Director from the College of Honors and Exploratory Advising and has representation from every advising center. The focus of this group is to ensure early advising sessions take place, student-athletes register during early registration, and that student schedules are appropriate based on practice schedules. This committee is also in frequent communication with the Athletic Department to ensure we meet the NCAA eligibility requirements for athletes.

Office of First-Year Programs Partnership

During the last two years our advising teams have worked alongside our Office of First-Year Programs (OFYP) to connect students to success programming. OFYP offers a variety of events to assist students with making a successful transition including the find your classes event, a syllabus planning party, and registration help sessions held in the library labs. As advisors chat with students, and receive early alerts, they are able to encourage students to participate in these valuable events.

Last fall, the OFYP, created a commuter success program to match upper-class mentors with first year students who are not living on campus. The aim of this mentorship program is to help commuter students make a connection to VSU. Through this program, commuter success coaches are encouraging their students to reach out to their assigned advisors as questions arise.

Leveraging Concierge Coaching

In response to the pandemic, VSU launched a concierge coaching program in Spring 2020. This program utilized 293 staff and graduate assistants, representing all divisions on campus, serving

just over 6,000 undergraduate students. From mid-March to early May the coaches entered in 13,615 notes into the VSU Student Success Portal.

The primary goal of the concierge coaching program was to help mitigate student concerns in the transition to a fully online experience, while providing an additional resource to connect students to the appropriate office/individual on campus. Notes from the concierge coaches were viewable by the academic advisor of record and numerous connections to academic advisors were made via the concierge coaches. The program was a success and has continued forward.

Text Campaign Efforts

As we continue to find ways to effectively reach our students, text campaigns have become an important component of our communication plan. While we have done numerous campaigns, we would like to share one example below.

At the conclusion of the first week of the semester, we send out a campaign to ask students how they are doing with one week in the books. The student response options include:

- Excellent. I am off to a great start.
- Good. I am getting the hang of it.
- Not well. If I am honest, I am struggling a bit.

While advising teams can reach out to all responders, we have focused on getting a quick response out to the students who have marked that they are struggling. We invite them to come in for an appointment in the second week of classes and help to address any concerns. We have had an excellent response, with a little above 80% of students, connecting with advising centers for appointments in week 2. You may view the text campaign outline in Appendix III.

A Connected Team

Given the unique setup of our structure, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the synergy that has been created as the organization has evolved. Our advising leadership team, which consists of the directors from each advising center, meets on a weekly basis. We are also joined by the Program Manager for the Office of First-Year Programs.

As a team, we brainstorm ways to impact students through our advising. We share what initiatives are working in various Centers, along with ones that have not worked. We learn and grow with one another as a connected team. Through these weekly meetings we have been able to impact policies and procedures on campus. One concrete example from this past summer is an update to the Major Declaration process. Our team worked with the Registrar to make the Major Declaration process a fully online process through DocuSign. This has been a welcome addition for students and staff.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

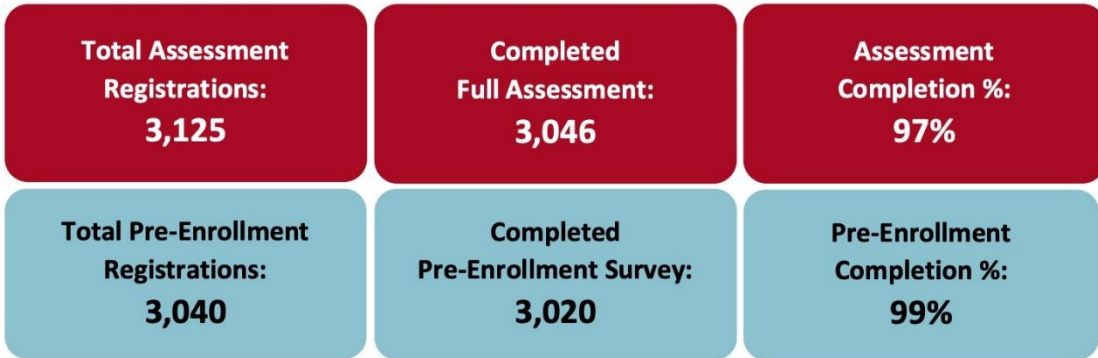
While we are encouraged by the increases in retention and graduation rates, we recognize we still have much work ahead of us. Our new organizational structure has been tested, and we are more connected than ever before. At VSU we will continue to utilize the data, while

remembering that every number represents a student who deserves the opportunity to be successful. Through our advising relationships we will continue the path forward towards even greater student success in the future. Thank you for taking the time to review our application. We appreciate your efforts!

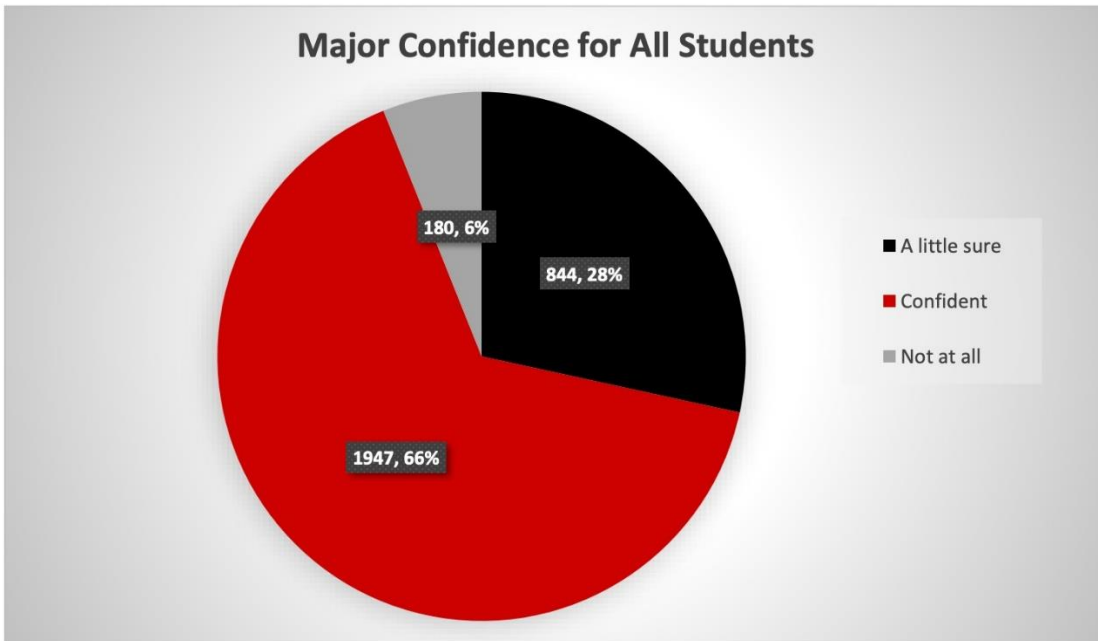
APPENDIX I – Sample MyMajors Data



Key Valdosta.MyMajors.com Stats: May 15, 2020 – August 24, 2020

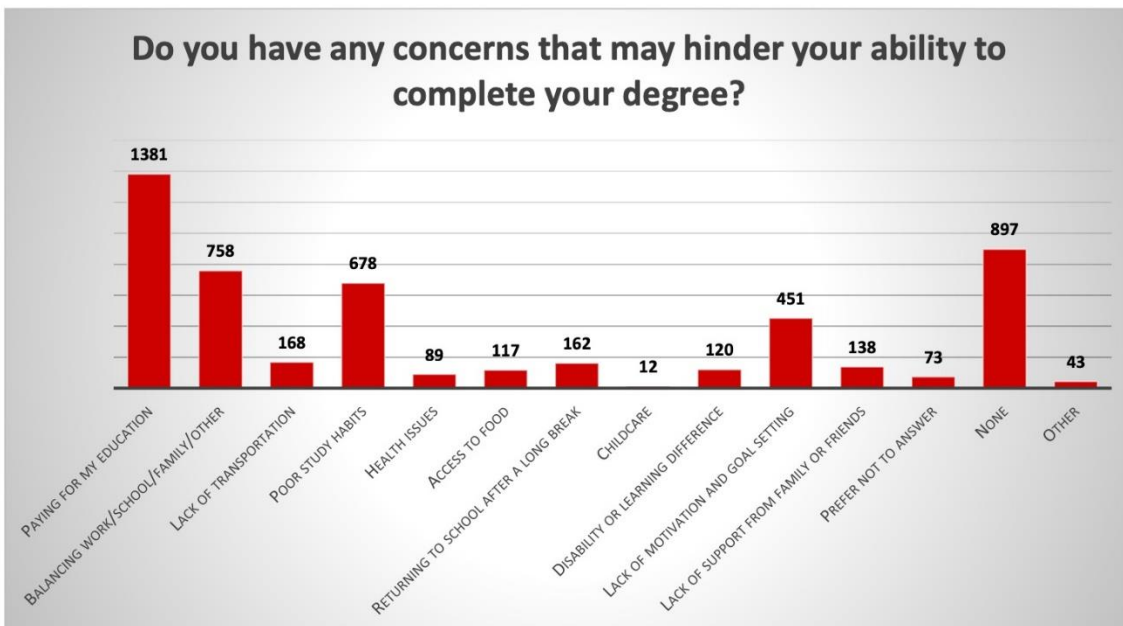
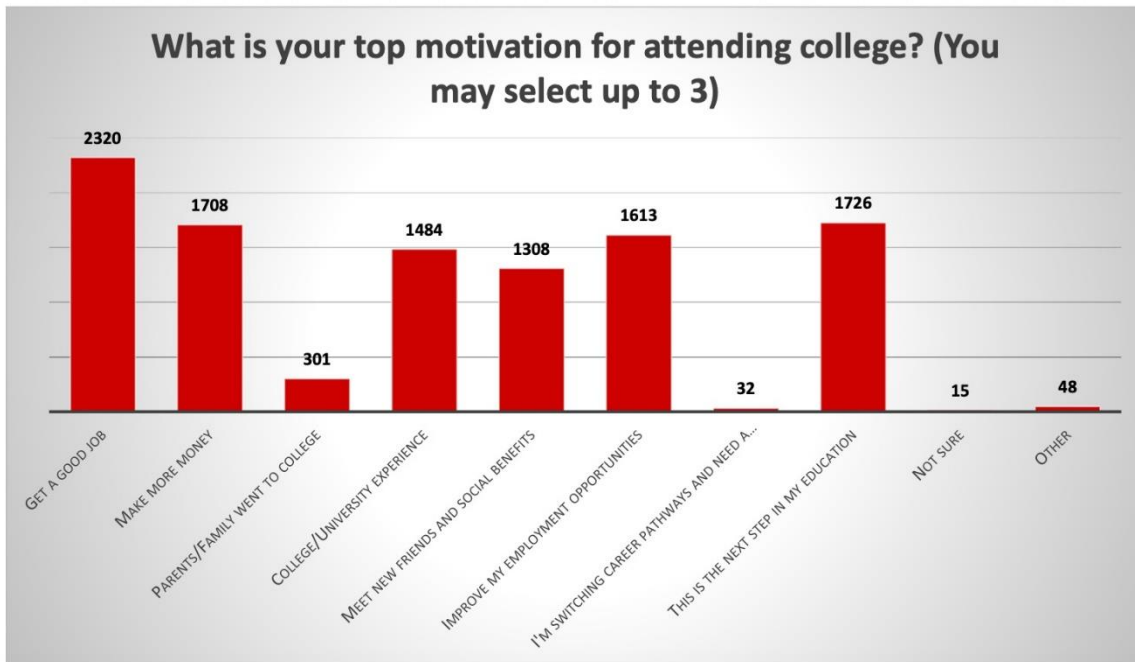


97% of students who started the MyMajors assessment ended up completing the pre-enrollment survey.





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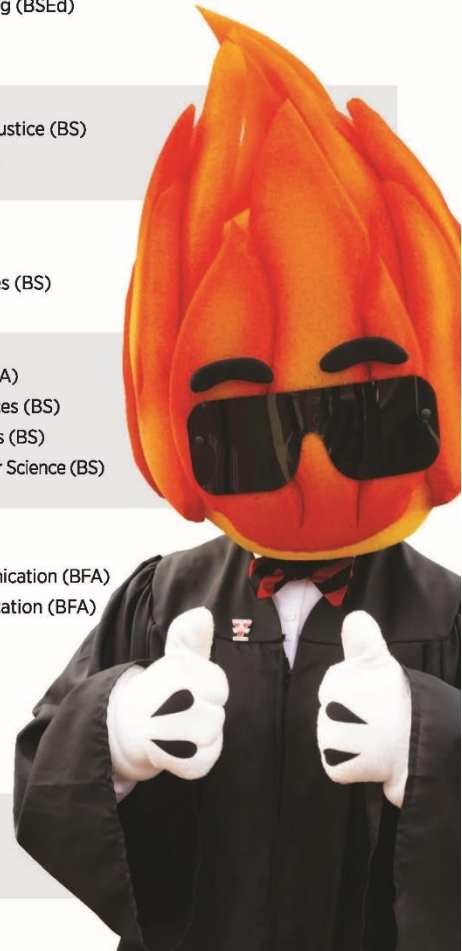


Appendix II – VSU Focus Areas

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FOCUS AREAS	UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAM MAJORS
Arts & Design	Art (BA, BFA) Theatre Arts (BFA) Dance (BFA) Interior Design (BFA) Music (BA) Music Performance (BM)
Business	Accounting (BBA) Finance (BBA) Management (BBA) Economics (BBA) Organizational Leadership (BS) Marketing (BBA) Human Capital Performance (BAS) International Business (BBA) Office Adm. & Technology (BS) Healthcare Administration (BBA)
Education	Art Education (BFA) Special Education: Deaf & Hard of Hearing (BSEd) Elementary Education (BSEd) Workforce Education & Development (BSEd) Health & Physical Education (BSEd) Middle Grades Education (BSEd) American Sign Language & English Interpreting (BSEd) Communication Disorders (BSEd)
Social & Behavioral Services	Sociology & Anthropology (BA) Criminal Justice (BS) Psychology (BA, BS) Political Science (BA)
Health Professions	Dental Hygiene (AAS) Nursing (BSN) Exercise Physiology (BSEP) Health Sciences (BS)
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics)	Applied Mathematics (BS) Mathematics (BA) Biology (BA, BS) Environmental Geosciences (BS) Chemistry (BS) Astronomy (BS) Physics (BS) Computer Information Systems (BS) Computer Science (BS)
Humanities & Communication Studies	English (BA) Mass Media (BFA) Communication (BFA) History (BA) Emergent Media & Communication (BFA) Philosophy & Religious Studies (BA) French Language & Literature (BA) Spanish Language & Literature (BA) Associate of Arts (AA)
Exploratory (Personalize a Course of Study)	Interdisciplinary Studies (BA)



APPENDIX III – Example Text Campaign

TEXT CAMPAIGN

Week 1 – Fall 2019

Send on Friday of 1st Week

Target Audience: Students enrolled in Fall 2019 who have just completed Week 1 of courses.

Initial Text: “Happy Friday from your Advising Team. We wanted to check in to see how your first week has gone. How is it going? Please respond with the number which corresponds to your answer.”

- [1]: Excellent. I’m off to a great start.
- [2]: Good. I’m getting the hang of it.
- [3]: Not well. If I’m honest, I’m struggling a bit.

If [1], is selected – Reply: “That is great news. Don’t hesitate to connect with us when questions arise.”

If [2], is selected – Reply: “Great to hear. Are there any questions you’ve not been able to get answered?”

If a response is given, the following reply is sent: “Thank you for your response.”

If [3], is selected – Reply: “Sorry to hear this, but you are not alone. There are plenty of students on campus who feel the same way. We can help. We would love to connect with you - -- send us an email at cosmadvising@valdosta.edu and we will chat next week.”

Appendix IV – Student Letter of Support, VSU Student, Melissa Wolfe



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Regents' Momentum Year Award Committee,

Early on in my senior year of high school, I experienced something that left me feeling lost and unsure of what I wanted to do next. I truly had lost all the excitement I once felt for my future and the desire to pursue higher education. That is until my parents encouraged me to attend a V-State Experience in my hometown of Tampa, Florida. The people I spoke to that night represented every corner of our campus, including faculty, staff, and students. Those individuals who took the time to care about me and my future may never know how significantly they impacted my life trajectory. But, they did, and honestly, my story is just one of many students' unique stories about how they ended up here at Valdosta State and why they stayed.

From day one, the support I received from my academic advisor has been more than I could've ever asked for. As a student who came to Georgia from out of state, being a part of a Freshman Learning Community was incredibly helpful. We weren't required to register for an FLC, but after my advisor recommended it, I decided to participate. I began my major level courses on my very first day of college with a group of students who I'll be crossing the commencement stage with in just a few short months. I sincerely attribute a great deal of my academic success to that conversation and decision. Without the support of my advisor and others in the Division of Student Success, I would not be where I am today.

In my role as Student Government Association President, I spend a lot of time talking to a variety of students. I frequently hear from students about the support they've received from our advising staff, and whether it's scheduling conflicts, class recommendations, or general life advice, we all know that we can count on them to help us get through whatever's going on.

The implementation of concierge coaches was both innovative and effective. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Valdosta State, our Student Success team put in countless hours creating this resource so that students wouldn't be left to navigate these unprecedented times alone. They say it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to keep things afloat in a pandemic. So many individuals volunteered their time to check in and follow up on student's academics, mental health, physical health, and access to resources.

Differentiating the Valdosta State University advising team from others is their ability to connect with students on a personal level. I know I can count on my advisor to help me figure out what classes to take, but I also know her support extends beyond a 30-minute advising session. As the years have progressed, I've genuinely formed friendships that I believe will last to become lifelong relationships, and I know many other students who have as well. I know that I speak for many when I say there is no group more deserving of this recognition.

Sincerely,

Melissa Wolfe
Student Government Association, *President*

Appendix V – Letter of Support, VSU Student, Dylan Taylor

Dear Regents' Advising Award Committee:

I am writing to recommend Valdosta State University for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success. As a first generation college student, the advising teams at Valdosta State have helped me through each step of the process, guiding my steps so that I know what to do and that I have the tools I need for success.

Even before setting foot on campus, you know there is someone in your corner who is only concerned for your success. By focusing on the “whole” student, the advisors here make you feel that you are more than just a number and part of a registration checklist, you are a person with dreams and goals, and their mission is to help you accomplish those goals. Their knowledge of each resource on campus is unmatched, always knowing where to point each student for any questions, concerns, or struggles they may have.

I know those struggles personally. As a first-generation college student, I was struggling my first semester; falling behind, not knowing how to effectively study, and struggling with being away from home. My advisor helped me through this by recommending resources and offering plenty of support. The advisors at Valdosta State University do not shy away from the hard conversations, such as mental health, and help students get the help they need at the on-campus resources that Valdosta State University offers. Often times, the academic advisors are the first line of defense at identifying those students who may need that extra help, and without them many students would never seek out that help on their own.

Also, the advisors here at Valdosta State University know how to adapt to change quickly and effectively. This was demonstrated most recently with the COVID-19 pandemic, the advisors adapted to online appointments through the Microsoft Teams app, forwarded their phones so that students could reach them, and conversion of physical paper forms into online documents quickly to help the transition to online format more smooth.

Valdosta State University advisors always have an optimistic attitude, warm smile, and encouraging words for each student they encounter. They treat each student as a unique opportunity to help someone accomplish their dreams and reach each goal they set, one semester at a time. It is for these reasons I believe they should receive the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success.

Sincerely,



Dylan Taylor
Elementary Education Major
Valdosta State University
Class of 2023

Appendix VI – Letter of Support, Mr. Stanley Jones, VSU Registrar



October 19, 2020

To: Mr. Robert Freidhoff
Interim Associate Vice President for Student Success

From: Stanley Jones
University Registrar

Dear Mr. Freidhoff:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of support for the Momentum Year Advising Award for your team. You may not know this, but I take full credit for the consideration of having advising centers for all academic colleges at Valdosta State University. Ok, perhaps that's not exactly true but I like to think so. During my interview for University Registrar in 2009, I was asked what was good about our current registration process and what I would like to see changed. My first and only comment was to see consistency in the advising process for all students. It was a challenge before and during registration cycles to hear the frustration from students (and parents) that they were not getting the overall attention needed during the advising process from faculty advisors. Please know, we have some wonderful faculty advisors, but most were not able to give the student to time needed during advising due to teaching, research, and committee responsibilities. The biggest challenge was during the summer (May through August) where students would apply for readmission, and would have to wait until faculty returned to campus to be advised. This put a great deal of stress on the Registrar's Office as well as academic department chairs that had to try to fill in as best they could.

So you can imagine how excited I was to hear that the advising initiative had been funded and that we would begin having advising centers in every college. When you were named Executive Director of Advising in 2017, you hit the ground running and quickly laid out a plan that has been extremely effective. Just from the Registrar's Office perspective, we have seen an increase in student preparedness for registration. We have fewer registration issues (advising flags not lifted, haven't heard from my advisor, or I'm confused about what I am registering for) which has resulted in fewer frustrating phone calls and emails at 7am when registration begins! The actual registration for classes process has become quicker as students feel more confident in what they are registering for and that they know a great deal of thought and time has gone into getting them into the correct courses. Your team works closely with you to determine course needs and allows my office to add more courses quicker to prevent student anxiety. They are also able to register students for classes when needed. When a student needs additional assistance, I now feel confident that there is a team of advisors waiting in each college to help. We no longer have to wait for the "one person" to respond to an issue. My team knows they can email the advising email alias' and that someone will respond quickly.

OFFICE of the REGISTRAR

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REGENTS' MOMENTUM YEAR AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
IN ADVISING AND STUDENT SUCCESS



I have also seen an increase in students applying for graduation in a timely manner. With professional advisors constantly monitoring student progression, we are now receiving applications quicker with fewer issues. However, it is also great when issues arise, we have a professional team that responds quickly. When additional paperwork is needed, we find that we receive it a great deal faster than before. The advising teams also help identify problems with curriculum and lend their support for changes when needed. I find the support we receive on these issues very effective.

I could go on and on. I am truly grateful to you and your teams for the hard work that is put in everyday to assist our students in achieving a college education. I know they are equally as excited and emotional as I am seeing their students walk across the stage at Commencement. I now know and believe that the journey to completion was made a bit easier by having your advising team there to support our students.

Again, thank you for the hard work and dedication. Your team is more than deserving of this prestigious recognition. I am very thankful to the University System of Georgia for providing me with this opportunity to lend my support to your amazing team.

Best of luck,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stanley Jones".

Stanley Jones
University Registrar

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Appendix VII – Letter of Support, Valdosta State University Dean's Council



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE *of the* ARTS

Regents' Momentum Year Award Committee,

The Valdosta State University Deans' Council is pleased to submit this letter in support of the Office of University Advising and Student Transitions (UAST) as a nominee for the Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Advising and Student Success.

Valdosta State University has made excellent progress in the area of student advising and retention over the past three years. Improving retention through successful student advising and support is an institutional strategic goal. With an institutional commitment to a centralized advising model, academic colleges have been assigned advising teams to support all majors in our departments. This new model has provided students with more targeted support than they were afforded under an old model that relied exclusively on faculty members for academic advising. Our advising teams continue to build meaningful professional advising/mentoring relationships with our students and are informed of scheduling, financial aid, and registration processes in ways that support our students much more effectively than in past advising models. The advising team design allows the members to be fully engaged with academic support and success modeling when requested, and the team is accessible to students in a way that supports their progress.

Our faculty are overwhelmingly impressed with the level of curriculum knowledge and scheduling savvy the teams bring to our students. We also feel comfortable knowing that all of the students in a program are being advised in the same equitable manner. The academic deans are more informed of the registration and advising status of our students than we have ever been in the past, and we are better prepared to assist the colleges with curriculum and scheduling projections. The advising teams have provided detailed and accurate data reflecting the progress of our students, their preparation for advising, and academic progress. Our advising teams are committed to student support and leadership. Their communications with our majors have been consistent and supportive, and we have seen far fewer problems with course substitutions, graduation applications, and late registrations.

The collective efforts of our division of student success has contributed to the improvement of our institutional first year retention rates. Our overall first year retention rates have increased from 65% to 72% over the past three academic years. The advising units have been instrumental in having all first-year students carry full 15- credit hour, schedules and have addressed momentum year success plans by having students take both English and Math courses in their first 30 attempted hours. The teams have been doing excellent work communicating to students the importance of the degree maps and planning for their programs of study, and our advisors are accessible to incoming students to assist with decisions about choosing majors and requirements for programs of study. The 4 year and 6-year graduation rates have also improved due to the involvement of the advising division. Their efforts to reach out to students requiring assistance to complete their final semesters of school have identified the students and subsequently individualized completion plans for those who are less than 15 credits away from graduation. The integration of notification systems such as My Majors, Degreeworks, Visual Schedule Builder, and the Advising Portal has improved communications between faculty, advising, administration, and students. The advising teams have transitioned communications and record keeping in a manner that allows for clarity of communication and accuracy within documentation actions.

OFFICE of the DEAN

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IN ADVISING AND STUDENT SUCCESS



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
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The Office of University Advising and Student Transitions has made a significant impact on the success of Valdosta State University's students. The VSU Deans' Council appreciates the dedication and effort this division brings to campus and we wholeheartedly extend our appreciation for their work and support their nomination for this award.

Sincerely,

Valdosta State University Deans' Council

OFFICE *of the* DEAN

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