**Essay 5: Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation**

**Commitment to Access**

A key component of the California State University mission is to encourage and provide access to an excellent education to all who are prepared for and wish to participate in collegiate study. CSUSM is committed to establishing innovative programs and services to support the recruitment of students who face cultural, geographical, physical, academic, financial, or personal boundaries. The [Alliance to Accelerate Excellence in Education](http://www.csusm.edu/community/alliance/letter.html) has established Guaranteed Admission agreements with ten area school districts to improve the college attendance and completion rates of students in North San Diego County. The [ACE Scholars Services](http://www.csusm.edu/ace/about-ace.html) is a comprehensive program that supports former foster youth. The [Veterans Center](http://www.csusm.edu/veterans/building.html) actively recruits students from all military bases in the local region. Approximately 12% of CSUSM students are veterans, service members, reservists or dependents/spouses and has the highest percentage of student veterans per capita of any university in the CSU system. In 2013, the Stevens Institute of Technology built and designed a new Veterans Center for the campus. Built on the land of the Luiseño Indians, California State University San Marcos is proud of its impressive history of engaging the local American Indian population. There are 25 tribal communities in San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties – with 18 of those communities located within our service region. The American Indian Student population is at 1%. In 2007, CSUSM signed a [Memorandum of Understanding with Santa Ysabel Reservation](https://www.csusm.edu/community/tribal/communitypartnerships.html) to increase the number American Indian students. Additionally, CSUSM continues to build strategic partnerships with mutually beneficial outcomes with our tribal neighbors through the efforts of a full-time tribal liaison, a community-based native advisory council, and the [California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center](http://www.csusm.edu/cicsc/).

**Remediation**

Remediation is an aspect of the student experience that influences student retention and success. CSUSM has made great strides improving our remediation rates within a student’s first year of college. In AY 2011, 1201 FY students entered CSUSM. Of these students, 812 (68% of FY students) needed remediation. 725 students (89%) needed English remediation and 426 (52%) needed Math remediation (339 students needed both English and Math). Of the 812 students, 697 (86%) cleared their remediation requirements and 264 (78%) of the students who needed both English and Math were able to successfully clear their remediation requirements.

Students of color and first-generation college students are grossly overrepresented among students needing remediation in English and Math. CSUSM is proud of its success in supporting students who may otherwise be hindered by remediation requirements. Between 2006/07 and 2010/11, the remediation rates for Latino students (who made up the largest portion of CSUSM students needing remediation) increased from 68% to 88%. In addition, the remediation rates increased from 70% to 90% for African-American students, 79% to 98% for Asian and Pacific Islander students, and 67% to 94% for first-generation college students (who come into the university needed remediation at the highest rate). The remediation rates for Caucasian students also increased during this time period from 72% to 91%. Additionally, the remediation rate for women improved from 71% to 88% and rates for men improved from 74% to 90%. It should be noted that in 2011/2012, the CSU system reduced the cut-off score for English remediation, which also reduced the number of students requiring remediation. In 2012/2013, Early Start was developed to require incoming students to begin remediation during the summer before starting in a CSU. These improvements directly impact the CSUSM’s mission to provide access to higher education for students who may not otherwise be afforded this opportunity; and also increases our [First-Year student retention rates](http://www.csusm.edu/ipa/ret-graduation/ftf-retention1.html).

**Early Warning Initiatives**

CSUSM has implemented a myriad of programs and services to address support the unique needs of our students and identify challenges as early as possible. The [Student Outreach and Referral (SOAR)](http://www.csusm.edu/soar/) program was established after a Discovery Café that identified that first-year students, specifically first-generation, struggled to navigate the complexity of the university. SOAR serves as a centralized resource for students and their families. The program is committed to providing individualized attention to facilitate personalized referrals to university resources. SOAR proactively connects with first-generation students and their families to raise awareness of campus resources and to promote a sense of belonging within the university community. In 2013/2014, SOAR supported 536 cases; and with enrollment growth this number is anticipated to grow.

In an effort to support academic success, the [Personalized Academic Success Services (PASS)](http://www.csusm.edu/class/pass/) program provides academic success workshops and individualized support to students who are experiencing challenges to their academic and personal success.

As part of the Dean of Students Office, the [Cougar Care Network (CCN)](http://www.csusm.edu/ccn/) is an early alert initiative to improve student success, retention, and persistence. CCN serves as a “network” of campus representatives to who will support students when there is an early alert referral from a member of the campus community. In 2014, the created a full-time Care Manager position to provide additional support to students experiencing personal challenges that my impact their academic and personal success.

**Academic Support**

*Academic Advising*

One of the primary ways CSUSM students are guided to success is through academic advising. Students access advising services based on major. Advising services are designed to impact persistence and retention, as well as student satisfaction – all factors that have been shown to directly influence student success and degree completion. Organizationally, the university is delivering services through a centralized undergraduate advising center, as well as through college-based offices depending on the major. Undergraduate Advising Services assists students in majors within the College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences, for example psychology and criminal justice. The College of Business Administration sees students in both pre-business and business majors. The College of Education, Health and Human Services advises students in education, kinesiology, nursing, human development, and other health and human services professions. The College of Math and Science provides assistance to students in math and science majors, for example biology and chemistry. Faculty advisors provide students with insight regarding major course selections, internship opportunities, career options, and graduate school. Undergraduate Advising Services, based in the university’s Division of Student Affairs, serves as a central communications channel for the college-based offices and also provides a coordinating function of advising for undergraduate students which helps to keep communications streamlined for students.

Current services include individual, group, and self-service advising tools. All advising units provide individual appointments focused on development of educational plans, as well as counseling of personal and vocational goals of the student. To assist students with making timely progress towards graduation, advisors use general education and [major/minor worksheets](http://www.csusm.edu/academicadvising/worksheets.html) to help students determine outstanding requirements. Advisors also monitor degree progress and graduation readiness as students near completion of their general education and major requirements. The largest volume of interaction with students is through individual appointments. Advisors counsel thousands of CSUSM students per year, and during key registration times some advising units offer drop-in appointments to help students select accurate coursework.

Some units also provide group advising services designed to reach a wide audience as an intrusive strategy to provide timely information to students. For example, the School of Nursing provides first-year workshops for all pre-health students to detail the complex requirements for entry into School of Nursing majors. These workshops have significantly reduced the number of individual appointments needed for general questions and has allowed nursing advisors to focus primarily on students who have complex or problematic degree progress issues. Other advising units are using similar strategies for achieving sustainable practice as the university grows in numbers of students.

There are also a number of self-service electronic tools being offered to students, including Degree Planner and Schedule Assistant. Degree Planner is an online tool designed to assist students with developing a long-term plan for graduation by using a live course planner that interacts with the PeopleSoft program to determine requirements for the major. The tool identifies which courses the student is taking and which courses still need to be completed in order to fulfill the student’s degree plan for graduation. This feature is expected to facilitate time to degree improvements for students, as well as serve as a vital way for university administration to address course demand in a way that is not currently possible. Schedule Assistant is an additional planning tool that has been launched for students that allows the student to input criteria, including desired breaks, athletic practice schedules, and work schedules. The system produces potential schedules for the semester, and students select the schedule they prefer and are able to enroll right from the scheduler. This tool is expected to enhance student satisfaction and allow streamlined planning for both students and advisors.

At the moment, there is no mandatory advising requirement at CSUSM. Academic advising is self-elected. Practically speaking, with over 12,000 students to serve, there are currently not enough advisors available to make academic advising mandatory. Given the disparate student-to-advisor ratio, Undergraduate Advising Services (UAS) has employed various methods to provide all CSUSM students with the opportunity to obtain personalized academic advising. Due to course availability issues, it has been difficult to help students establish 4-year plans, which has resulted in UAS taking a flexible semester-to-semester approach. Advisors help students develop a desired schedule for the semester, and then help them build the best schedule for progress towards degree based on course availability. In addition, [drop-in advising](http://www.csusm.edu/academicadvising/dropins/index.html) for the upcoming semester is provided during the registration period, allowing students without a scheduled appointment to discuss scheduling concerns and questions with a member of the advising team. The impact of advising on student success is an area of needed development, and the advising units are developing strategies for measuring these effects.

*Tutoring Centers*

In addition to advising services, students are able to receive academic support through CSUSM’s tutoring centers: Math Lab, Writing Center, and Language Learning Center. Since 2009, student visits to the Math Lab, Language Learning Center, and Writing Center have increased 43%, 59%, and 108% respectively.

Student Visits to CSUSM Tutoring Centers

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Math Lab** | **Language Learning Center** | **Writing Center** |
| **2009-2010** | 10,305 | 1,761 | 2,178 |
| **2010-2011** | 13,168 | 2,803 | 3,254 |
| **2011-2012** | 15,283 | 3,716 | 3,174 |
| **2012-2013** | 16,036 | 3,574 | 3,921 |

Academic support needs have become apparent as the tutoring centers (Math Lab and Writing Center) have reached their capacities as the student population continues to grow. Since 2009, tutoring hours have increased by 44% in the Math Lab and by 80% in the Language Learning Center, and the Writing Center has shown the largest increase in tutoring hours at 344%.

Completed Tutoring Hours

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Math Lab** | **Language Learning Center** | **Writing Center** |
| **2009-2010** | 13,549 | 1,995 | 1,109 |
| **2010-2011** | 17,595 | 2,980 | 1,551 |
| **2011-2012** | 19,183 | 4,171 | 2,202 |
| **2012-2013** | 20,988 | 4,392 | 2,985 |

Given CSUSM's very diverse student population, there are many students who benefit from assistance with English language writing. The Language Learning Center and the Writing Center provide services for students who require assistance with English language writing, but current demand for these services has surpassed their capacity. A full-time position providing these services is needed to meet the needs of students who require writing support.

**Student Learning**

CSUSM is committed to a holistic approach to student learning. Research indicates that High-Impact Practices (HIPs) increase retention and promote students’ success during their college experience. CSUSM students are increasingly engaged in enriching curricular and co-curricular learning experiences.

# *First-Year Programs and Learning Communities*

The [Office of First-Year Programs](http://www.csusm.edu/fyp/) designs, implements and supports programs to help first-year students achieve academic excellence in the classroom and develop a deeper understanding of, and commitment to, long-term academic goals. First-Year Programs is responsible for the General Education Life-Long Learning course (GEL 101) that serves as a first-year success course. Enrollment in this first year course is voluntary, although approximately 80% of first-year students complete the course. For the past five years, First-Year Programs has conducted a very successful Conference for Instructors Who Teach First Year Students as a way of supporting our adjunct faculty who teach many of the first-year courses. Participants are primarily instructors and graduate students, although a fair number of tenure-track faculty attend.

# *Civic Engagement*

# At CSUSM, service learning is integrated into coursework with the assistance of the [Office of Civic Engagement.](http://www.csusm.edu/community/civicengagement/index.html) In addition to [service learning](http://www.csusm.edu/community/civicengagement/servicelearning/), students can participate in co-curricular volunteer opportunities and other civic engagement programs.

Since 2006, Cal State San Marcos has been implementing [general education learning outcomes](http://www.csusm.edu/ge/Goals%20and%20GELOs/) (GELOs). The outcomes flow from the institutional mission and align with the American Association of Schools Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Liberal Education & America’s Promise (LEAP) essential learning outcomes. Central to the assessment of these practices and outcomes, and the progress of the university’s transformational impact, are NSSE’s and CIRP’s Freshman Survey and Senior Survey, which focus on active and collaborative learning, civic engagement, and personal goals.

The survey data strongly suggests greater emphasis on civic learning and engagement practices at CSUSM: 33.1% of senior respondents at San Marcos report participating in a community-based project as part of a regular course within the previous year, up from only 17.9% in 2006. In addition, 75.2% reported participating in community service or volunteer work within the previous year, up from 60.9% in 2006. The NSSE demonstrates association between engagement during the college experience and its influence on social values and goals: 52.6% of seniors perceive their college experience contributed very much or quite a bit to their knowledge, skills and personal development in contributing to the welfare of their community. This reflects an increase from 38.8% in 2005, and suggests association between the increase in high impact practices related to civic learning and engagement (service learning and community service/volunteer work) and the desired institutional learning outcomes.

The Freshman Survey and the Senior Survey analyses (responses as a freshman vs. as a senior) further suggest the impact and transformation during the college experience: 42.6% of graduating senior respondents indicate that it is “essential or very important” to participate in a community action program, compared to only a quarter (23.1%) of incoming freshmen. Increases of over 10% were also noted in the importance respondents gave to helping others in difficulty, becoming a community leader, and influencing social values.

This data suggests that we are producing graduates who recognize the importance of civic leadership, community action and contributing to the welfare of their community ([NSSE data](http://www.csusm.edu/ipa/surveys/nsse.html)). Additionally, faculty are creating more opportunities for undergraduate students to become involved in community engaged scholarship through an [Engaged Scholarship grant program](http://www.csusm.edu/community/facultyengagement/incentivegrants/) that provides financial support intended to increase collaboration between academics and individuals outside the academy for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

In addition, CSUSM further promotes civic engagement through its student organizations, which are actively involved in the local community. The [2012-13 Handbook for Student Organizations](http://www.csusm.edu/sll/studentorgs/2013handbook.pdf) includes community service as a required component of “an active programming calendar.”

# *Undergraduate Research*

CSUSM offers many undergraduate research opportunities to students. One example of this is the [Office for Training, Research and Education in the Sciences (OTRES)](http://www.csusm.edu/otres/index.html), which provides a supportive multicultural environment for student and faculty career development in the biomedical sciences and related disciplines. The OTRES sponsors programs that focus on science education, student support services, research training, and research participation. Through OTRES, students voice their research interests and are connected to senior student researchers for shadowing in labs. Students participating in research projects through OTRES earn independent study credit for major requirements. OTRES also connects students with faculty mentors, who they will work with throughout the rest of their undergraduate careers at CSUSM. The OTRES student graduation rate is 93%, compared to 40% nationwide and 77% for CSUSM.

In January 2008, CSUSM was one of two CSU campuses selected to participate in the Council of Undergraduate Research (CUR)-National Science Foundation (NSF) Institute for Institutionalizing Undergraduate Research. One of the CSUSM team’s first objectives was to convene a [CSUSM Committee on Undergraduate Research](http://www.csusm.edu/gsr/student/cugr.html) (CUGR), which consists of representatives from nearly 30 different campus units. CUGR administered an [institutional survey](http://www.csusm.edu/gsr/student/cugr.html) in 2009 that found that approximately 95% of respondents reported that faculty in their academic unit are actively engaged in mentoring students in undergraduate research/creative activities. Twenty of the units reported offering courses that provide undergraduate research opportunities. Moreover, 55% reported that they offer support or assistance for undergraduate research activities.

Additional opportunities for students to engage in community-based research exist through campus-based centers focused on serving specific regional populations. In 2011, the [California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center (CICSC)](http://www.csusm.edu/cicsc/) opened on campus with a focus on conducting and supporting research and analysis of tribally identified concerns and questions, supporting the recruitment and retention of Native American students, faculty and staff, creating a sense of community and belonging among the Indian population on and off campus, and preparing graduates who can serve Indian communities well in support of their multiple and complex needs. In addition, the [National Latino Research Center (NLRC)](http://www.csusm.edu/nlrc) is committed to utilizing community-based research to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of rapidly growing U.S. Latino populations through applied research, training, technical assistance, research-based services, and information exchange. CSUSM recognizes the importance of supporting undergraduate research programs and the many ways these programs contribute to students’ success on campus.

*Study Abroad*

The [Office of Global Education](http://www.csusm.edu/global/) is the home of a number of services and initiatives to serve international students and offer study abroad opportunities for CSUSM students wanting an international experience as part of their education. Study abroad can be one of the most personally enriching and academically rewarding experiences a student can have. The opportunity to study in another country for a summer, semester, or academic year is open to all CSUSM students through a wide range of programs. These study abroad opportunities have contributed greatly to CSUSM students’ academic and personal success by providing them with a global perspective.

*Internships/Student Placement*

In a [2011 survey](https://newscenter.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/career/files/02731-CSU_CareerDirectorsEmployerSurvey.pdf) of employers conducted by the California State University Career Centers, 67% of the 552 employers who hired interns from CSU campuses over the prior three years agreed that internships are an “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” part of their overall recruiting strategy. Employers also indicated that when recruiting for interns, they recruited from an average of 2.5 CSU campuses, underscoring the competitive nature of securing internships and the need for quality internship preparation and support by the campus. An example of a CSUSM initiative that seeks to prepare students for the workplace is the [Career Readiness Initiative (CRI),](http://www.csusm.edu/chabss/featuredprograms/careerreadiness/index.html) which was founded in Fall 2012 by the College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences. CRI assists liberal arts students on the pathway from the classroom to the workplace by being deliberate in its efforts to help students connect their skills and knowledge to career choices, providing them with the tools and strategies they need for career success with an emphasis on mentoring and internship programs. Numerous internships are available to students through centralized listings on the [CougarJOBS](http://www.csusm.edu/careers/undergraduates/internship.html) internship information page.

In September 2013, the campus charged a Student Placement Task Force with examining CSUSM student placement activities (i.e., academic and co-curricular placement of students in community settings) and recommending how these practices might be centralized and coordinated to best serve the stakeholders, including students, faculty, and community organizations. Recommendations of the Task Force will begin implementation in 2015 to include development of a: (1) common portal (website) to provide information for all users (staff, faculty, and community partners) to navigate the placement process; (2) internship office to serve as a support system for faculty and students, and to build consistency among internships across departments and colleges; and (3) shared database (common software program) for all student placements, which will allow users, particularly staff and faculty, to fully appreciate the many facets of each relationship the University has with its community partners. Additionally, to support a system of integrated and coordinated student placement activities, the campus is currently working on defining various types of Engaged Learning (e.g., internship, service learning, and clinical) and internship policy.

*Co-Curricular Engagement*

In 2011, CSUSM developed a Co-Curricular Model (CCM) to create an integrated learning environment where students are empowered to apply the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom through a myriad of intentional learning opportunities. The CCM provides a framework to support integrated learning at CSUSM, serves as a resource to guide the development of co-curricular learning opportunities, and promotes student engagement so that upon graduation, students will be competitive in a global workforce. Grounded in the AAC&U LEAP Initiative, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, and the CSUSM General Education Learning Outcomes, the CCM identifies five student learning outcomes: Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility, Leadership and Interpersonal Development, Career and Professional Development, Critical Thinking and Ethical Reasoning, and Holistic Learning. The model is assessed utilizing existing campus benchmarks and the data collected is utilized to inform the development of programs and services. Presented to over 20 constituent groups, the CCM has received an overwhelmingly positive response from the campus community. The Division of Student Affairs has charged a Co-Curricular Implementation Team to identify strategies to integrate the model across the division. Future plans include partnerships with the Faculty Center and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies Office to ensure broad implementation across the University.

**Graduation**

Historically, only 60% of first-time students entering CSUSM in Fall 2000 returned to campus in Fall 2001. This percentage gradually increased over the years to 75% for the entering class of Fall 2005, which had a corresponding increase in the [6-year graduation rates](http://www.csusm.edu/ipa/ret-graduation/retention-files/2013-retention/ftf_graduation_rates.pdf) from 36% for Fall 2000 entrants to 48% for students entering in Fall 2005. The one-year retention rates declined for the entering classes of 2006 and 2007, as did the six-year rates for these students. However, efforts to improve student success on campus have led to the one-year retention rates increasing steadily, with 82% of the Fall 2013 entering class returning in Fall 2014.

Using the [*Expected Graduation Rate Calculator*](http://www.heri.ucla.edu/GradRateCalculator.php) developed by the Higher Education Research Institute as a benchmarking tool, CSUSM has discovered that students are consistently graduating at higher rates than initially predicted by the CSUSM [Freshman Survey](http://www.csusm.edu/ipa/surveys/cirp.html), which examines student characteristics and experiences. This demonstrates that the programs and initiatives offered on campus are contributing to greater student success.

In 2009, the CSU created the [Graduation Initiative](http://www.csusm.edu/aa/gradinitiative/) with the intent of not only increasing graduation rates by a minimum of six percent for all students by 2015, but to also bring the rates of Underrepresented Minority (URM) students to the same level of non-URM students. Each campus was given a [target](http://www.csusm.edu/aa/gradinitiative/delivery_plan_report_final_122309.pdf) 6-year graduation rate for first-time and transfer students entering in Fall 2009; CSUSM’s rate was set at 45% for first-time students and 71% for transfer students, with equal rates for URM and non-URM students. The university has largely [closed the achievement gap and improved retention and graduation rates](http://www.csusm.edu/ipa/ret-graduation/retention-files/2013-retention/ftf_graduation_rates.pdf) for these students. In addition, CSUSM is producing graduates who recognize the importance of [civic leadership, community action and contributing to the welfare of their community](http://www.csusm.edu/ipa/surveys/nsse.html).

Retention and graduation rates have also improved for graduate students on campus. In 2006, the one-year continuation rate in graduate programs on campus was 74%, and by Fall 2010, this number had increased to 87%. In one year, from Fall 2006 to Fall 2007, the three-year retention rate surged from 59% to 70%. In addition, in a five-year span, from Fall 2006 to Fall 2011, CSUSM decreased the time to degree from 3 years to 2.7 years. [Graduation rates](http://www.csusm.edu/gsr/graduatestudies/documents/csusm_graduate_education_report_fall_2012_final.pdf) have remained stable, between 40 and 45%.

697 (86%) cleared their remediation requirements [359 (93%) of the students needing English only, 74 (85%) of the students needing math only, and 264 (78%) of the students needing both English and math].

**Student Satisfaction**

The vast majority of seniors (87%) responding to the 2014 NSSE gave their experience at CSUSM a “good or excellent” rating, and 80% said that they would choose CSUSM again if they were starting their college experience over. Seniors’ interactions with academic advisors had an average rating of 4.8 on a 7 point Likert scale (with 7 being excellent), their interactions with faculty a 5.5, their interactions with Student Services staff (Career Services, Student Activities, etc.) a 4.9, and their interactions with other administrative staff (Registrar, Financial Aid, etc.) a 5.0.

These findings are echoed in the 2013 College Senior Survey, where three-quarters of respondents said that they were satisfied with their college experience and would choose to enroll at CSUSM if they had to make their college decision again. More than 80% were satisfied with the quality of instruction, major courses, contact with faculty, and class size. These same seniors were likely to be satisfied with the sense of community among students and with the availability of social activities. More than half of seniors responding to the survey came to CSUSM as transfer students.

Findings from the 2014 Alumni Survey show that more than 50% of alumni have given CSUSM a positive recommendation to a prospective student. The survey shows that 57% of recent graduates report being enrolled in or planning to go to graduate school, and 25% of respondents who graduated 5 or more years ago have gone on to earn additional degrees. Finally, more than 80% of respondents are currently working. Subsequently, the vast majority of graduates with advanced degrees report working in a job in line with their career goals.