Southern Connecticut State University

SCSU

Student Success Task Force: 2013-14

Final Report/Recommendations to President Papazian

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Southern Connecticut State University
Student Success Task Force
Executive Summary
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Colleges and universities are in the business of graduating educated students. So, it comes as no surprise that retention and graduation rates are of primary importance to all four-year institutions. In significant ways, colleges and universities are judged by how successfully they move students from prospects to graduates. These two metrics—persistence and time to graduation— frequently reflect the perception of the quality of the learning environment, social culture, co-curricular activities, campus engagement, academic integrity and overall student experience. Southern Connecticut State University is no exception. In the simplest terms, Southern must deliver on its promise: to graduate students timely with the appropriate education and degree.

Graduation rates are a lagging indicator. This means that even as universities adopt new programs and policies to support student progress and bolster graduation rates, the results from these initiatives do not become part of a university's profile or reputation for at least four years (most often six). Southern's most recent data reflect a four-year graduation rate of 17% and a six-year graduation rate of 49%. While these figures have trended slightly upward in recent years, Southern continues to lag behind its competitors and national averages.[1] Immediate and focused attention will be necessary if we are to affect positive change by 2025.

The Work

In January, 2013, President Mary Papazian charged a Student Success Task Force (SSTF) to focus on improving SCSU's year-over-year retention and four- and six-year graduation rates. We considered ways to support all of our undergraduate students—fulltime, part-time and transfers. Graduate and non-degree seeking students were not part of the charge of the Task Force, but many of the recommendations found in this report will, undoubtedly, make a positive impact on our entire student body.

Early in the process it was determined that most of the essential work of the SSTF would be done at the subcommittee level. The nine subcommittees had broad representation[2] and were chaired by a cross-section of the University. They conducted their own research, but also gathered and studied existing information and data from a wide variety of campus resources. The subcommittee chairs came together every few weeks to share and discuss the specific progress and challenges faced by each group. The work accomplished by these committees

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[1] According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* the average rates for all Connecticut public universities are: 4-Year Graduation = 40.6%, 6-year graduation rate = 61.5%. United States Averages for all 4-year public universities are: 4-Year=31.3%, 6-year = 56%.

[2] See committee membership, chairs and contributors listed on page 27 of this report.

became the heart and soul of the SSTF. Accordingly, the reports and recommendations from each subcommittee[3] were used as the foundational material for this final report.

The Recommendations

Contained within this report are recommendations that are primarily data-driven. Additionally, the Task Force also relied on the individual experiences and expertize of those who know and have been part of Southern for several years. In many ways, the SSTF engaged in a kind of self-study, and it is the combination of data analysis coupled with deep and broad institutional knowledge that brought about our recommendations. These recommendations fall into six overlapping and interrelated areas. Taken together and fully implemented, the recommendations will improve and, in some cases, transform the student experience at our institution. It is our intention to catalyze constructive change while building on Southern's firm and timeless foundation articulated in its mission and operationalized by its faculty, staff and administrators.

The SSTF's broad areas of recommendation will:

1. **Advance a Culture of "Student-Centeredness"**

2. **Create a Student Success Center**

3. **Transform Academic Advising**

4. **Modify Academic Programs, Policies & Instruction**

5. **Refresh University Branding & Marketing**

6. **Improve Student Financing & Affordability**

The Results

There is much to consider within these pages. However, generating this report and framing each recommendation represents only a beginning. This work will only be considered a worthwhile investment if every member of the university community identifies his/her opportunity to advance and forward the work. This is a call to action! Student success must touch every part of the University—indeed, we require it in our mission: *"As a student-centered institution, Southern regards student success as its highest priority."*

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[3] See specific tabs for separate reports.

Advance a Culture of Student-Centeredness

Student success is Southern's highest priority. To accomplish our efforts to support students' attainment of degrees and help them realize their academic and personal goals, each and every member of the campus community must become a stakeholder in their success. We must create a culture where students are unquestionably the center of our work. In our interactions and delivery of services, our approach should indicate that they are the reason we come to work every day. As we make decisions about programs, policies, and requirements, we need to ask ourselves if the best interests of students are being met.

Integral to this culture of student-centeredness is having high expectations for students while providing support mechanisms to help students realize those expectations. Student achievement is at the heart of being student-centered. Students come to Southern with dreams of where a college education can take them and they leave with the knowledge, skills and confidence to achieve far more than they originally imagined.

Being student-centered means that students know they matter. When they have a problem, they know where to go for help and they can count on the first person they encounter being enthusiastically responsive. Being student-centered means that students' needs and learning come first. They are our barometer for making decisions. Putting students' first must become the ethos of the university.

The following are recommendations to create a stronger student-centered culture at Southern.

Sense of Belonging
The more we are able to create sense of belonging and identity for students, the less they will want to leave when they hit a bump in the road. Because we are not the first choice for many of our students, we need to be even more intentional about becoming their first and only choice once they arrive. We want them to choose to stay! Responding affirmatively to the question *"I expect that I will graduate from Southern"* is a strong predictor of retention. Nearly every interaction a faculty or staff member has with a student can communicate a message of interest and investment in their progress. They need to know we want them to graduate from Southern. We need to be intentional in our conversations with students to discuss their personal and academic goals and help remove barriers that keep them from pursuing a Southern degree.

Students need to believe that Southern offers them a unique experience that they cannot get somewhere else. They need to make connections, develop relationships, and invest enough of themselves such that they would feel some kind of loss if they departed the university. The Campus and Community Engagement subcommittee recommends that academic units provide an array of both social activities and professional development opportunities to *"provoke interest and education and [to] provide students with a sense of belonging within their departments."* Additionally, encouraging faculty and staff (and perhaps their families) to

participate in co-curricular campus activities allows students to interact with them in a different context and fosters a stronger sense of campus community.

Moreover, Southern's student body is comprised of multiple subpopulations with unique and varying needs. In order to create a stronger sense of belonging, students must have opportunities to build smaller, cohesive communities within the context of the larger Southern experience. This is already being done to some degree, with living-learning communities in the residence halls and with linked courses that create learning communities within the first-year experience. The Honors Program, Athletics Program and Access Programs (e.g., SEOP/EOP), are other good examples of ways the University provides unique support and connection for students sharing similar experiences. However, there are other groups on campus, including students of color and students who identify as LGBTQ, who report feeling marginalized and who believe Southern could be doing more to build an inclusive community. The President's Commission on Climate and Inclusion has been charged with identifying and addressing these issues, and Student Success Task Force looks forward to the recommendations that emerge from this important work.

Student-Centered Service

During the 2012-13 academic year, staff in several service-oriented departments began a grass roots effort to improve customer service. They focused on technological solutions to everyday issues for students and developed principles and practices of good service. Consistent throughout these initiatives is a focus on the student as the most important person on campus. They identified six core values integral to provide superlative customer service to enhance the student experience and encourage students to achieve their educational goals: responsibility, accuracy, effectiveness, empowerment, integrity, and professionalism. This initiative named *SCSU and You: Working Together* offers the foundation for a service delivery movement on campus.

Expanding this initiative to include all of campus will help create a climate that always puts students first. Student-centered service needs to become institutionalized to be the standard for all offices and departments. Each unit needs to identify what this means for its work and create expectations of service delivery for the staff.

Student-centeredness does not promote a customer service philosophy that "students are always right" or that we never say "no." It does not mean that we make exceptions to our policies because a student disagrees or is unhappy with a decision. However, when we deliver a decision that does not feel good to a student, we need to help him/her understand the decision and how it ultimately has the collective best interests of students (and perhaps the university) at the center because of our strong commitment to educating students.

Employee Orientation, Training and Development

To create and sustain a culture of student-centeredness, we must begin when we recruit new employees to the university. Advertisements for open positions should send a clear message that Southern places students as top priority and candidates should be expected to communicate their commitment to students through the interview process as a criteria for selection. The message should be reiterated as employees begin their work. The Navigating the University subcommittee recommends the implementation of an on-boarding process that

provides new employees with an understanding of Southern as a unique place to work. Everyone needs to understand how he/she has an opportunity and responsibility to impact the experience students have at Southern.

Job descriptions need to specify performance expectations that support a culture of student success. Performance evaluations need to reflect the degree to which employees have demonstrated student-centeredness in their work. Employees should be rewarded for their contributions to student success. The Navigating the University subcommittee stated *"employee morale has been on a decline for many years. Employees feel that they are not valued."* A critical component to helping students know they matter is for employees to not only know that they matter but also understand how and why they matter. The Campus and Community Engagement subcommittee suggests that *"honoring staff milestone years and outstanding services would enhance the sense of identity and pride among staff, thus fostering a stronger campus connection."*

We need to utilize every opportunity and available means to promote institutional culture change. We need to consider new opportunities for training and development, institutional messaging and promotion, program development, and service delivery to create an unequivocal belief that Southern facilitates and supports student and employee success.

University Ombudsman
Students frequently express concern that they do not know where to turn for answers or how to solve problems. The University can feel like a big maze that is difficult to navigate. The Navigating the University subcommittee recommends reviving the university ombudsman position to provide confidential and informal assistance to students. The ombudsman's role is to provide information, answer questions, assist in the resolution of concerns, address critical situations, and otherwise help students navigate the complexity of the university. The office should be centrally located, highly visible, and well publicized so students know where to seek assistance. Faculty and staff can refer students to the ombudsman when they are not able to identify a more appropriate office to assist the student.

Hours of Operation
Students attend classes beginning as early as 7:05 am and end as late as 10:10 pm Monday through Friday as well as throughout the day on Saturday and Sunday. On-line courses are becoming increasingly popular and will grow in demand as students want greater flexibility in when they can take classes. Some students rarely step foot on campus during the traditional workday when offices are most likely to be open. While some key service areas remain open until 6:00 pm one night a week, additional consideration needs to be given to student demand for services beyond the traditional workweek (Navigating the Campus subcommittee).

With every faculty and staff member taking responsibility for the small and big ways they can positively influence the student experience, support their learning in and out of the classroom, and help them progress to graduation, Southern should soon become known as the institution where students come first!

Recommendation #2:

Create a Student Success Center

Other challenges for students are that they do not know which office provides which service, services are scattered around campus, and they do not have the time to navigate the complexity of the university to find the resources they need to support their success. In too many cases, we have gaps in what we offer or offices are not well informed of each other's services causing students to fall through our bureaucratic cracks. These barriers lead students to stop out, drop out, or transfer from Southern. There seems little doubt that we have opportunities to improve the ways we provide support for our students in their challenges to progress and earn their degrees.

The Student Support Services Committee recommends the establishment of a Student Success Center (SSC) that will house a comprehensive set of programs and services to support student transitions and academic success. A quick Google search identified dozens of colleges and universities of different missions and sizes who have established student success centers. While they vary somewhat in the services they provide, a focus on students' academic success is the common denominator.

Southern's Student Success Center will provide a physical and virtual place on campus where students can find help to identify and solve their problems. Ideally, these services will be co-located as much as possible. While that may be challenging in the short run, having a single location will minimize students' confusion about where to go to get the help they need. Additionally, it will increase the cooperation between the support areas and with the faculty. We recommend including a Student Success Center in the master facilities planning work that is soon to be commenced.

Regardless of the physical location, staff in units comprising the Student Success Center must work closely together to provide integrated programs and services. Moreover, they need to educate the campus community on their services to ensure others can make appropriate referrals to their offices

Under shared leadership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, the Student Success Center will be comprised of five primary areas of focus: student transition support, learning support, disability accommodations, academic and career advising, and academic interventions and enhancement. Below is a description of programs and services within these focus areas that are recommended to be included. Developing an organizational structure and staffing units was not considered in the scope of this report.

Student Transition Support

Student Transition Support will focus on the multiple points of transition that students experience. Beginning with orientation, our first-year and transfer students must have a strong introduction to their Southern experience. First-year orientation has a solid foundation and must continue to be enhanced to remain a dynamic and viable program. While we have a solid beginning for our transfer orientation, it requires more investment of time and energy throughout the campus community. We need to identify the requirements necessary to make it

a mandatory experience for all students with academic advising as a key component. Furthermore, it must be offered for students entering the university in any semester. Our summer and fall orientation programs for all new students must continue to be current and relevant. The Pre-Campus Readiness group recommended the following areas be addressed to better prepare students for their academic experience: reading a variety of syllabi, time management practices, and SCSU computer systems such Blackboard and MySCSU.

First-year Students

To create a strong foundation for their entire Southern experience, we must build on the success of our First-Year Experience program to continue to meet the changing needs of our first-year students. It is also critical that we continue our commitment to access, perhaps through the participation in new federal (e.g., TRiO) and state access programs. Living-learning communities provide substantial opportunities to provide stronger connections for students through their living experience around common areas of interest and/or study. The expansion of the peer mentor program into the second semester would help to extend the connections students established through the INQ course during the fall. Through the Student Success Center, first-year students will develop even stronger foundations for success to help them progress far beyond their first year.

Second-year Students

Additionally, the Student Success Center will provide unique support to students in their second year, especially those not yet connected to an academic department. After receiving a high level of support and intervention in the first year, students can feel lost as they navigate the university on their own. The majority of second-year students live off campus and do not have the support of the residence life staff they might have had in their first year. Moreover, students who have not yet declared a major (and even some who have) are not yet connected to an academic department and others may be rethinking their initial choice of major. Thus, to complement a new academic advising model that will support students' academic progress (detailed later in this report), the Student Success Center will provide programs and services to help second-year students connect with each other and resources on campus, explore and declare their major, prepare for their upper-level pursuits, and remove barriers to progress toward their degrees.

Transfer Students

While we have focused significantly on the transition of first-year students into Southern, we have been less attentive to our transfer students. The Research subcommittee notes, *"the data show that transfer students are more likely to graduate than native SCSU students, and that within those who transfer, those who graduate are more likely to transfer in an average of forty-five credits."* They recommend actively recruiting transfer students and lowering barriers to entry. The Pre-Campus Readiness subcommittee supports the Transfer Task Force (December, 2012) recommendation to form a transfer student office to help support their transition into the university. Southern needs a comprehensive approach to transfer students that supports their academic, social, and personal needs.

Strong relationships with our primary feeder community colleges are critical to helping those students make seamless transitions into the university. Continuing to improve our work with transfer articulation with an emphasis on comparability instead of equivalency will allow students to take only the courses they need for degree completion at Southern (Academic Programs and Policies subcommittee). As students who transfer with a larger number of credit hours are more likely to complete their bachelor's degrees, students may be advised to complete their associate degree before transferring and their LEP requirements should then be waived (Academic Programs and Policies subcommittee). Consideration should be given to forming a transfer student living-learning community, a transfer student organization, and a chapter of Tau Sigma, the national transfer student honorary. The Transfer Student Task Force Report provides several additional recommendations to support transfer students' academic success.

A focus on student transitions must also emphasize strong relationships between staff in the Student Success Center units and those who support the overall experiences of special populations like University Access Programs, Veterans and Military Services, and International Education. The Pre-Campus Readiness subcommittee also encourages intentional interventions and support for students who identify as having unique, special needs.

Learning Support

Students' responses to a variety of surveys indicate that they are not receiving the academic support they need to be successful at Southern. Additionally, with more than 50% of entering first-year students needing at least one remedial course in math or English and a large number of courses in which more than 40% of the students earn a D, F, or W, our current services cannot provide adequate support.

Currently, academic support for students is offered through Tutoring Services, the Writing Center, and Study Skills Enhancement staffed by one full-time and one part-time employee. Per the Student Support Services subcommittee, the staff and programs for learning support must grow to meet the needs of Southern students. Tutoring services need to be expanded to include additional courses where students indicate higher rates of poor performance. Consideration must be given to new approaches to learning support including supplemental instruction, on-line tutoring, academic success coaches, weekday and weekend study skills courses, academic mentoring, structured learning assistance, study buddy services, and on-line delivery of support materials (e.g., podcasts). The Pre-Campus Readiness subcommittee recommends developing workshops, institutes, and boot camps for new students to help them prepare for college-level work.

With better staffing and greater visibility come better opportunities for departmental partnerships to support students' academic success. Learning support and Residence Life staff need to collaborate to consider ways to offer learning support in the residence halls. Athletic Academic Support Services will have a stronger working relationship with the learning support staff to maximize resources and provide the best possible support to student athletes. The staff will work closely with their colleagues in International Education to assess the distinctive learning needs of international students.

Disability Support

The Student Success Center also provides an opportunity to create greater synergies between disability support, academic advising, transition support and learning support to better integrate students with disabilities into the life of the campus and make resources more readily available to them. For example, the tutoring needs of students with disabilities can be enhanced by learning support staff to expand offerings and include special training for tutors to understand the unique learning needs of students with disabilities (Student Support Services subcommittee).

Academic and Career Advising

Good advising may be the single most overlooked characteristic of a successful college experience[4]. For Southern students, this perhaps is even more relevant. Students need strong guidance and support to help them navigate curricular requirements, plan their paths to graduation, and prepare for their chosen careers. Academic advising is addressed in the next recommendation as one of the central recommendations. A new model of advising should take into consideration the interrelatedness of academic and career advising and the value of imbedding career development and planning into the advising role.

Academic Interventions and Enhancement

Academic interventions and enhancement focuses on processes and programs that are currently in place or will need to be developed or enhanced to prevent students from failing to reach their academic potential or help them recover when they do. The Student Success Center provides a structure to house staff who are fully dedicated to these efforts.   Areas to be included are remediation and support for underprepared students, Satisfactory Academic Progress, early warning intervention, academic probation support, withdrawal services, and other services designed to help struggling students make progress toward their degrees.

Further assessment and study is required to establish specific structures and staffing for programs and services identified for inclusion in the Student Success Center.   There are great models on other campus that might inform our work. In addition to those units that will be housed in the SSC, there are many others across campus who support the success of students and will need to be closely aligned with the work of the Student Success Center including, but not limited to, Information Technology, Buley Library, Counseling Services, Student Health Center, Student Life, Office of Residence Life, Registrar's Office, Office of Financial Aid, and Bursar's Office.

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[4] Light, R. J. (2001). *Making the most out of college: Students speak their minds.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Recommendation #3:

Transform Academic Advising

For decades, experts have amassed a significant body of research[5] which clearly demonstrates that student success can be improved through robust, consistent and informed academic advising. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*[6] reinforces that, in the current competitive climate, Universities nationwide are actively ramping-up their advising programs to improve retention.

The SSTF recognizes this strong correlation between academic advising and retention evidenced by our NSSE results, registration percentages and ample anecdotal evidence. Further, this evidence supports the desirability of significant cultural and operational changes to support student success (retention and time-to-graduation). The Advising subcommittee of the SSTF calls for a *"supportive advising culture at Southern and a commitment of all SCSU employees in the belief that the students are our customers."* Further, they recommend that the University should transition *"to a proactive approach"* to advising rather than reactive. In short the SSFT recommends:

> *Establishing a supportive advising culture at Southern Connecticut State University designed to improve student satisfaction and retention. This will be fulfilled by creating a University wide policy for academic advisement with a cohesive set of advising guidelines and supports.* (Advising subcommittee)

This critical transition should not be implemented incrementally, but rather, SCSU's advising program should undergo substantive transformation. This transformation includes:

- Revitalization of SCSU's advising mission, purpose and policies;
- An advising structure to better support first- and second-year students;
- Essential training to support those who wish to serve as first- and second-year advisors, including utilization of advising tools such as EAB;
- Incentives to reward faculty and staff who wish to participate in the new advising program.

The University should advance a new mission/vision of advising that emphasizes SCSU's educational values and shared responsibility of the student and advisor. Additionally, it should underscore the importance of student involvement in all areas of University life, encouraging a holistic approach for the student experience.

The Advising sub-committee of the SSTF recommends that,

> *While attending the University, students will have no more than two advisors: freshman/sophomore adviser before moving [to] a Major Advisor.*

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[5] Academic Advising Resources offer sample
[6] Chronicle of Higher Education, December 6, 2013

One way to implement this structure would be to create of a cadre of Master Advisers (MADs) to address the unique needs of our first- and second-year students. MADs could be full-time faculty or staff that would undergo specific training and would remain the student's adviser for the first two years (while the student pursues LEP requirements and major prerequisites). This would mean that all students will be guaranteed a stable adviser (MAD) to support them during the first two years of study regardless of how many times they change their major or area of interest.[7] Assignments of MADs could be in association with INQ courses or by area of student's primary interest (school, department or discipline).

The University may consider revising a portion of the administrative structure, inserting dedicated first- and second-year directors at the center of the process to ensure MADs are supported and properly trained. (One of the directors might focus on the unique challenges of first-year students while the other on the sophomore experience/choosing a major.)

Faculty who are not MADs will become Major Advisers (MJRs). MJRs will be assigned to students as they declare a major. After students successfully complete 60 credit hours, they would "cut the umbilical cord" with their MADs and move to their MJRs as uniformly as possible across the University each spring.

These basic principles would lay a groundwork from which the newly imagined advising system would emerge. This type of system would reinforce University priorities by actively emphasizing continuity and support during the first two years of a student's career.

1. Housed in the newly formed Student Success Center, the advising structure and its directors would:

    - Ensure consistency and continuity
    - Provide continued training
    - Assure programmatic integrity
    - Develop reliable/ongoing assessment of system
    - Develop/integrate/update program's advising tools

2. ~60-65 MADs (combination of faculty and staff), will be a primary contact for first and second year students. Responsibilities might include:

    - Maintain an advising load of 20 first-year students, 20 sophomores (40 total)
    - Meet with advisees 2-3 times each semester
    - Have the unique ability to registration PINs to assigned advisees[8]
    - Assist in passing the rising sophomores (~20) to MJRs each spring semester.

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[7] Data show that by the end of their first year 25% of all college freshman change their mind about their field of study. Another 50% of first-year students say that plan to change majors (UCLA Research) Selingo, J.J., 2013. *College (Un)bound*. Pg. 145 New Harvest, Boston.

[8] PINs are currently needed by all undergraduates but, under the current system, a student registration PIN can be issued by any faculty/professional advisor as well as many clerical staff. With so many ways to obtain a PIN there is little incentive for students to meet with their assigned advisor.

3. MADs will remain the student's primary advisor for two years. As students settle on their intended major during their sophomore year, the University will create a mechanism to transition all second-year students to the MJR during the spring semester of their second year.

4. Most faculty who are not MADs will remain Major Advisers (MJRs).

5. The Academic and Career Advising Center would, very likely, be part of the MAD initiative but also could be dedicated to working with transfer students, late admits, part time, readmits, and a variety of very specialized student needs (i.e.: Interdisciplinary Studies).

This new structure places MADs at the center of this University initiative. How this program might interface, augment and enhance the current advising system and SCSU's professional advisors is beyond the scope of this report and further study is needed. Moreover, choosing highly motivated, energetic faculty and staff to participate in this program would be crucial to its success. Appointment to a MAD is a distinction that would need to be substantively reflected in faculty reviews. The current CBA stipulates, *"all students will be given adequate advising by members during registration and throughout the school year to assure the pursuit of sound educational objectives."* Even so, it is likely that incentives would need to be offered MADs and should be commensurate with the time/effort required to do the work and reflect the value that the University places on this new responsibility.[9]

Reimaging the academic advising mission and structure for Southern will require collaboration and cooperation from many units across our campus. It cannot happen overnight, nor should it. But if we aspire to be an exemplary student-centered comprehensive university focused on the educational transformation of our students, then outstanding advising must become one of our hallmarks. We must endeavor to provide direction and purpose to the Southern experience by helping to shape the intellectual development of students and creating pathways to a successful university experience.

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[9] Considerations include, altering the CBA recognition for advising from *Service* to *Teaching*, offering reassign time and/or additional payment.

Recommendation #4:

Modify Academic Programs, Policies & Instruction

There is strong evidence, including both internal and external data, which supports a link between the credit load requirements of SCSU's academic programs and timely progress toward completion of degree. Further, when looking at individual programs—university and departmental—the educational pathways and policies must be flexible enough so that students can seamlessly negotiate various paths toward graduation. Too often SCSU has created unintentional obstacles for students; these obstacles include but are not limited to, overly restrictive academic policies, unnecessary prerequisites, single-course bottlenecks, curricular sprawl and an ambitious Liberal Education Program.

Immediate attention should be paid to ensure that all academic programs can be negotiated by qualified students efficiently and timely. Streamlining and simplifying some academic processes in addition to adjusting the credit load in specific programs will reduce unnecessary friction between student progress and appropriate academic standards.

Liberal Education Program (LEP)

The LEP, in its current form, requires a minimum of 48-51 credit hours (depending on course choice and major), in addition to three writing intensive classes which can add as many as nine additional credit hours. Compared to many other GenEd or LEP programs, SCSU requires substantially more credit hours.[10] However, "minimum credit hours" only tell part of the story, for minimum assumes that all of our students are ready to take the appropriate college math, English and 200-level foreign language. The reality is that many of our students require 6-12 hours of additional prerequisites in order to take the courses that will finally satisfy the LEP.

Additionally, the LEP has a considerable number of major-specific requirements for certain programs; courses required by the major but also designated to meet specific LEP learning goals. This can cause a hardship/additional credits for students who, upon changing their major, find they have completed credits which no longer can be applied to their new program.[11] (Program and Policy subcommittee)

The result for our students is that the LEP can often consume more than half of the total hours required for graduation (>60 credit hours). Not surprisingly, this results in students needing more time to complete their requirements. While every school develops its own unique general education requirements, appropriate to its students' needs, SCSU should look carefully at our LEP program with the goal of retaining its philosophies and structure while reducing the total number of required or implied credit hours.

There are many actions, alterations and outright changes that could help streamline and add flexibility to the LEP. While the SSTF does not offer specific programmatic recommendations, it

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[10] Traditionally, the general education or LEP requirements consume ~33% of a student's overall schedule (40 credit hours). In many of the highest quality liberal arts colleges, liberal learning requirements range between 30-36 credits.

[11] Refer to footnote #4.

encourages a prompt and thorough review of the LEP with the intent reducing its curricular footprint. Some questions that might be asked during this review include:

- Are all of the current Areas of Knowledge crucial to the LEP?
- Is there unnecessary overlap/redundancy in any area of the LEP?
- Should the LEP differentiate between a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Science?
- What are the potential unintended consequences for student progress of embedding specific program requirements in the LEP?
- Can some LEP competencies be satisfied through accelerated or self-paced learning?

The SSTF recognizes that reducing the required credit load in the LEP is a challenge. Like many of the SSTF recommendations, it will require collaboration, cooperation and considerable institutional will. But the potential benefits are great and multi-faceted—impacting student success, student perception and new-student recruitment.

Departmental Programs Size & Shape

Historically, the university experience has made the promise (both implicit and explicit), that students who successfully complete 15 hours of course work each of 8 consecutive semesters (four academic years) could graduate with bachelor's degree. The resulting 120 hours of course work would allow for completion of the general education program, appropriate electives, perhaps a minor and at least one major. More recently, some accrediting agencies have upped the ante, requiring more credits within specific disciplines in order to achieve a degree. Moreover, many programs at SCSU have allowed the natural expansion of program curricula to create a situation where, even if students are "college ready" and actively pursue a single major early-on in their career, program size/shape still make graduating in four years a challenge.[12]

The Academic Program and Policy subcommittee states, *"There are programs with heavy credit loads that typically require students longer than four years to complete … this prolonged course of study often implies a higher chance of student attrition."* While in some cases accrediting agencies drive program requirements, most often individual departments are in control.

When we look carefully at the number of credit hours that students actually take in order to graduate from a particular program, the data is clear: students do not graduate from SCSU with 120-125 earned credit hours; they often end up taking many more. In fact, there are 12 academic programs on campus which took students over 140 credits [on average] to complete.[13] (Academic Program and Policy subcommittee)

While reducing program size and/or changing its shape (paths to graduation) is challenging, it is a task that SCSU should embrace and operationalize immediately. Some general actions might include:

- Streamlining departmental curricula;
- Reducing the total number of program requirements, prerequisites and/or cognates;
- Allowing for greater curricular flexibility by specially identifying multiple paths to graduation;
- Adjusting course rotation and strengthening departmental advising.

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[12] Refer to table in Academic Programs and Policies Appendix.
[13] These are students who began as freshman and graduated from Southern.

Pedagogical Innovation

The Instruction and Learning subcommittee offers several powerful recommendations that could positively impact student retention and graduation rates. Their well-researched and faculty-centered report brings important contributions to the broad discussion of how we might enhance student success. As we look at the future of higher education and the steep challenges that face every institution, it becomes clear that some traditional approaches to teaching and learning need to evolve and to be augmented by new/emerging methods. (Instruction and Learning Subcommittee)

While Southern will always value the in-class/on-ground experience, it is time that the university invests purposefully and deeply in more progressive and flexible modes of teaching and learning. Offering a quality classroom experience is the heart and soul of Southern, but reimagining what constitutes a "classroom" and how best to actively engage our current and future students will require us to change. Students have many options in the current educational marketplace—there is no longer one-and-only-one preferred way to receive a quality education. Our competitors regionally and nationally are investing in innovative teaching and learning practices[14] that, over time, will transform the landscape of higher education. Southern should actively pursue these new practices—both proven and experimental. Some include:

- Expand online offerings;
- Create/expand hybrid and blended course offerings;
  - This model is proving effective and could be a distinctive hallmark at Southern
- Develop self-paced learning strategies (see Math below);
- Embrace new pedagogical strategies.

As articulated by the Instruction and Learning subcommittee—if Southern is to succeed in transforming a meaningful portion of its classes, an investment in new technologies, training and technical support will be required.

Math

The Math department has begun a transformation in how they will address remedial/introductory course offerings. A faculty subcommittee ably led by Dr. T. Bennett, has forwarded a report and new program initiatives[15] designed to allow many of our students to move more efficiently through certain classes. The opening pages of this incisive and well-researched report offer many insights to the important relationship between math competency and student retention:

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[14] New modes of teaching and learning are elegantly and artfully discussed in *College (Un)bound* by Jeffrey J. Selingo (Part II, The Disruption) New Harvest, Boston. These techniques are well positioned to be embraced by quality universities across the country and around the world.

[15] Math Report: *Developmental Math at SCSU*, is appended to this report.

…students with an SAT math score below 450 are placed into MAT 095, which accounts for approximately 42.7% of our incoming freshmen class. About 25.7% of this freshman class is at the upper end of the MAT 095 placement with SAT math scores between 400 and 449 … students with SAT math scores below 320 are of particular concern. Rick Riccardi provided us with data for the freshman cohort of Fall 2010 and Fall 2011 who had SAT math scores 400 or lower (N = 438), and we analyzed the overall retention rate of these students (i.e., whether or not they are still registered as a matriculated student in Fall 2013) and also analyzed their pass rate the first time that they took MAT 095. The percentage of this group of students that are no longer taking courses at SCSU is 45.89%. If we narrow the data to just those students with an SAT math score between 200 and 320, we find that 66.66% of those students have not been retained.

The final report recommendations are consistent with some of the curricular innovations discussed earlier in this section. Of particular note is the "math emporium" model that will significantly change the pedagogical approach to math instruction. While this model is not new to higher education, its promising structure will provide SCSU a new way to help our students achieve the necessary math competencies efficiently and effectively. The final goal is to help students who are challenged by math to move through the broader LEP more quickly. The SSTF endorses and supports these initiatives and encourages other programs to study this progressive model of instruction.

Writing Program

Strong writing skills are a hallmark of the well-educated individual. Universities invest vast resources to ensure students develop the writing skills they need to succeed on their academic journey and beyond. The Instruction and Learning subcommittee identifies where SCSU might need to focus energy and resources:

…SCSU faculty tend to lament students' poor writing skills. At the same time, students get mixed messages about how to write properly, which citation system to use, and how to revise their work … They [students] are often unclear about expectations for college-level work and experience faculty with multiple teaching styles and varying levels of helpfulness out of class … A more concerted effort is needed to train faculty in designing learning activities, writing to learn, offering effective student feedback, peer evaluation processes, reflective writing, and quick and ungraded learning assessments.

Southern's most recent report on *Undergraduate Students' Learning and Developmental Outcomes* reveals:

In regard to students' quality of writing on their Critical Thinking papers, their work contained errors, which did not hinder comprehension but might have distracted the raters as they read the papers. On the Cultural Expressions assessment, student writing tended to be rated as 'competent' or above less than 25% of the time.

Currently, the writing requirements at SCSU consist of one English composition course (ENG 112) and three additional Writing Intensive classes taught at various levels by faculty across the University (Writing Across the Curriculum/WAC). The WAC program is one part of Southern's decentralized writing initiative with administrative duties divided between the WAC Co-

Directors and the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee (WACC). Additionally, the university offers support services for writing through the Writing Center which also has a Director.

While each of these positions has specific responsibilities and does much of the heavy-lifting to help promote/improve our writing instruction and student outcomes, it was revealed at a recent meeting between the Director of Composition, the Co-Directors of WAC and the Chair of WACC that, 'Southern lacks a structurally sound/unified university writing program.' This sentiment was echoed/amplified by consultant Martha A. Townsend,[16] who, in her letter of Februrary 6th, 2014 addressed *"…some of the issues … that SCSU's WAC program is struggling with presently."* The following bullet points are excerpted from her letter:

- *Little coordination between Composition, writing in the liberal education program (Gen Ed) and WAC courses; goals that might link them are fairly loose.*
- *Attention to critical reading is lacking.*
- *Students aren't required to take a writing intensive course in their major field of study.*
- *The University Writing Program has no vertical/hierarchical structure.*
- *Faculty development for writing is occasionally available [but] limited and not required.*

Townsend concludes, *"…these <u>are</u> problems that interfere with the Program's—and students'—success.*

The SSTF recommends that immediate action be initiated to bring structure, stability and centralized leadership to our University Writing Program. While there are many models that could be employed to improve our current decentralized structure, a bottom-up approach that links student learning in early composition courses to an integrated/vertical writing program is crucial. To transform and operationalize this program, the SSTF recommends that all aspects of the new writing program be organized under a new position: University Writing Program Director. Working closely with Director of Freshman Composition, the Writing Program Director would report to the Provost (or appropriate dean) and would be specifically charged with creating a sustainable administrative and curricular structure to unify the Writing Program and improve overall student writing and learning outcomes.

Policy Adjustments

While many of the recommendations in this section of the SSTF report focus on larger curricular/programmatic concerns, there are several policy recommendations provided by the SSTF subcommittees that could reduce friction, eliminate unnecessary obstacles and open administrative avenues for select students. In some ways, these policy adjustments might be considered "low-hanging fruit" which could be implemented in a relatively tight time-frame. Some of these policy adjustments might include:

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[16] Townsend's letter of February 6th, 2014 can be found in appendix: Instruction and Learning

- Modify grade replacement policy
  - Change 15 credit maximum to 5 courses (due to many 4-credit courses);
  - Remove original grade from transcript to support students pursuing state certification;
  - Automatically allow grade replacement as students register for classes.

- Align the University Withdrawal Policy with the deadline for course withdrawals (10 weeks), to provide consistency and accountability. After 10 weeks, all university withdrawals must be due to "extenuating circumstances" and approved by an appropriate university representative.

- Standardize times/days of class offerings to help minimize scheduling conflicts.

- Implement greater flexibility within existing policies/administrative actions.
  - Given that Southern supports a very large percentage of small classes (10-25 students), when the room size allows for additional seats, programs should routinely override one to two students into high-demand sections.
  - Whenever educationally sound, departments should allow appropriate course substitutions to seniors who have earned more than 120 hours but may be missing one course requirement.

SCSU defines itself in its mission statement as "student-centered." With this in mind, the SSTF encourages the University to actively look for other administrative actions that will simplify and support our students' experiences and help them toward timely graduation.

Recommendation #5:

Refresh University Branding & Marketing

How Southern is perceived by our prospective students, their friends, advisors, guidance counselors, families, professional associates and the broader academic community is critical to our student success. It is our image that often determines the quality of students we attract, their attitude and their overall expectation of success.

Gone are the days when state universities can attract students by simply being "an affordable alternative" or a school that "accepts a broad range" of high-school graduates. Market forces, changing demographics and intense competition now exert serious pressures on colleges and universities to offer unique and high-quality educational experiences. It is clear that Southern has not developed a defining brand that distinguishes us from our competition. This means that our students are not often coming to Southern *because* we are Southern. And, by extension, they are not compelled to approach their career at Southern with the anticipation and urgency that come from high expectations and the explicit promise of delivering a well-defined educational experience.

Some universities develop a brand or reputation over time that provides definition in ways that may be unintentional—both positively and negatively. Harvard, Yale, Brown, "the Ivy Leagues" are all defined by their historical reputation. The expectations of students who are accepted to these schools have clear ideas (accurate or not) of their four-year academic journey. However, many schools need to develop/define a specific brand to attract the appropriate students to their doorstep. Artistic academies (CalArts), for-profit institutes (University of Phoenix), colleges of activism (Oberlin) and highly progressive universities (Carnegie Mellon) have intentionally created/expanded their brand to target groups of potential students.

While Southern has no clear brand to help attract its share of the market, the University has much to trumpet: superb student/faculty ratio, small class size, large number of majors, opportunities for undergraduate research, centers of academic excellence, vital on-campus culture, etc. By not capitalizing on and marketing our strengths, we are at the mercy of others who will define our reputation for us.

The SSTF does not recommend a narrow definition of branding and marketing to segregate or diminish our potential market, but rather, capitalizing on our inherent strengths and developing high-quality marketing materials that will bring the best and brightest students to our campus. In many ways, we must become more like successful private schools—attracting students to the quality experience that Southern can offer and then, *delivering* on this experience so that Southern becomes a school of choice. It is important to note that students who attend their first-choice school are much more likely to persist and graduate.

While it is beyond the scope of the SSTF to research, develop and recommend one specific brand for Southern, capitalizing our "student-centered culture" could resonate with a wide variety of students. But no matter what brand (or center of excellence) is chosen, we must *deliver* on our promise. Recommended by the Pre-Campus Readiness and Campus and Community Engagement subcommittees, here are a few specific ways that SCSU might reach out to prospective students and our community to strengthen our reputation:

- Foster stronger relationships with local and regional school administrators;
- Continue/expand guidance counselor open house opportunities;
- Redouble our undergraduate open house experiences;
  - Focus on general themes and/or programs (i.e., Technology, STEM, Business, etc.)
- Create high-quality, branded marketing materials for the university, schools, departments and programs;
  - Printed materials, one-sheets, etc.
  - Professionally produced promotional video
  - Continued website improvements
- Continue implementation of the Common Application platform to simplify, broaden and strengthen the application process;
- Grow scholarships for deserving students;
- Develop clear and consistent messages for all who represent the University;
  - Identify specific strengths to promote, publicize and repeat
  - Script phrases/ideas that faculty, staff and administrators can easily use when representing the University
- Develop proactive advertisement and publicity efforts;
  - Increase local advertisement efforts to highlight our roles as employer, neighbor, advisor, and educator
  - Highlight our rich history of leadership and service to the local community
  - Promote community access to sporting events, cultural events, and other programs through public schools as well as the local media
- Create a "community day" to welcome campus and community families to learn more about Southern.

Much of the work we do to improve our educational experience for students takes several years to impact the University's persistence and graduation rates. Reputation and perception also take time to change. Indeed, reputation is a lagging indicator, so the University must begin this process with diligence and urgency in order to glean and benefit in the near-term.

Recommendation #6:

Improve Student Financing and Affordability

Affordability of college is a critical issue for higher education today. As indicated by the Access and Affordability subcommittee, *"in today's climate of rising tuition costs and escalating student debt, perception of college affordability can be an initial barrier to enrollment and persistence."* For many Southern students, the ability to pay for college is of utmost concern. Indeed, financial challenges are a reason cited by many students for stopping out or dropping out of college.

A large percentage of Southern students apply and qualify for financial aid. For the 2011-12 academic year, eighty-one percent of Southern students received some type of financial aid, with thirty-eight percent of those receiving a Pell grant. Moreover, eighty-four percent of our students graduate with debt. Selingo writes in *College (un)bound*, *"While a college degree might make good economic sense, one at any cost doesn't. Education debt may be good debt, but even too much of a good thing can hurt you. Excessive borrowing is the biggest problem facing higher education, and it hurts everyone."* (p. 51).[17] With the availability of federal and state financial aid shrinking, students are struggling to fund a college degree. Sometimes they can cobble together funding for a semester or two but are unable to pay for subsequent semesters and depart the university.

A commitment to students' success requires a commitment to their financial well-being. The following recommendations provide a strategic approach to optimizing our resources to support students' progress toward a degree.

Financial Literacy

Students need to be better educated on managing the finances of a higher education. Southern must continue to make it a priority to provide financial aid counseling and support. To help students make informed financial decisions, we need to simplify materials, personalize messages, and streamline processes. The Access and Affordability subcommittee recommends making student debt management a priority by hiring a financial planner. This person would help students create financial plans, understand their options for bill payment, and navigate the scholarship waters. A primary function for the financial planner would be financial education with a focus on credit card and student loan debt, budgeting skills, loan repayment, loan forgiveness, financial savings, and federal tax credit basics. The financial planner would work collaboratively across campus to raise the awareness about and provide education around student financial literacy.

Financial Aid Awards

Southern must be strategic in how financial aid is awarded to students. The Access and Affordability subcommittee recommends using financial aid leveraging as a tool to award university grant funding to students most likely to graduate in a timely way. As the Pre-Campus Readiness team explored ways to better attract and support students as they enter the

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[17] Selingo, J.J., (2013). *College (un)bound*. New Harvest, Boston.

university, they recommended increasing scholarship money, especially for high-achieving students who we retain at higher rates than other students. Increasing our enrollment would also allow us to increase the number of merit scholarships we are eligible to award (Access and Affordability subcommittee).

In the long run, our ability to raise funds to support student scholarships through the capital campaign will significantly impact our ability to better meet the gap in financial need too many students experience.

Student Employment

A large number of Southern students work to support their educational pursuits. For many, working negatively impacts their progress to a degree. The 2011 NSSE report found that the more hours a student indicated working off-campus, the lower his/her grade point average tended to be. Moreover, working off campus is negatively correlated with retention.   Working commuters tend to be on campus only when they have a class which prevents them from engaging in the life of the university in ways that would help them create a stronger Southern identity.   While we are not able to provide enough financial support to all students to eliminate their need to work, we might be able to change the trajectory of their academic pursuits by employing them on-campus. Working on campus often provides greater flexibility in scheduling and offers a point of engagement for some students who do not otherwise have a place where they feel connected.

The Access and Affordability and Research subcommittees both recommend increasing our financial investment in on–campus employment and paid internships for students. The Campus and Community Engagement subcommittee recommends supporting *"community engagement work study and student worker opportunities"* that would provide financial support while offering meaningful experiential learning and service experiences for students. We need to avoid further reductions in student employment funds, explore barriers to student employment opportunities (e.g., food services), identify opportunities to invest additional resources in student employment, create a more seamless process to find and secure on-campus jobs, and provide meaningful work experiences that support students' learning and connection to the university.   Additionally, for students working in roles that interface with other students, they need to be trained on standards of service delivery consistent with other employees.

Additional Expenses

Beyond providing more financial resources to students, we must be attentive to ways we can reduce the cost of a higher education. The Access and Affordability subcommittee recommends two areas for investigation to potentially reduce expenses. First, reducing the costs of textbooks for students would increase the likelihood they obtain the required resources for their classes. The cost of textbooks has risen astronomically in the last several years. Students sometimes do not purchase a text for a class because they cannot afford it. While the university has a book scholarship program, it can only support a small fraction of students who struggle to afford their textbooks. Additionally, some faculty members make textbooks available in the library. The

used books and book rental programs offered through the bookstore do provide alternatives to purchasing new texts, but are still cost prohibitive to some students. We must continue to explore new and better options for students to access less expensive textbook including e-books and free digital open source textbooks.

Secondly, Southern must continue to be sensitive to the cost of meal plans, especially as a requirement to live in the residence halls. A survey of sixteen northeastern universities indicated that Southern has the fourth most expensive meal plan, including the most expensive of the CSUs.   Many students also complain that the plans for on-campus students who live in units with kitchens do not offer sufficient flexibility to meet their needs. Not only do meal plans help to ensure that students have access to food (as we know that food insecurity is increasing among college students), eating on campus also encourages engagement between students and with other members of the campus community. The costs of meal plans should not be a barrier to choosing to live on campus or otherwise being able to eat on campus. The SSTF supports current efforts underway to consider new meal plan options for next year.

The cost of a Southern education is a key consideration for students in their ability to progress and graduate. They must value the return on their investment. The more we can do to manage costs, increase financial literacy, and provide financial assistance, the more likely students will realize their educational and career goals.

Conclusion

These six themes offer a significant number of recommendations presented in the subcommittee reports. While these themes represent the majority of the recommendations put forth by the subcommittees, they are not all inclusive. Below are a few additional themes that will also make a positive impact on student success. Additionally, there are a handful of recommendations that are not included in this summary report. It would behoove the campus community to read the detail in the subcommittee reports to better understand the nuances of the recommendations and gain a complete understanding of each area.

Child Care

SCSU previously had a day care on campus and later partnered with a center near campus to provide affordable care to students. Currently, there is a very small amount of money made available to a handful of students to help pay for daycare. The Student Success Task Force, through the work of the Research and Pre-Campus Readiness subcommittees, recommends that Southern has a day care center. Not only would it support the success of students who are parents of young ones, but it would also offer a unique educational experience for students in our early childhood education program.

Community Engagement

Southern is committed to being a strong citizen in the surrounding communities and beyond. The Campus and Community Engagement subcommittee identified a variety of approaches to increase Southern's engagement with the local community and support students' personal and professional success. To provide a hub for this work, they recommend developing an Office of Experiential Learning to provide *"a place where faculty, staff, students, and alumni can work together with community partners to create, support, and promote high quality experiential opportunities that support Southern's mission statement, strategic plan and LEP."*

Communication

Getting information to students is a perpetual problem. There is no single way students indicate that they prefer to receive information and they are frequently on information overload through the few mechanisms we most commonly use.   The Campus and Community Engagement subcommittee recommends identifying ways to more effectively communicate information on programs and events on campus and in the local community. They emphasize the importance of having a central place where students can learn about opportunities to engage socially on the weekends to create a more vibrant weekend culture.

The Navigating the University subcommittee emphasizes the need for more accessible information that would allow the university community and visitors to more easily navigate the campus. Their recommendations include establishing an information center in the academic heart of campus; posting Quick Response Codes around campus that provide access to an online map of the campus; launching a free Southern app; developing "live chats" to respond to online visitors who have questions; introducing a texting process for students to ask questions to selected student services offices; and increasing signage, maps and room numbers throughout

campus. We also need to make it possible for people to pose questions and receive prompt responses via the website home page.

New Student Recruitment

While most of the work of the Student Success Task Force focused on priorities to improve the matriculated student experience and help students progress to graduation, the recruitment of students to attend Southern is also critical. More importantly, we need to increase our focus on recruiting students with the greatest likelihood for graduating from SCSU. The Pre-Campus Readiness subcommittee identifies several initiatives to strengthen outreach and recruitment efforts to first-time and transfer students (see report). Moreover, the Pre-Campus Readiness and Research subcommittees recommend that admissions standards be raised, recognizing that while SAT scores are not the only predictor of college success, significant correlations between SAT scores and success rates have been demonstrated.

Facilities

As the University prepares to engage in a master facilities planning process, two subcommittees make recommendations that address facilities needs. The Student Support Services subcommittee identifies a need for additional space for many of the offices that provide critical support to students including Counseling Services, Student Health Services, and the Tutoring and Writing Centers. Additionally, the Campus and Community Engagement subcommittee recommends providing better recreation facilities for faculty and staff to support their work/life balance and encourage them to be more actively engaged on campus. Current planning for a university wellness center will begin to address some of these concerns. Additionally, a new Student Success Center should be a high priority in the master planning process.

Further Research and Review

The Student Success Task Force work is a beginning, not an end, to understanding student success at Southern. We need to promote a culture of assessment that is rigorous and ongoing. The Research subcommittee recommends convening a faculty research group on student success to mine new data and make recommendations to further support students' success. The Pre-Campus Readiness subcommittee recommends that focus groups be conducted with new students shortly after their arrival on campus to gather greater insight to information provided by the questionnaires they complete. Consideration should also be given to participating in the Admitted Student Questionnaire program offered by the College Board to better understand why students admitted to Southern do or do not choose us. The use of data to understand what we have achieved and inform what is yet to be done is fundamental as we transform the university into a student-centered institution.

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Southern will become students' first choice in the state of Connecticut to pursue their higher education and earn their degree. There will be no question that we live our mission every day. As we move forward, a commitment must be made by each and every member of the university community to identify his/her place in this work. This is a call to action! The university should

designate a permanent body with broad representation to institutionalize student success, provide oversight for the implementation of recommendations in this report, identify and/or initiate future research related to student success; and recommend actions and activities that will maintain student success as our highest priority at Southern. If realized, Southern will be a different place; we will truly be a student-centered university that collectively puts the best interests of students first. The Student Success Task Force firmly believes that students will progress to graduation in much more significant ways if we take these critical steps:

1. **Advance a Culture of "Student-Centeredness"**

2. **Create a Student Success Center**

3. **Transform Academic Advising**

4. **Modify Academic Programs, Policies & Instruction**

5. **Refresh University Branding & Marketing**

6. **Improve Student Financing & Affordability**

We hope these recommendations will inform the work of the strategic planning process and help to shape the SCSU of 2025.

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