

# Graduation Initiative 2025 Equity Goals & Priorities November 2021

## **Executive Summary**

The California State University continues to experience a record-breaking rise in graduation rates systemwide, yet equity gaps are growing. The first-year class that entered in fall 2019 represents the cohort of students on which 6-year graduation rates and equity gaps will be measured in 2025. The COVID-19 pandemic and the disparate impacts across communities of color and low-income families have created a renewed urgency to close the gaps that exists between underserved and vulnerable students and their peers. Not since Graduation Initiative 2025 launched five years ago has the need to marshal the CSU's collective resources been more critical to address differential patterns of student success.

Five priorities, identified to build upon one another, reflect actionable steps to close equity gaps in the CSU today. These priorities are an extension of the Chancellor's Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee recommendations. Campuses are expected to act this year on the five priorities listed below. And while not all committee recommendations are called out, this initial focus primes the system for significant cultural shifts, particularly in the area of holistic advisement and student support services.

Equity-focused outcomes are attached to each priority and will require differential funding, in addition to the existing, recurring GI2025 funding of \$375 million. These goals are ambitious in timing and outcome, reflecting the need to act now in order to stop any further growth in gaps. However, they are also grounded in the need to ensure resources are available to create the capacity for these efforts. Ultimately, it will be the responsibility of the entire CSU community to ensure that every student has a fair and equal opportunity to earn their degree, contribute to the California workforce and thrive in their community.

**Priority 1: Re-Engage and Re-Enroll Underserved Students:** *Advance systemwide and campus re-enrollment campaigns and establish campus retention targets beginning with the spring 2022 semester and continuing for the next three years.*

Reflecting a nationwide trend aggravated by the pandemic, student retention has decreased at a number of CSU campuses—particularly among students of color. Of the 34,671 underrepresented minority (URM) students<sup>1</sup> who enrolled fall 2019 across the CSU, 9,600 were not enrolled for their third year. This constitutes a 28% attrition rate among URM students after three years and continuing this trend will make it virtually impossible to close equity gaps.

Based on fall 2021 preliminary data, the campuses listed below numerically show the most significant URM student attrition from the fall 2019 cohort. Identifying and implementing

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of alignment with federal reporting standards, this proposal uses the term underrepresented minorities or URM. However, a more inclusive understanding of underserved students must take into account students from low-income backgrounds, students who are first in their family to attend college, students from nontraditional ages and backgrounds and more.

effective outreach to students who have departed, with a specific focus on students of color, Pell grant recipients and first-generation students, will need to be prioritized. Each CSU campus is charged to initiate aggressive re-enrollment campaigns incorporating all available strategies, including considering an increase in staff capacity and investment in technology. In addition, campuses should consider what resources will be needed to ensure retained students are positioned for success with the support of advisement and other student services.

Campus	Fall 2019 First-Year Cohort	
	Number of URM Students No Longer Enrolled by Third Year	Percent of URM students Not Retained
Bakersfield	432	37%
Channel Islands	149	28%
Chico	296	28%
Dominguez Hills	780	38%
East Bay	328	38%
Fresno	543	27%
Fullerton	521	20%
Humboldt	148	41%
Long Beach	585	23%
Los Angeles	820	31%
Maritime Academy	22	35%
Monterey Bay	144	24%
Northridge	906	28%
Pomona	430	22%
Sacramento	655	31%
San Bernardino	641	28%
San Diego	290	17%
San Francisco	574	33%
San Jose	376	27%
San Luis Obispo	99	12%
San Marcos	339	27%
Sonoma	202	30%
Stanislaus	320	30%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>9,600</b>	<b>28%</b>

**Metrics for Tracking Progress:**

- Establish categorical year-to-year retention targets for each campus.
- Establish campus reclamation targets for students who departed after their first and second year.

**Funding: \$3 million** of the \$15 million will be used to bolster retention and reclamation efforts at select campuses with both high URM enrollment and high attrition among URM and Pell eligible students. Resources would be apportioned strategically to address the most impactful systemwide gap-closing opportunities and allocated on an annual basis for fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022. CSU data will be used to identify select campuses. All campuses also will be encouraged to use existing GI 2025 resources currently in their budget.

**Priority 2: Expand Credit Opportunities with Summer/Intersession Funds:** *Supplement enrollment of URM and Pell students in intersession and summer session with the goal of closing equity gaps in credit accumulation at targeted campuses.*

Students of color and first-generation students often arrive at the CSU with fewer Advanced Placement courses or dual enrollment credits, and they are more likely to maintain jobs while enrolled requiring more flexibility in their course schedule. As a result, their need for additional opportunities to earn CSU course credit is critical if they are to graduate in a timely manner.

Summer sessions and intersessions provide these additional credit accumulation opportunities. Yet, many do not take advantage of these opportunities. With increased advisement support and additional funding of summer and intersession enrollment, students who may be falling behind in academic credits can be redirected to timely degree completion. Based on fall 2021 preliminary data, among the students retained from fall 2019 only three campuses (San Luis Obispo, San Diego and Maritime Academy) average 60 units earned for all students—a critical marker for four-year degree completion. Campus credit accumulation for URM students are listed below.

Campus	Fall 2019 First-Year Cohort	
	Mean CSU Units Earned by URM Students After Two Years	Number of URM Students Remaining in Cohort
Bakersfield	55.3	722
Channel Islands	51.5	383
Chico	51.2	765
Dominguez Hills	49.6	1,283
East Bay	49.9	525
Fresno	52.7	1,438
Fullerton	52.4	2,074
Humboldt	48.1	216
Long Beach	53.3	1,931
Los Angeles	54.1	1,795
Maritime Academy	70.0	40
Monterey Bay	53.8	449
Northridge	53.5	2,374
Pomona	51.4	1,493
Sacramento	52.8	1,477
San Bernardino	53.5	1,650
San Diego	58.5	1,460
San Francisco	50.6	1,143
San Jose	52.8	1,037
San Luis Obispo	86.9*	712
San Marcos	48.6	908
Sonoma	56.2	462
Stanislaus	51.8	733

\*Quarter units

### **Metrics for Tracking Progress:**

- Establish baseline equity gap in credit accumulation for campuses.
- Establish campus goals for closing gaps in credit accumulation and tie progress to GI 2025 budget allocation in future budget years.
- Track URM intersession and summer session enrollment against the number of URM students lagging in credit accumulation.
- Implement block scheduling for first- and second-year cohorts beginning fall 2022.

**Funding: \$7 million** of the \$15 million will be used to underwrite intersession and summer enrollment. Resources would be apportioned strategically to address the most impactful systemwide gap-closing opportunities and allocated on an annual basis for fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022. A match from campuses will be required given the number of students who need additional opportunities to reestablish a four- or six-year graduation trajectory.

**Priority 3: Ensure Equitable Access to Digital Degree Roadmaps:** *No later than June 15, 2022, every CSU student will have access to and adoption of a real-time digital degree planner.*

As the CSU moves towards more responsive and dynamic advisement, the implementation of a digital degree planner, or roadmap, systemwide will be essential as it ensures that *all* CSU students are provided a consistently clear path to graduation. Evidence shows that planners provide students with an accurate, real-time understanding of what courses they need to graduate (including A2/B4 courses) and real-time corrections when key academic milestones are missed.

Most campuses provide some version of a degree planner, but many platforms are underdeveloped. Student utilization also varies significantly across the system—from 90% at one campus to less than 3% at another. Historically underrepresented students and first-generation students benefit significantly when given access to a degree planner as they often accumulate fewer credits in their first year, are retained at a lower percentage and more likely to struggle with navigating the course registration process. Digital degree planners are one critical element for solidifying what are commonly referred to as Guided Pathways that: 1) clarify pathways to a student’s end goal; 2) help students choose and enter particular degree pathways; 3) help students stay on track; and 4) ensure student learning.

A digital degree planner is defined as a personalized, app-based tool that prepopulates degree requirements and course-taking options offering students real-time, semester-by-semester planning for registration and degree completion. The digital tool should be maintained for accuracy and account for all previously earned and applicable credit prior to registration.

### **Metrics for Tracking Progress:**

- Create an internal measure of CSU students, by campus, who are actively using a digital degree planner by fall 2022.
- Complete transcript audits for all first-time and transfer students prior to registration for their first term at the CSU.
- Develop an infrastructure plan to maintain accurate degree maps and course availability submitted to the Chancellor’s Office no later than January 15, 2022.

- Ensure that every first-time student has access to and enrolled in General Education A2/B4 courses in their first year. Enrollment tracked by campus to establish improvement targets.
- Automate degree audit and clearance for students.

**Funding: \$5 million** of the \$15 million will support this priority. As 21 of 23 campuses currently employ some version of a degree planner, there is no need for substantial financial investment for purchasing of platforms or tools. However, select campuses will require intense technical assistance and implementation support to meet the goal of 100% student utilization. Resources would be apportioned strategically to address the most impactful systemwide gap-closing opportunities and allocated on an annual basis for fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022. College Futures Foundation and Lumina Foundation also are expected partners to support adoption.

**Priority 4: Eliminate Administrative Barriers to Graduation:** *No later than June 30, 2022, each CSU campus shall, with an equity-centered framework, revise drop for non-payment policies, re-evaluate registration hold policies and reform the graduation filing process.*

Administrative barriers disproportionately affect low-income and first-generation students who are often more susceptible to academic disruption due to campus fee assessments or holds. Bureaucratic procedures in higher education can often have a compounding effect—typically adding to, rather than reducing, administrative processes. The result is often unintended administrative tripwires or barriers experienced by students. One higher education observer rightly noted “...*the most difficult thing about college should be the coursework.*”

Eliminating these barriers has been identified as a key priority which can significantly and positively impact students’ ability to graduate in a timely manner. It should be noted that the idea of revising drop for non-payment policies, for example, is not to ask campuses to forgo revenue or for complete forgiveness of outstanding balances. Instead, it is to assess how existing policies may have disparate impacts or derail academic progress in unintentional ways.

**Metrics for Tracking Progress:**

- Each campus will establish an Administrative Barriers taskforce.
- Taskforce to reassess graduation filing process.
- Taskforce to reassess drop for non-payment policy.
- Taskforce to reassess the consequences of existing registration hold categories.

**Funding:** No Chancellor Office funding required for this priority.

**Priority 5: Promote Equitable Learning Practices and Reduce DFW Rates:** *Beginning fall 2021, the Chancellor’s Office will engage ASCSU, campus presidents, provosts and deans to identify the top 10 high enrollment critical major pathway courses (by campus) with higher than average equity gaps as defined by DFW rates.*

Earning a non-passing grade negatively impacts a student’s academic trajectory and increases the risk of attrition—negatively impacting the CSU’s ability to close equity gaps. What happens in

classrooms when the doors close plays a significant role in whether students feel a sense of belonging, whether they gain or lose academic confidence or if they ultimately earn a degree. Equally important are the significant variations in academic preparation among students arriving to CSU campuses. Without compromising academic rigor, an intensified systemwide strategy must be deployed to explore the root causes of persistent high failure rates among URM students. Working closely with faculty, such areas as how to more effectively provide learning support for students and re-evaluating course design and pedagogical practices will need to be addressed. Students of color and first-generation students often arrive with fewer AP or dual enrollment opportunities while in high school and are more likely to earn low and non-passing grades in first-year foundational courses leading towards their major.

### **Metrics for Tracking Progress:**

- Publish (internally) an active list of high-enrollment, high-DFW courses with the largest equity gaps to establish benchmarks and to engage presidents, provosts, deans and faculty senate and department leaders.
- Establish improvement rates by course for each campus.
- Track and publish progress over the next three terms the courses are offered.

**Funding:** Campuses will be asked to use existing funds to support this effort. Each campus has its share of more than \$375 million in recurring GI 2025 funding. In addition, there is \$10 million in the 2021-22 budget to support culturally competent professional development for faculty. Campuses may also benefit from systemwide professional development programs for faculty and grant-supported projects intended to improve utilization of faculty dashboards.

### **Conclusion**

Graduation Initiative 2025 and the success of all CSU students continue to be among the university's highest and most consequential priorities. Systemwide, while campuses and the system have reached impressive and record-breaking retention and graduation rates, persistent and stubborn equity gaps continue and require increased focus and investments to reach and address the needs of historically underserved students.

The fall 2019 entering first-year cohort, whose data will be used to measure the CSU's 6-year graduation rate and equity goals in 2025, is the focus of this additional one-time funding in areas that the Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee have identified for targeted investment and opportunities to close equity gaps. One-time funding will be differentially distributed, focusing on opportunities to differentially impact the CSU system's equity gaps. To track ongoing progress in these key equity priorities, campus presidents will be asked to include progress metrics in annual conferences with the Chancellor. Campus leadership and continued commitment to these objectives, along with a greater emphasis on metrics and accountability, are essential to the CSU's ability to achieve the goals of Graduation Initiative 2025.