

**\$35 Million Graduation Initiative 2025 Funding**  
**Accountability Metric**  
**California State University, San Marcos**  
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### **Executive Summary**

Through cross-divisional partnerships, California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) is well on its way to realizing the short-, medium-, and long-term goals we articulated in our September 2016 Student Success Plan in support of the 2025 Graduation Initiative. The \$1.25 million 16/17 academic year (AY) Graduation Initiative allocation has provided necessary funds to expand our analytic capabilities so that we can more accurately identify our students' academic needs and then respond by providing course schedules to match those needs (see Attachment 1). Simply stated, with these funds we have

- Designed and launched a new academic planning, schedule-building system (Degree Set, Go!).
- Expanded our analytic capabilities with the fully anticipated launch of Tableau Enterprise in spring 2017.
- Developed and launched a two-phased plan to review over 900 student records and contact nearly graduated seniors regarding their 2017 spring- and summer-enrollment plans.
- Responded to student course-demand needs for spring 2017 by adding approximately 67 new courses.
- Developed a plan to offer a hybrid targeted summer 2017 schedule that includes Extended Learning (EL) courses open to all students and approximately 20 stateside courses for nearly graduated seniors who are aid-eligible.
- Developed a plan to offer \$1600 need-based scholarships to support 300 nearly graduated seniors with summer 2017 course costs.<sup>1</sup>

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### **CSUSM 2016/17 AY Graduation Initiative Strategies**

With this submission we are providing an update regarding our short-term strategies (many with long-term impact) as outlined below.

**1. Implemented Degree, Set, Go!:** CSUSM launched in fall 2016 an innovative plan, branded Degree, Set, Go! (DSG), to refine the class registration process and encourage students to follow the course roadmaps in Degree Planner. The premise behind this campaign is that a sub-optimal course schedule must not be a reason that contributes to a delay in the student's path to

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<sup>1</sup> CSUSM's data indicate that approximately 50% of our anticipated 600 summer 2017 nearly graduated seniors will qualify for need-based scholarships.

graduation. This campaign, led by the office of the Vice Provost in partnership with Instructional & Information Technology Services (IITS), the Office of Communication, Student Affairs, Office of Undergraduate Studies (OUGS), all advising units, and all four colleges, kicked-off with an informational training event for staff in August. Promoting the use of advising and registration technologies, namely Degree Planner (CSUSM's branding of Smart Planner), and Schedule Assistant (CSUSM's branding of College Scheduler), students are encouraged to set their future academic plan with enough lead time to allow colleges and departments to set a course schedule that meets student demand. Once the course schedule is published, students construct a schedule that best fits with time restrictions the student might have independent of course offerings. A corollary goal to DSG is to assign instructional resources to colleges in a way to meet student demand. The university is in its second semester implementing this allocation model.<sup>2</sup>

The following steps have been taken on campus in relation to the above two goals:

- 1) Faculty in each degree program have built sample 120-unit academic plans (henceforth referred to as roadmaps). Where appropriate, roadmaps include requirement categories rather than specific courses and include pre-requisite structures and semesters of offerings for required courses (a sample roadmap for the major in Political Science is available at [http://www.csusm.edu/academic\\_programs/roadmaps/chabss/psci.html](http://www.csusm.edu/academic_programs/roadmaps/chabss/psci.html)).
- 2) Roadmaps for majors and minors have been input into Degree Planner.
- 3) Degree Planner, Schedule Assistant, and registration are packaged and presented to the student into a unified advising and registration experience entitled Degree, Set, Go!: DEGREE is simple with Degree Planner; SET your schedule with Schedule Assistant, GO to your shopping cart and enroll.
- 4) Buy-in from all advising units has been secured.
- 5) DSG has been introduced as a module in all sections of our first-year seminar course, GEL, taken by approximately 90% student of our incoming first-year population.
- 6) An incentive is being implemented that will reward students whose early plans significantly match the students' first-day-of class schedules.
- 7) A data analyst has been dedicated to build and produce the demand report by course, which results from students' Degree Planner pages (a sample report is available at [Course Demand Fall 2017 Final V2.0 SSCI 2-2-2016.xlsm \(open link\)](#))
- 8) Department Chairs and coordinators are being trained on reading, analyzing, and using the student demand report to build their course schedules.
- 9) A timeline has been set to align all communications to students with the output of the degree planner demand report and the schedule build.
- 10) Measures have been set to monitor the progress of the initiative (see Attachment 2).

Although it is too early to measure the effect of this initiative quantitatively, buy-in has been strong university-wide. The following data point is of interest: Before the beginning of the DSG campaign, 45 out of nearly 12,000 students had a schedule on the first day of classes that matched exactly the set of requirements indicated in their Degree Planner. The number of such students one semester into the campaign is nearly 1,500.

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<sup>2</sup> Note this innovative plan was presented at the Winter 2017 American Association of State Colleges and Universities to resounding praise from CSU and non-CSU university leaders from across the country.

**2. Facilitate Shifting Unit-Load Norms from 12 to 15:** Informed by CSUSM's Graduation Initiative Steering Committee's (GISC) review of national unit-load research and our own campus culture of unit-load, our campus has decided to design an initiative to shift the unit-load norm from 12 units to 15 units per semester. As a point of context, two-thirds of CSUSM students start their second year with freshman status (i.e. fewer than 30 collegiate units completed). Very few students enroll in 15 units in the first term, including fully proficient students. Our typical student enrolls in approximately 12.5 units each semester (see Attachment 3).

To facilitate this culture shift, we are moving forward with three projects:

a. **CSUSM Unit-Load Research Project:** The Vice Provost, OUGS, and Institutional Planning & Analysis (IP&A) at CSUSM have launched an IRB-approved study to investigate how external commitments affect academic success for CSUSM students carrying specific academic workloads. Specifically, how does a full academic workload of 15 units affect the success of students who are committed (working, taking care of family, etc.) 30 or more hours a week, and how does a 15-unit load affect students who are not committed in such a way? In effect, we would like to recreate the tests used by Attewell and Monaghan (2016)<sup>3</sup>, who found that full-time unit-loads of 15 units were beneficial for almost all students, with the exception of those working at least 30 hours a week. We hypothesize that a similar study at CSUSM will produce like results.

This CSUSM-based study is important because our campus has received very aggressive four-year graduation rate goals from the Chancellor's Office (increase from 14% to 30% by 2025). Increasing student unit-loads has been identified as a pathway to achieving that goal. Confirming our hypothesis could help us challenge campus norms that incoming freshmen should take 12 units as opposed to 15, a norm which has arisen due to the assumption that students should start more slowly--an assumption also challenged in the literature (Attewell, Heil, & Reisel, 2012<sup>4</sup>; Szafran, 2001<sup>5</sup>).

We conducted the survey in fall 2016 and are currently studying the results.

b. **Unit-load Steering Committee:** This cross-divisional steering committee is working together to identify institutional barriers that may inhibit increased unit loads. The result of this work combined with the findings from the Unit-Load Research Project will inform the campus campaign to change the culture, messaging and expectations regarding students' unit loads. The campaign will launch in fall 2017.

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<sup>3</sup> Attewell, P., & Monaghan, D. (2016). How Many Credits Should an Undergraduate Take? *Research in Higher Education*, 1-32.

<sup>4</sup> Attewell, P., Heil, S., & Reisel, L. (2012). What is academic momentum? And does it matter? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 34(1), 27-44.

<sup>5</sup> Szafran, R. F. (2001). The effect of academic load on success for new college students: Is lighter better? *Research in Higher Education*, 42(1), 27-50.

c. **Degree Planner Default:** As we move forward with the unit-load research and campaign, we have also set the Degree Planner default at 15-units. Student can adjust the default, and in doing so, they will see visually that a 12-unit per semester plan will require five years of college. This simple visualization is serving an important educational piece. At the same time, for most of our students, a 5 year plan complements their work and family commitments.

**3. Facilitate Graduation for Nearly Graduated Seniors—CSUSM Senior Success Project for 4.5 and 2.5 Seniors:** Utilizing analytics, we have identified nearly graduated seniors with special attention paid to 4.5 and 2.5 seniors who, with careful advising for spring and summer 2017, could graduate by summer 2017. To do our best in reaching all nearly graduated seniors and aware that data are dynamic, we developed a two-phased project as detailed below. Note: in our 2016 Student Success Plan, we anticipated piloting a graduation advisor model. Given the tight-schedule for the 4.5/2.5 project, we have not yet piloted such a model. Instead, OUGS, in partnership with IITS, IP&A, all of the colleges and advising units, is leading the Senior Success Project.

**a. Senior Success Phase I—Outreach to Nearly Graduated Seniors and Free Elective Intervention:** Between late December and early January we accomplished the following with the goal of identifying students requiring free electives:

1. Used analytics to review over 900 student records; assuming successful completion of the Spring 2017 semester, these students would need to complete fewer than 7 units to graduate.
2. Reviewed these students' records to verify their individual needs.
3. Studied the needs looking for themes.
4. Executed a targeted intervention for 51 students who needed 1- or 2-units of free electives by working in partnership with the College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences (CHABSS) to offer their variable unit *Career Readiness* course.
5. Contacted over 700 nearly graduated seniors to encourage them to review their spring 2017 schedules to make adjustments as needed to facilitate graduation.

**b. Senior Success Phase II:** As of the start of the Spring 2017 term, we are well into Phase II, which focuses on students who, after the Spring 2017 semester will have six or fewer course requirements to complete their degrees. OUGS is working in partnership with the Vice-Provost's office, IP&A, IITS, all four colleges, and all advising units plus Financial Aid and Extended Learning to identify possible pathways to graduation by Summer 2017.

Our analytics indicate that 567 students fit into the requirements for Phase II: 147 from the College of Education Health and Human Services (CEHHS), 288 from CHABSS, 76 from College of Business Administration (CoBA), and 56 from the College of Science and Mathematics (CSM). We have developed a detailed plan in partnership with the units listed above to ensure a hybrid summer schedule that includes courses offered via Extended Learning and a stateside schedule that meets the needs of as many nearly graduated seniors as possible. We are also working closely with departments to ask that they review the academic needs of their nearly graduated seniors based on the data we provide with the goal of providing academic solutions for as many students as possible. In partnership with Financial Aid, we will ensure that nearly graduated seniors who are eligible for need-based summer scholarships receive them. Phase II is a carefully choreographed series of tasks that we believe will positively support our students' graduation needs.

**4. Expand Analytic Capabilities– Tableau Enterprise:** After piloting Tableau software for over a year within the IP&A and Business Intelligence (BI) teams, CSUSM has used Graduation Initiative 2025 and eAdvising funds to purchase an enterprise-wide server license that will enable campus-wide deployment of this software. CSUSM has also increased the number of licenses for Tableau Desktop (developer) software up to 30 seats with the goal of empowering self-service analytics. Although several Tableau dashboards have been created, the target audiences have not been able to view these reports because they lack access to the Tableau Server. The newly purchased Enterprise license will be integral to the campus's vision for decision support and will substantially augment the campus's capacity for data integration, analysis, reporting, and dissemination. Public-facing dashboards displaying student enrollment, application, and retention data are targeted for release in Spring 2017, with additional dashboards in the works to examine course demand, unit-load patterns, course completion rates (DFWs), high-impact practices, and key student-level information that may offer opportunities for intrusive advising.

**5. Strengthen Course Availability:** Two key initiatives are improving course availability—the DSG initiative as explained earlier and the Student Access Initiative described below.

**a. Degree, Set, Go!:** CSUSM is transitioning from a schedule-building process based on historical patterns and proportional, incremental distribution of growth resources to a process that is informed by analytics. The DSG campaign is contributing to timely data that informs our schedule-building process. With data from the Course Demand Report, this spring we added 67 courses. We will continue to improve course availability adding courses as data demand and funding provide.

**b. Student Access Initiative:** In addition to data-informed schedule-building, it is important to note that in fall 2016, we redesigned our course schedule calendar. We increased the number of course sections offered by modifying our course schedule. Notably, this initiative, which increased the number of MWF sections was endorsed by both Associated Students Inc. (ASI) and the Academic Senate.

**6. Academic Success Center:** Funding received from the Governor's Innovation Award was used to develop our Academic Success Center. Opened in October 2016, this center, led by OUGS, provides academic coaching and discipline-based academic interventions. In phase I, the four staff in this center have launched three programs in Spring 2017: a) academic coaching for all students with a particular focus on outreach to sophomores whose GPA has dropped by .375 in one semester but whose GPA is at 2.2 or above, b) academic coaching targeted towards first-year students enrolled in our award-winning first-year seminar with the goal of transitioning them successfully into their sophomore year; c) data-informed academic support programing for undeclared students and for students enrolled in math, science, arts, humanities, and social and behavioral science courses. These programs are being designed collaboratively by five faculty liaisons and the four ASC staff and will complement CSUSM's long-running high-impact practices.

Without question, the \$1.25 allocation to CSUSM has made possible programmatic and digital infrastructure improvements that are essential as we strive to realize the bold 2015 Graduation Initiative goals. We are confident that the strategies described above will ensure more students graduate in a timely way beginning Spring 2017. We look forward to sharing out 2017 graduation rates later this year and are hopeful that similar funding continues in support of the 2025 Graduation Initiative.