Cal State Fullerton is entering the second phase of an innovative, data-driven advising system established in fall 2014 to expand the types of contextualized, timely, and intentional student interventions needed to significantly increase graduation rates, reduce time to degree, and narrow achievement gaps. In fall 2015, ten cross-divisional, cross-departmental Student Success Teams (SSTs)—armed with information culled from various best-of-class commercial and in-house data and predictive analytics platforms—will pilot ten different gap-closing campaigns designed to meet the needs of more than 2,100 students. The SST construct is a cost-effective approach to advising through loosely coupled, decentralized teams, representing a new model for fostering responsive, systematic, strategic experimentation that, when proven effective, can be quickly scaled up across an entire campus and adapted by other institutions. Based on the results obtained during phase one of our innovative campaign-driven SSTs, which focused on increasing overall graduation rates and supporting timely graduation, we are confident that we will not only meet our aggressive goal of cutting student achievement gaps in half, but that we will completely eliminate our achievement gaps by 2018.

A NEW APPROACH: STUDENT SUCCESS TEAMS (SSTs)

In the past three years, Cal State Fullerton has pursued an all-hands-on-deck effort to implement a data-driven, early-alert-focused approach to proactive student advising to better serve our approximately 39,000 students, more than half of whom are first-generation college students. As part of these efforts, the Division of Academic Affairs and the office of Academic Programs have collaborated with all eight colleges, the Irvine Campus, the Office of Graduate Studies, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Division of Information Technology to expand the number of professional advisors; establish several college-based student success centers; institute mandatory academic advising; strengthen degree audits; and develop assessment procedures for advising efforts. These activities go above and beyond traditional advising systems and services.

But we didn’t stop there. We recognized an opportunity to create a wholly new, innovative structure that could be more flexible, dynamic, and outcomes-oriented than traditional university systems. Over the course of the 2014–15 academic year, we gathered the brightest, most-experienced advising minds from across the University and assembled them into college-based Student Success Teams (SSTs). Each SST operates as an innovative “advising laboratory” within its unit’s unique context, transcending entrenched reporting lines and creating independent accelerators for the incubation and implementation of both proven and experimental advising approaches. A visualization of the SST construct follows on page two of this narrative.

The SST Steering Committee—comprised of the chairs of each SST, the provost, the vice president for Student Affairs, the associate vice president for Academic Programs, and the associate vice president for Student Affairs—offers a monthly space for the exchange of best practices and engagement in the wider University conversation about student success. Our goal is to empower the “frontlines” by giving the SSTs the autonomy to implement tailor-made advising campaigns according to their students’ needs, while also allowing them to draw on the robust technological and strategic resources of the University as a whole. The SSTs have a common toolbox of technology platforms, each of which can be leveraged for scalpel-like precision in identifying at-risk students, engaging in targeted advising, and tracking success.
Throughout fall 2014 and spring 2015, the emerging SSTs developed and implemented the first phase of a wide variety of advising pilot campaigns designed to increase graduation rates, particularly through reductions in graduation deferrals. One early indicator of the success of the SSTs can be found in the effects of the graduation specialists, who spent the 2014–15 academic year reviewing 6,959 graduation candidates and—through their proactive advising—prevented more than 2,000 graduation deferrals. The big-picture indicators are equally positive. Our six-year graduation rate increased by 6.6 percentage points between 2014 and 2015, from 55.7% to 62.3%. Additionally, we narrowed the achievement gap between underrepresented and non-underrepresented students by 3.3 percentage points in the same period: an improvement of 25%. Appendix E presents more-detailed evidence demonstrating effectiveness of the efforts put forth by members of the SSTs in phase one.

STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINE: Crossing the Finish Line to Graduation

**Student Case Study 1: College of Communications**
This student intended to graduate in spring 2015, but advisors discovered that she needed to be enrolled in one additional upper-division unit to meet all degree requirements. The student was contacted, and advisors recommended a one-unit “mini-session” five-week course that was open and fit well into her current class schedule. The student enrolled; advisors followed up to confirm enrollment. Result: Graduated.

**Student Case Study 2: College of Health and Human Development**
Advisors found that this student was shy of the 120 units required to apply for graduation and had not completed his declared minor. In examining the student’s transcripts, they found a transfer course that had not been added to his totals correctly. Furthermore, they learned that the student had no intention of finishing the minor, and successfully guided him in dropping it. Result: Graduated.
GAP-CLOSING CAMPAIGN PILOTS

As an innovation, the SST construct offers tremendous opportunities for nurturing, expanding, and sustaining innovative ideas and practices that address a breadth of challenges in higher education. After the exciting results of our SSTs’ phase-one focus on increasing overall graduation rates, in the spring of 2015 the SSTs were charged with cultivating small teams to tackle the achievement gap between non-underrepresented and underrepresented minority students. During summer 2015, these mini-teams designed custom gap-closing campaign pilots for their respective colleges, targeting approximately 2,100 students campus-wide. Brief descriptions of the pilots—which launched in September 2015—are presented in Appendix C in the draft minutes from our September 11 SST Steering Committee meeting, at which each SST chair shared updates on his or her college’s fall 2015 campaign. Below is an inside look at one SST’s gap-closing campaign (additional materials can be found in Appendix D). It’s important to note that these campaigns represent only one of the many strategic and operational initiatives being driven by the SSTs for fall 2015 (e.g., mandatory advising workshops for approximately 3,500 students with 75–84 units).

Inside a Gap-Closing Campaign: The College of Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS)

HSS chose to focus its gap-closing campaign pilot on Criminal Justice, a department that includes high percentages of underrepresented minority students and first-generation college students among those who may be struggling academically. In summer 2015, using the EAB-SSC platform, the SST proactively identified 205 at-risk Criminal Justice majors with 20–89 units earned and a cumulative GPA between 2.0 and 3.0.

During the first week of class, these students received a letter from the HSS associate dean inviting them to participate in the Criminal Justice Success Academy, a program designed to help them explore career options and discover resources for academic success. The letter’s positive tone (“Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in an exciting new opportunity in recognition of your academic and professional promise...”) demonstrates the University’s belief that students’ potential is just as important as their past.

“The Academy will consist of a series of four workshops, each of which will feature a prominent speaker, or panel of speakers, from the local Criminal Justice community.” Seeing an opportunity to engage with and draw on the rich resources of our local community, the SST invited respected practitioners in the fields of probation, policing, and the legal professions—many of whom are also CSUF alumni—to expose students to different careers and networking opportunities.

“Participants will also have the opportunity to receive a personalized letter of recommendation from the Associate Dean for Student Relations and the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs [as well as] additional opportunities for advising and consultation.” The Success Academy is a highly collaborative, cross-divisional effort that involves representatives from Academic Affairs and Students Affairs working closely to offer comprehensive student support services that transcend traditional organizational structures, seamlessly integrating academic, co-curricular, and career advising.

The Academy will offer “Information about on- and off-campus internships, Study Abroad opportunities, and field placements...” High-Impact Practices (HIPs) such as study abroad and internships have been shown to disproportionately improve the persistence and graduation rates of underrepresented minority students. HIPs are therefore an important component of many of our SSTs’ gap-closing campaign pilots as well as our overall University efforts to narrow the achievement gap.
**VISION, CHALLENGES & OBSTACLES**

**Appendix A** includes a letter from President Mildred García in support of the SST construct and the gap-closing campaign pilots with an explanation of how these efforts fit into the University's long-term vision for student success. **Appendix B** includes a letter from Provost José L. Cruz and VP for Student Affairs Bereneceea Johnson Eanes, co-chairs of the SST Steering Committee, outlining the collaborative and cross-divisional nature of the SST construct and its value to our institutional mission. The bottom line is that Cal State Fullerton recognizes the moral imperative to increase graduation rates and narrow achievement gaps for current and future generations of students in our increasingly diverse nation. We have codified this belief into our University Strategic Plan by setting forth clear goals for strengthening student success, including the objective of ensuring that 75% of CSUF students participate in an advising system that integrates academic, career, and personal development components.

We have already overcome many of the challenges that stand in the way of cross-divisional collaborations, but we also recognize that it is essential to continue to conduct this process in a highly collaborative manner in order to foster a new advising culture with extraordinary buy-in to the SST concept. Winning the APLU Innovation Challenge would provide much-needed moral and monetary support that will help maintain the current level of effort, fuel new pilots, provide continuing development opportunities for SSTs, and drive the scaling of promising interventions.

**STATUS**

The most current status of the SSTs can be found in the minutes of the SST Steering Committee meeting on September 11 (**Appendix C**). In sum: As of September 2015, each SST has utilized the EAB analytics tool, along with the homegrown platforms of the Student Success Dashboard and Titan Advisors Network, to identify a group of students to reach via targeted interventions during the fall 2015 semester. With the guidance of University leadership, each SST has tied its campaign to specific metrics by which the SST can measure the effectiveness and success of its campaign; **Appendix E** includes a sample of such metrics.

The learning and outcomes from these gap-closing campaign pilots will be shared at the close of the fall semester with the SST Steering Committee, and will be used to potentially redesign elements of strategy and operations before scaling any practices that emerge. In the meantime, SSTs will continue to adapt and scale their overall advising practices and campaigns based on success metrics, feedback from students, and lessons learned from each other.

**ADAPTABILITY & SCALABILITY**

The SST concept is highly adaptable to other institutions, as it does not require additional staffing investments but rather strategic reorganization of personnel and technology. Existing university leadership and key stakeholders can be assembled into the SST Steering Committee, and the flexible structure of the SSTs by nature allows easy recasting in a variety of academic and co-curricular settings. A major responsibility of Cal State Fullerton’s SST Steering Committee is to document the work of the various SSTs and the results of their campaigns to ensure that these are available to other institutions interested in clear images of how they too can better serve their traditionally underserved students.

Furthermore, the adaptability of important homegrown technology tools such as the Student Success Dashboard is demonstrated by the fact that at least four other campuses in the California State University system have adopted it.
LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT & PITCHER

To reinforce the collaborative nature of this endeavor, the provost and vice president for Academic Affairs and the vice president for Student Affairs are leading the SST pilot innovation as co-chairs of the SST Steering Committee. The daily tactical efforts of the pilot are managed by the associate vice president for Academic Programs and the associate vice president for Student Affairs as well as the SST chairs. College deans are held accountable for the work of their college. The president of Cal State Fullerton supports this initiative through hosting annual Town Hall meetings, open to the entire institution, where numerous achievements and innovations from the SSTs are highlighted for the campus community. If selected for the Pitch Competition, Dr. Vijay Pendakur will present Cal State Fullerton’s pitch.

Berenecea Johnson Eanes  
VP, Student Affairs

José L. Cruz  
Provost & VP, Academic Affairs

Mildred García  
President

Peter Nwosu  
Associate VP, Academic Programs

Vijay Pendakur*  
Associate VP, Student Affairs

*Designated pitcher for APLU

Co-chairs, SST Steering Committee

Day-to-Day Tactics & Implementation

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Appendix A  
  Letter from Cal State Fullerton President Mildred García in support of the SST construct, with an explanation of how it fits into the University’s long-term vision for student success.

- Appendix B  
  Letter from Provost José L. Cruz and VP for Student Affairs Berenecea Johnson Eanes, co-chairs of the SST Steering Committee, outlining the collaborative and cross-divisional nature of the SST construct and describing the role of the steering committee.

- Appendix C  
  Minutes from the SST Steering Committee meeting on September 11, 2015; includes brief descriptions of the fall 2015 gap-closing campaign pilots launched this month by each of the ten SSTs.

- Appendix D  
  Sample materials from the HSS SST fall 2015 gap-closing campaign pilot, centered on the Criminal Justice Success Academy. Documents include the SST’s campaign worksheet, the letter sent from the associate dean to targeted students, and a description of the workshops that will be offered as part of the Success Academy.

- Appendix E  
  Evidence of the impact thus far of the SSTs’ phase-one efforts to raise overall graduation rates and support students in graduating on time. This document also includes sample metrics for measuring the success of the SSTs’ current gap-closing campaign pilots.