

University Colleges at Public Master's Universities

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In the following report, Hanover Research draws from interviews with university college administrators to address important characteristics of successful university colleges, including program offerings, staff needs, and administrative support. Common challenges for these units, including measurements of success, are also discussed.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

“If students have a good first year, they will likely persevere.”¹ Dr. Jacqueline Washington, Director of the Office of University Studies and First-Year Programs at Delaware State University, succinctly expresses the motivation driving university colleges and equivalent units. Universities are seeking to improve retention and success, especially among entering, underprepared and undecided students. Many have placed a strong focus on improving students’ first-year experiences and readiness for university studies via these units.

In order to help the University of Alaska-Anchorage (UAA) determine if and how a university college should be established at UAA, Hanover Research relies on interviews with university college administrators to address important characteristics of successful university colleges, including program offerings, staff needs, and administrative support. The report also discusses common challenges to these units, including measurements of success. This report also profiles units at five public master’s universities.

KEY FINDINGS

- **University colleges or equivalent units are relatively common among public master’s universities.** An examination of over 70 institutions identified 19 with relevant units. Most commonly, these units are known as a “University College” or a department or office of “First Year Experience.”
- **University colleges are typically structured to support the following:**
 - Primary or partial responsibility for a freshman seminar course, required for all incoming students.
 - Academic and career advising for undecided students or all freshmen.
 - Bridge programs for rising freshmen who need remedial assistance in areas such as English or mathematics. Additional remedial education programs may be offered.
 - Interdisciplinary bachelor’s degree programs.
 - Elements of university student leadership development programs.
- **Few university colleges and equivalent units profiled in this report house their own faculty.** Rather, these units may be staffed with advisors who may also teach general courses required within the unit. Units also rely on faculty members from other colleges as well as adjunct faculty for additional support. Some administrators report that their units are understaffed given their responsibilities.
- **Proper funding and strong administrative leadership are two of the most important elements for successful university college implementation.** The most common challenge to university colleges, according to interviewed administrators, is

¹ Washington, Jacqueline. Director, Office of University Studies and First-Year Programs. Delaware State University. Phone interview. March 7, 2014.

underfunding. Changes in administration or a lack of a clear vision in current administration will also likely hinder the unit's success.

- **Retention rates and degree-completion rates are often used to measure unit success, but are not sufficient.** Unit administrators note that these metrics may not fully reflect a unit's effectiveness as they are affected by variables outside the control of a university college or equivalent unit, such as student finances. Consideration should also be given to:
 - Student and faculty feedback on program effectiveness.
 - Measurements of student progression, such as a student's ability to set and meet educational goals, even if that student is not retained.
 - A comparison of outcomes for students who consistently use the unit's services versus those who do not.
- **University college programming impacts student and university success by improving first-year student study habits and facilitating their degree progress.** University colleges and equivalent units focus on developing general skills applicable within any major, by training new students to be better overall students. Such units also provide advising that helps students choose a major that best suits their interests and abilities.
- **A university college also serves the university by housing interdisciplinary, developing, and unique programs.** University colleges often maintain working relationships with all academic departments on campus, making them optimal units in which to develop and administer programs that draw significantly from multiple disciplines.
- **Unit administrators have not seen significant impacts on the student body when students in need of remedial assistance are grouped with the general student population in freshman seminars.** The only report of tension due to a mixed student population was between traditional and non-traditional (i.e., adult) students. Non-traditional students may express frustration if traditional students do not take the first-year seminar seriously.

SECTION I: UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CHARACTERISTICS

In the following section, Hanover Research considers characteristics of successful university colleges and equivalent units. This section also addresses challenges and threats these units commonly encounter.

Hanover Research interviewed representatives of university colleges or equivalent units at five public master's universities:²

- Kennesaw State University (KSU)
- McNeese State University (MSU)
- Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU)
- Delaware State University (DSU)
- Coastal Carolina University (CCU)

Unit representatives addressed important factors for university college (UC) success, including suggested unit program offerings, required administrative support, and challenges and threats that a UC is likely to face. This section summarizes topics addressed by multiple representatives as well as those that were strongly emphasized by individual representatives.

IMPORTANT UC CHARACTERISTICS

Unit representatives highlighted the following characteristics as important for UC success.

DEDICATED LEADERSHIP AND FACULTY

A successful UC will have broad university support. Dr. Michael Heard, Associate Dean of KSU's UC, notes that his unit was a "visionary priority" of the university president at the time, Betty Siegel, who was a driving force behind its creation. He indicated that **strong university support from the highest levels was important for the successful implementation of the UC.**³ The introduction of a new academic unit, which may include a new required course for all freshmen, may not be uniformly welcomed across a university.⁴

² [1] Heard, Michael. Associate Dean, University College. Kennesaw State University. Phone interview. March 10, 2014.

[2] Blevins, Allison. Director of Advising and Retention, General and Basic Studies. McNeese State University. Phone interview. March 11, 2014.

[3] Nelson, Dorothy. Director, Center for Student Success. Southeastern Louisiana University. Phone Interview. March 10, 2014.

[4] Washington, Op. cit.

[5] Rice, Nelljean. Dean, University College. Coastal Carolina University. Phone interview. March 3, 2014.

³ Heard, Op. cit.

⁴ Nelson, Op. cit.

Strong university leadership with a clear vision can help address objections and ensure smooth unit implementation.

Similarly, a UC's success depends on leadership and faculty support within the unit. The strategic plan of KSU's UC notes the importance of having a "strong leadership team headed by an effective dean"⁵ Additionally, **faculty should be aligned with the UC's mission and goals.** The faculty must take the unit's mission and offerings seriously. Dr. Heard notes that sometimes teaching assignments within UCs are treated as punishment, which should not be the case.⁶ Having a dedicated faculty under a UC dean provides the most straightforward structure to focus faculty efforts on the first-year experience.⁷ However, if a UC needs to rely extensively on faculty from other colleges, the university's administration should look favorably on UC participation when faculty members apply for tenure or other promotions.⁸ While some units rely on adjunct faculty to teach UC-based courses, Dr. Nelljean Rice, Dean of Coastal Carolina University's University College, notes that, "it is tough to rely on adjuncts during growth."⁹

SUBSTANTIVE FRESHMAN SEMINAR

A first-year seminar administered by a UC can provide incoming students with a uniform and welcoming first-year experience that prepares them for academic success. It should be required for all freshman and selected transfer students, depending on how many credits they have already completed.¹⁰ This seminar should be offered for degree credit.

- Dr. Heard recommends that such seminars carry **at least three credits**, or student and faculty buy-in will be difficult to gain. He notes that neither students nor faculty members are likely to take a one- or two-credit requirement seriously.¹¹
- Dr. Jacqueline Washington, Director of DSU's Office of University Studies and First-Year Programs, observes that, "one semester can be too little time to adjust."¹² She notes that DSU's program is unique in requiring students to take a two-semester freshman seminar, having the same instructor for both semesters.

The seminars can vary in degrees of academic specialization within a university. For example, KSU's seminar is not designed to be discipline-specific.¹³ However, units at other institutions allow for customizations based on major. For example, the freshman seminars at DSU are differentiated by academic major and taught by faculty within a given major's department.¹⁴ DSU's Office of University Studies and First-Year Programs developed a

⁵ "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan." Kennesaw State University – University College. p. 8.
http://www.kennesaw.edu/uc/faculty/files/2012-17_UC_Strategic_Plan_FINAL.pdf

⁶ Heard, Op. cit.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rice, Op. cit.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cf. Heard, Op. cit., Washington, Op. cit.

¹¹ Heard, Op. cit.

¹² Washington, Op. cit.

¹³ Heard, Op. cit.

¹⁴ Washington, Op. cit.

master curriculum that must inform all iterations of the seminar, but it allows academic departments to customize the seminar to the anticipated needs of majors.¹⁵

Representatives also recommend that the seminar be developed using **balanced input from faculty and staff from each university department**.¹⁶ “Ask the faculty what they need students to know,” recommends Dr. Washington.¹⁷ Critical thinking tends to be important for all disciplines. The question that should guide curriculum development is, “How will this help students be successful?”¹⁸

Dr. Heard also recommends that UCs **use first-year seminars as a way to target and address specific student needs that will impact their academic success**. For example, students could be required to complete a learning approaches inventory upon acceptance to the university.¹⁹ Inventory results could then be used to guide curriculum development within individual seminar sections as well as student seminar placement.²⁰ Alternatively, students could be divided by high school GPA, grouping students with lower GPAs in a seminar that addresses fundamental skills. Students with higher GPAs could be enrolled in a seminar that focuses on more advanced study skills.²¹ MSU recognizes the value of such an approach but is not currently able to implement one due to budget constraints.²²

BRIDGE PROGRAMS

Dr. Rice notes that university colleges are good homes for bridge programs.²³ **Most profiled UCs and equivalent units offer bridge programs for rising freshmen who would benefit from academic assistance** before the beginning of their first semester in college. Program formats and requirements vary across institutions. CCU will be initiating a new bridge program in fall of 2014 for incoming “at risk” students, Coastal Excellence and Leadership, which allows participants to earn six college credits before the fall semester.²⁴ KSU offers a bridge program that essentially extends the first semester math and freshman seminar requirements by three weeks, giving students a head start on college without remedial education.²⁵ DSU offers two distinct and effective bridge programs: one for conditionally admitted students, and one for regularly admitted students who do not need extra assistance, but are interested in taking on student leadership roles.²⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Nelson, Op. cit.

¹⁷ Washington, Op. cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ An example is the Lancaster Approaches to Studying Inventory (LASI).

²⁰ Heard, Op. cit.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Blevins, Op. cit.

²³ Rice, Op. cit.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Heard, Op. cit.

²⁶ Washington, Op. cit.

FOCUSED ON RETAINING ALL STUDENTS

Retention efforts in UCs should not be focused only on underprepared and undecided students. Dr. Heard notes that KSU's unit is not dedicated only to improving retention among underprepared students, but those who enter university with GPAs between 3.0 and 3.5.²⁷ Many units offer programs designed to develop student leadership skills. These programs are typically open to all students. For example:

- KSU offers a 15-credit certificate in Leadership Studies.
- CCU's UC established a peer leader program.
- MSU's unit offers a bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership.

These provide successful students the opportunity to enrich their university experiences and to continue engaging in UC programming.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

UCs are also fitting homes for interdisciplinary studies as well as ideal testing grounds for new program development. Dr. Rice provides three primary reasons:²⁸

- A UC likely maintains contact with faculty members in all schools, which would help in marshalling resources to support an interdisciplinary studies program or in developing a course of studies.
- A UC could provide structure for an interdisciplinary program that would be difficult to house in other academic units.
- A UC can give better attention to the new program's administration than an institution's provost office, which likely administers a large number of programs.

Programs could remain housed within the UC, or could be developed into their own distinct units. Dr. Rice noted that honors programs are also good candidates for this. CCU's honors program could very well become a college in time, although it is currently too small.²⁹ However, KSU's UC used to house the institution's honors program, which grew and became KSU's Honors College.³⁰

COUNSELING/ADVISING

Successful UCs usually provide academic and career counseling. **Almost all units provide counseling for undeclared students and subsequently "hand them off" to faculty advisors within a student's major after one is declared.** Among units considered for this report, those that developed from student advising centers, such as those at SLU and MSU, require

²⁷ Heard, Op. cit.

²⁸ Rice, Op. cit.

²⁹ Ibid. CCU's Honors Program is not currently housed in the UC.

³⁰ Heard, Op. cit.

students to receive advising at the unit for their first year, whether they have declared a major or not.³¹ Others, such as CCU, provide advising to only undeclared students.³²

Additionally, advising should not be treated as merely class scheduling. **Successful advising involves an investment of time in the students, and can play an important role in student decisions.**³³ The experience of one institution suggests that students may even prefer dedicated, full-time advisors to faculty advisors. At MSU, students in the General Studies major are assigned dedicated advisors as freshmen, who then continue as their major advisors through to graduation. The director of the Department of General and Basic Studies, Mrs. Alison Blevins, believes that the access to advising that majors have is a significant factor in the major's popularity, which is the largest at the university. Students can always "drop in" and discuss their progress with the trained advisors in the department.³⁴

CHALLENGES & THREATS

Unit representatives also noted consistent challenges encountered by UCs, both within the university and within the units themselves.

FUNDING

The most common challenge or threat to UCs and equivalent units is insufficient funding. Under-funded units typically include a small number of faculty and staff who feel "stretched thin." For example:³⁵

- The strategic plan of KSU's UC, which includes comments from faculty and staff within the UC, notes that a lack of funding was very often considered a serious weakness. One respondent commented, "Morale is getting lower as people are continually asked to do more with less."
- MSU's staffing and budgetary constraints could not support a three-credit freshman seminar. Mrs. Blevins recommends to any institution implementing a UC, "Be funded."
- The dean of CCU's UC taught seven classes during the 2012-2013 academic year as well as being the chair of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program.

Dr. Rice suggests that, for institutions with fewer than 8,000 students, a UC may be too much of a drain on institutional resources. However, it is "worth it" for institutions with more than 8,000 enrolled.³⁶

³¹ Cf. Blevins, Op. cit., and Nelson, Op. cit.

³² Cf. Rice, Op. cit.

³³ Nelson, Op. cit.

³⁴ Blevins, Op. cit.

³⁵ [1] "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan," Op. cit., p. 8.

[2] Rice, Op. cit.

[3] Blevins, Op. cit.

³⁶ Rice, Op. cit.

Additionally, **changes in university-level administration are also likely to affect the direction and funding of retention efforts.**³⁷ A new administration may be interested in changing the direction of retention efforts, which could create lags in success as new initiatives are implemented. Or new leadership may simply show disinterest in supporting current efforts. Institutional leaders may not be hostile towards UC efforts, but they may direct their attention elsewhere, which could lead to decreased university resource allocations to a UC.

PERCEPTION WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

UCs may be challenged to maintain a suitable level of campus-wide visibility. KSU's strategic report notes that, "by far the most commonly identified weakness of University College is the lack of awareness or understanding by faculty and staff outside of University College about what it offers."³⁸ However, this was not a problem with all units. The Department of General and Basic Studies at MSU has a relatively high profile on campus. Mrs. Blevins notes that it is "as entrenched in all parts of the university as any department." She estimates that the high level of visibility stems from the unit's organization of Freshman Orientation. Additionally, the unit houses the most popular major on campus, based on the number of program graduates.³⁹

EXPECTATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

Expectations for UCs can be high, but it is often difficult to assess unit success. Since UCs are typically major elements of a university's student success and retention initiative, student retention rates and degree completion rates are often taken as significant measures of success. However, **UC representatives warn against setting unreasonable expectations or using measurements that may not reflect UC success.**

Representatives are quick to note that multiple factors affect student re-enrollment and degree-completion decisions. One of the most important, which has had a significant impact in recent years, is student finances. **Financial considerations can have a negative impact on re-enrollment decisions and cannot always be overcome by a student's earnest desire to continue at the university.**

Dr. Rice notes that student retention went up "two to three points" when retention initiatives were put in place at CCU. However in 2008, when the economy crashed, many out-of-state students could no longer afford to complete degrees at the institution. Approximately half of CCU's students come from New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. She notes that, "students would come for a year because they wanted to, but couldn't afford it."⁴⁰ Similarly, the student success center director at SLU noted that the unit focuses on student progression rather than retention, as not all students begin studies at a

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan," Op. cit., p. 8.

³⁹ Blevins, Op. cit.

⁴⁰ Rice, Op. cit.

university with the intention of finishing there. The unit considers itself successful if students can set educational goals and meet them.⁴¹

Even if retention efforts are successful despite student financial difficulties, **degree completion times can lengthen if students must take on work to pay for their educations.** KSU has a large population of commuter students who can maintain their enrollments while working and living at home. But an increase of students progressing under these circumstances has lengthened KSU's degree completion time average.⁴²

Accordingly, the success of UCs should be weighed by additional considerations beyond retention rates and degree completion. When unit representatives were asked how to recognize that their units were successful, responses included:

- Students and faculty members provide feedback on program effectiveness through surveys and evaluation forms.⁴³ Instructors are in a position to see whether students' study skills improve through these programs.⁴⁴
- Assess the characteristics (such as attendance and grades) of students who consistently use the unit's services during the first year, which could be compared to the characteristics of students who do not.⁴⁵
- To evaluate a bridge program, compare university outcomes for students who came through the bridge programs with outcomes of students who did not.⁴⁶

However, **not all units have detailed assessment plans in place.** The strategic report for KSU's UC noted that the programs lacked a comprehensive assessment plan.⁴⁷ Dr. Washington, who has been the director of DSU's Office of University Studies and First Year Programs for over a year, is working to develop effective success metrics.⁴⁸

MIXING STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT APTITUDES

Administrators interviewed for this report noticed **no significant impacts on the student population as a whole when students in need of remedial assistance were grouped with other students in freshman seminars.**⁴⁹ Dr. Heard, however, found the most significant tension in the classroom arises between traditional students, entering college directly from high school, and non-traditional students, who are typically older. In his experience, non-traditional students tend to be better prepared than traditional students. Non-traditional students also tend to take their educations more seriously and may express frustration if traditional students find it difficult to take the first-year seminar seriously.⁵⁰

⁴¹ Nelson, Op. cit.

⁴² Heard, Op. cit.

⁴³ Nelson, Op. cit.

⁴⁴ Heard, Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Washington, Op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan," Op. cit., p. 9.

⁴⁸ Washington, Op. cit.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid.

⁵⁰ Heard, Op. cit.

SECTION II: UNIVERSITY COLLEGE PROFILES

In the following section, Hanover Research profiles the UC or equivalent unit at five public master's universities:

- Kennesaw State University
- McNeese State University
- Southeastern Louisiana University
- Delaware State University
- Coastal Carolina University

These institutions were selected from among 19 public master's universities identified as operating a UC or equivalent unit. A listing of all 19 institutions and their respective units is in Appendix A.

The profiles focus on:

- The student population the unit serves;
- The requirements students must satisfy within the unit;
- The additional services provided by the unit;
- The unit's staffing; and
- The unit's success metrics.

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

KSU's University College was developed in 2004. KSU has consistently been recognized as an exemplary provider of first-year and undergraduate education, even before it began its UC.⁵¹ However, the UC has only made KSU's first-year programs stronger, according to the current associate dean.⁵² KSU's UC was designed to provide a smooth transition into the undergraduate experience and a common point of focus for students as they progressed through their programs of study.⁵³ KSU's UC serves between 3,000 and 4,000 students, or just under one fifth of KSU's 25,000 student enrollment.⁵⁴

The UC's mission is:⁵⁵

- To foster student learning and success at every academic level; and

⁵¹ "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan," Op. cit., p. 1.

⁵² Heard, Op. cit.

⁵³ "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan," Op. cit., p. 1.

⁵⁴ Heard, Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Bulleted items copied verbatim from: "KSU University College 2012-2017 Strategic Plan," Op. cit., p. 13.

- To nurture students' educational and personal growth through innovative and collaborative curricular and co-curricular programs, services, and resources.

UNIT REQUIREMENTS

All full-time first year students and transfer students with fewer than 15 university credits must satisfy the First-Year Curriculum Requirement during their first term at KSU.⁵⁶ Students can satisfy this requirement either by enrolling in a three-credit seminar or participating in an academic learning community (LC).⁵⁷ Students exit the UC once they complete the First-Year Curriculum Requirement or have earned at least 30 credits.

KSU's UC defines a **first-year seminar** as, "a course especially designed to help first-year students transition successfully into higher education."⁵⁸ The goal of KSU's First-Year Seminar is to:⁵⁹

- Develop students' life skills;
- Prepare them to be academically successful;
- Help students recognize connections between themselves and the community; and
- Help students to become more globally aware.

While the seminars are not discipline-specific, the UC offers four different versions of the seminar for students to choose from. These different versions tend to highlight one of the goals listed above, although each iteration of the seminar addresses all four goals:⁶⁰

- **Traditional Seminar** – Focused on developing essential skills required for university success.
- **Globally Focused Seminar** – Focused on developing skills for university success while addressing global issues such as governance and resource management.
- **Community Engagement Seminar** – Focused on developing skills for university success while assessing and working to eliminate community problems.
- **Leadership Development Seminar** - Focused on developing academic success strategies and leadership skills.

The seminar contributes to KSU's culture of success insofar as it is designed to develop life skills, study skills, prioritization skills, budgeting ability, career preparation, and global awareness, all of which are important for university success.⁶¹ The seminar does not

⁵⁶ "First-Year Curriculum Requirement." Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/fyts/curriculum.html>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "First-Year Seminars." Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/fyts/seminars.html>

⁵⁹ Bulleted list adapted from: Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Heard, Op. cit.

compete with other university courses or disciplines, nor does it draw on any specific discipline to the exclusion of others. Dr. Heard also notes that a student's success in his or her seminar tends to reflect their overall KSU success. In other words, the seminar grade often reflects students' grades in other courses.⁶²

First-year students who do not enroll in a seminar must enroll in a **LC**. Dr. Heard notes that campus and national research indicates that, among other benefits, students who enroll in LCs, "are more likely to 'make it' to their sophomore year."⁶³ At KSU, LCs consist of:⁶⁴

- Groups of 20-25 first-semester students co-enrolled in two or more courses linked together with a common theme.
- Themes can be suited to specific academic majors (e.g., business or nursing), or themes can be suitable for a variety of majors (e.g., social justice or gender studies). LC theme offerings can vary from year to year.

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

Among other responsibilities, KSU's UC oversees and administers student completion of the First-Year Curriculum Requirement. The UC houses two academic departments and a Center for Student Leadership. **The Department of First-Year and Transition Studies** administers the First-Year Curriculum Requirement. The department is responsible for organizing the First-Year Seminars and Learning Communities, as well as the annual First-Year Convocation. Additionally, this department will begin offering a fully online Master of Science degree in First Year Studies in 2015.⁶⁵

The Department of First-Year and Transition Studies also houses the university's unique **Early Start Bridge Academy (ESBA)**.⁶⁶ The ESBA is designed to provide extra assistance to borderline math-deficient students without using remedial training.⁶⁷ ESBA students are given a three-week head start on satisfying requirements for a regular-level mathematics course (College Algebra) as well as the required freshman seminar.⁶⁸ Students begin these two courses in July and continue with the same instructors and classmates in fall. This gives students extra time to develop their math abilities and adjust to university life.

The Department of University Studies offers the UC's only bachelor's degree, a **Bachelor of Science in Integrative Studies (INTS)**.⁶⁹ This degree is not designed to accommodate

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Learning Communities Program." Kennesaw State University – University College. <http://www.kennesaw.edu/fyts/communities.html>

⁶⁵ "Master of Science in First-Year Studies Graduate Program." Kennesaw State University – University College. http://www.kennesaw.edu/fyts/fyts_grad_program/index.html

⁶⁶ Heard, Op. cit.

⁶⁷ Students must have mathematics scores at <490 on the SAT or at <22 on the ACT See "Application Process." Kennesaw State University - Early Start Bridge Academy. <http://www.kennesaw.edu/uc/esba/amieligible.html>

⁶⁸ "What is the Early Start Bridge Academy?" Kennesaw State University – University College. <http://www.kennesaw.edu/uc/esba/whatisesba.html>

⁶⁹ "Bachelor of Science Degree in Integrative Studies." Kennesaw State University – Integrative Studies Degree Program. <http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/ints/requirements.html>

undecided students, but rather is for those with specific educational objectives that can best be met through a combination of courses from different disciplines, rather than an existing major.⁷⁰ Students pursuing an INTS degree can also concentrate in Environmental Studies, with track specifications available in Environmental Policy and Environmental Science.⁷¹

This department also offers:⁷²

- A 15-credit **Certificate in Leadership Studies**, open to students of any major.
- **Supplemental Instruction**, which consists of weekly study sessions led by supportive peers in areas such as biology and political science.
- The **ESL Study and Tutorial Center**, which provides English tutoring, advising, and other education resources for international students.
- **Learning Support Programs**, which provide remedial academic assistance in English, Reading and Mathematics. Learning support courses, which are being phased out due to statewide changes in education, carry institutional credit but not degree credit.
- The **Senior-Year Seminar**, which is a capstone experience available to all students, but not required. Students typically complete capstones within their majors.
- A **Math Lab**, which supports freshman and sophomore mathematics classes.

The UC's **Center for Student Leadership (CSL)** provides additional opportunities designed to engage high-performing students in the life of KSU and the larger community. CSL offerings include:⁷³

- **Leaders IN Kennesaw (LINK)** – This “signature” program is open to any major. This program’s three year course in self-development includes weekly student meetings and an “international community engagement project.”

⁷⁰ “A Clarification.” Kennesaw State University – Integrative Studies Degree Program.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/ints/clarification.html>

⁷¹ “Environmental Studies Degree Program.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/ints/envirstud.html>

⁷² [1] “Leadership Studies Academic Certificate.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/leadership/doc/LDRS%20Certificate%20Overview.pdf>

[2] “Supplemental Instruction (SI).” Kennesaw State University – University College.
http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/si_leaders/

[3] “The ESL Study and Tutorial Center.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/uc/esl/index.html>

[4] “Learning Support Programs.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/lsp/index.html>

[5] “University Studies.” Kennesaw State University – University College. <http://www.kennesaw.edu/us/> and Heard, Op. cit.

[6] “KSU Math Lab.” Kennesaw State University. <http://mathlab.kennesaw.edu/Home.html>

⁷³ [1] “LINK.” Kennesaw State University – University College. <https://web.kennesaw.edu/csl/program/link>

[2] “President’s Emerging Global Scholars.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<https://web.kennesaw.edu/csl/program/pegs>

[3] “Thrive.” Kennesaw State University – University College. <https://web.kennesaw.edu/csl/program/thrive>

[4] “King-Casey Women’s Leadership Experience.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<https://web.kennesaw.edu/csl/program/king-casey-women%E2%80%99s-leadership-experience>

- **President’s Emerging Global Scholars (PEGS)** – This program, open to freshmen with 3.5 or higher GPAs, is designed to unite students with strong potential for university success. The program includes an LC experience and is limited to 50 students.
- **Thrive** – This initiative provides multiple engagement opportunities to 200 high school achievers even before the start of freshman year. Opportunities include social events, community service, and study groups.
- **King-Casey Women’s Leadership Experience** – This semester-long program uses workshops and speakers to build confidence and skills among women participants.

STAFFING

The UC has 43 faculty and staff, including professors, lecturers, and program coordinators, as well as nine administrative staff.⁷⁴ The faculty members are dedicated to KSU’s UC, receiving payment and tenure through this college. UC faculty members typically teach the first-year seminar course four times a year. They also typically teach two courses per year in another department that complements their academic training. This opportunity is well received by faculty members, who are glad to collaborate with peers and teach in their fields of specialization. It is also well received by the other departments, which do not pay the UC faculty, yet are able to offer their courses.⁷⁵

SUCCESS METRICS

Dr. Heard notes that student retention at KSU has, “gone up noticeably,” since the implementation of UC programs. However, he is quick to note the difficulty in attributing retention outcomes to the UC specifically. Since all students have the same first-year curriculum requirement, there is no way to isolate the effects of the programs because there are no test groups enrolled in KSU that do not satisfy this requirement. But he also appeals to an educator’s common sense when considering the overall value of the UC and its programs: “You help students develop study skills. You *know* it helps.”⁷⁶

Dr. Heard also notes that degree completion time among retained students is strongly affected by financial considerations. Students with GPAs of 3.0 to 3.5, who qualify for merit-based state scholarships, are very likely to stay. However, progress slows for students who do not qualify for scholarships, but want to stay at KSU, as they often must find work to pay tuition.⁷⁷ The UC programs may be effective in retaining students, but under certain circumstances, effective retention can coincide with increasing completion times.

⁷⁴ “Faculty and Staff Directory.” Kennesaw State University – University College.
<http://www.kennesaw.edu/uc/about/directory.html>

⁷⁵ Heard, Op. cit.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Coastal Carolina University, in Conway, South Carolina, has a University College that serves 600-700 students from a student body of 9,000.⁷⁸ The unit developed from CCU's University Academic Center, which provided essentially the same services as the current UC.

The UC's mission is to aid students in their academic endeavors by:⁷⁹

- Facilitating developmental advising on the major programs and core curriculum;
- Providing a firm academic and social foundation through the First-Year Experience class; and
- Providing peer consulting and structured learning assistance through the learning assistance centers.

UNIT REQUIREMENTS

Freshmen are required to take a three-credit First-Year Experience course, but responsibility for this course has been decentralized. Each other college offers a version customized for its majors, without direction from the UC.⁸⁰ It is the same for student advising. CCU's UC is primarily responsible for serving two groups of students:⁸¹

- Those who have not decided on a major; and
- Those who have decided on a major within the UC.

The UC also advises honors and veteran students.⁸²

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

The UC's services are divided into five main categories:

- First-Year Experience
- First-Year Advising Center
- Learning Assistance Centers
- Programs of Study
- Bridge Program

The UC's **First-Year Experience** course is designed to facilitate a successful student transition from high school to university. It seeks to develop critical thinking capabilities as

⁷⁸ Rice, Op. cit.

⁷⁹ Bulleted list copied verbatim from: "Mission Statement." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<http://www.coastal.edu/uc/mission.html>

⁸⁰ Rice, Op. cit.

⁸¹ Bulleted list adapted from: Ibid.

⁸² "First-Year Advising Center." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<http://www.coastal.edu/advising/index.html>

well as increased participation in the CCU community.⁸³ The UC's iteration of this course is required for undeclared students and those who have declared a major within the UC. Dr. Rice notes that class assessments indicate that students react favorably to the creative and critical thinking and research elements in the UC's course offerings.⁸⁴

The **First-Year Advising Center** provides advising for undeclared, honors, and veteran students,⁸⁵ as well as those who have declared a major within the UC.⁸⁶ All undeclared first-year students must have two semesters of advising, which focuses on "big-picture" education and career decisions with the goal of helping students choose a fitting major. UC advisors continue to work with honors students, student veterans, and those with majors within the UC after their first years are complete.

The center also started a peer leader program, which targets eligible upperclassmen candidates and develops them into leaders within the unit.⁸⁷ This program has since been adopted by other colleges at CCU, reflecting the UC's positive influence on CCU's culture of success.⁸⁸

The UC coordinates **Learning Assistance Centers** to provide tutoring help to CCU students in the following areas:⁸⁹

- Foreign languages
- Mathematics
- Writing
- Science

CCU's UC also offers a bachelor's degree **program of study** as well as a minor:⁹⁰

- **Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies** – This provides students the opportunity to design and complete an interdisciplinary major that would not fit under an existing major at CCU.

⁸³ "University 110: First-Year Experience." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<http://www.coastal.edu/fye/index.html>

⁸⁴ Rice, Op. cit.

⁸⁵ "First-Year Advising Center," Op. cit.

⁸⁶ Rice, Op. cit.

⁸⁷ "Peer Leader FAQ's." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<http://www.coastal.edu/advising/mentorfaq.html>

⁸⁸ Rice, Op. cit.

⁸⁹ Bulleted list adapted from: "Learning Assistance Centers." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<http://www.coastal.edu/lac/index.html>

⁹⁰ [1] "Interdisciplinary Studies." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<http://www.coastal.edu/bais/index.html>

[2] Dr. Rice indicated that this option is housed within the UC (Rice, Op. cit.). The Requirements can be found at:
 "Minor Requirements." Coastal Carolina University - Women's and Gender Studies.
<https://www.coastal.edu/wgst/minor.html>

- **Minor in Women's and Gender Studies** – This requires 18 hours and can be combined with any major.

CCU's **residential bridge program**, called Coastal Excellence and Leadership, provides rising freshmen with low standardized test scores or challenging socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity to get a "jump start" on their college educations by earning six credits while residing at CCU during the summer. Participants will also receive tutorial sessions, career development assistance, and leadership development advice.⁹¹

STAFFING

The UC was formed with no faculty and less-than-optimal administrative support.⁹² Dr. Rice notes that the UC was able to appoint two lecturers this year in support of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program. The unit relies heavily on faculty from the other CCU colleges, as well as adjunct instructors, to teach UC courses. The unit description on the institution's website currently lists three academic advisors, including the UC dean and the director of academic advising.⁹³

SUCCESS METRICS

Dr. Rice noted that student retention increased over a number of years after retention practices were changed after 2005. However, the economic downturn in 2008 reduced retention rates, as many students who wanted to continue at CCU were simply unable to afford it. This obscured the retention metrics' value as indicators of UC success. Ultimately, however, Dr. Rice suggests that a successful UC plays an important role in a broader student retention effort.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Rice, Op. cit.

⁹² Rice, Op. cit.

⁹³ "Meet the Advising staff." Coastal Carolina University – University College.
<https://www.coastal.edu/advising/staff.html>

⁹⁴ Rice, Op. cit.

DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY

Delaware State University, located in Dover, Delaware, has an Office of University Studies and First-Year Programs (OUSFYP) in its Division of Academic Enrichment. The OUSFYP serves roughly one quarter of DSU's student body each academic year.⁹⁵

The OUSFYP's overall goal, as an office within the Division of Academic Enrichment, is to promote student success.⁹⁶ To this end, the OUSFYP provides programming designed to prepare first-year students for success in four areas:⁹⁷

- Academics
- Career readiness
- Leadership
- Service

UNIT REQUIREMENTS

All first-year students, including transfer students, must complete a two-semester University Seminar. It is a core course requirement. These foundational courses focus on preparing students to succeed at DSU. To satisfy the First-Year Program requirement, students must complete the seminar course with a grade of C or higher.⁹⁸

The seminars are major-specific and taught by faculty from each major. Undeclared students enroll through the OUSFYP, which determines the curriculum for these sections. While major-specific sections include fundamentals for success with a given major, the sections for undeclared students include career fairs and advising center elements to aid in major selection. Conditionally admitted students do not declare a major during their first year, so they enroll in the seminar for undecided students. Sections for undeclared students are taught by adjunct faculty or other unit staff.⁹⁹

All students enrolled in the University Seminars, regardless of major, must participate in the Freshman Forum, which is organized by the OUSFYP. This is a series of weekly 50 minute talks over the course of half a semester that addresses:¹⁰⁰

- The development of academic habits
- School life

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

⁹⁵ Washington, Op. cit.

⁹⁶ "Greetings from the Executive Director!" Delaware State University – Academic Enrichment. <http://www.desu.edu/academic-enrichment>

⁹⁷ Bulleted list adapted from: "A Message from the Director." Delaware State University - Office of University Studies and First-Year Programs. <http://www.desu.edu/office-university-studies-and-first-year-programs>

⁹⁸ Washington, Op. cit.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

The OUSFYP organizes additional services and programs for freshmen, such as:¹⁰¹

- Peer mentoring program
- Study skills and networking development
- Academic and professional portfolio development
- Campus community engagement and outreach activities via Residential Learning Community Program

The office also has **two summer bridge programs**. One is available to students who were conditionally admitted for academic concerns. The other is available to students who have been unconditionally admitted.¹⁰²

STAFFING

The OUSFYP has four faculty members who teach the University Seminars for undecided students. Additional teaching support is provided by adjunct faculty and other staff. Advising and tutoring services are provided by different offices within the Division of Academic Enrichment.¹⁰³

SUCCESS METRICS

DSU's experience with success metrics reflects that of other institutions Hanover spoke with. Financial concerns have had a significant impact on student retention in recent years, making it difficult to evaluate unit success on that measure. According to Dr. Washington, university graduates are having a difficult time finding jobs and students are re-considering the value of college, and student concerns about these issues cannot be wholly addressed through a UC or similar unit.¹⁰⁴

With this limitation noted, the OUSFYP is working to better quantify the extent to which student success is affected by unit offerings. Dr. Washington indicated that the unit would like to:¹⁰⁵

- Compare university outcomes for students who came through the bridge programs with outcomes of students who did not.
- Assess the characteristics (such as attendance and grades) of students who consistently use the unit's services during the first year.

¹⁰¹ Bulleted list copied verbatim from: "A Message from the Director," Op. cit.

¹⁰² Washington, Op. cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA UNIVERSITY

Southeastern Louisiana University's Center for Student Excellence (CSE) was developed in 2005 in response to the recognized need to improve student advising. The unit's approach to advising was appropriated from SLU's small but successful center for undecided students, the Career and Academic Planning Center.¹⁰⁶ The unit serves all freshmen and selected transfer students.

The CSE's mission is:¹⁰⁷

- To assist students in becoming active, responsible, and successful learners
- To create an environment which fosters student development and retention

UNIT REQUIREMENTS

All freshmen and incoming students with fewer than 30 credits are required to take **Southeastern 101** (SE 101), which is a two-credit course that aims to provide "the tools that address the rigors of academic life on the University level."¹⁰⁸ This course is administered and taught by the CSE.

Students also have a **first-year advising requirement** through the CSE, whether they have declared a major or not. During the first semester of freshman year, students attend individual advising meetings that address areas such as career assessment and developing an academic plan. Second semester advising appointments develop students' abilities to navigate the university's curriculum and adjust their academic plans when and if needed.¹⁰⁹ When a new student has completed first-year requirements and declared a major, an exit report is provided to the department of each student's declared major to give department advisors profiles of their incoming students.¹¹⁰

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

The CSE's basic services are divided into five categories:¹¹¹

- **Academic Advising** – Provides personal guidance for freshman as they plan and commence their university educations.

¹⁰⁶ Nelson, Op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Bulleted items adapted slightly from: "About the Center for Student Excellence." Southeastern Louisiana University. https://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/cse/about/index.html

¹⁰⁸ "Southeastern (SE)." Southeastern Louisiana University Course Descriptions. http://www.southeastern.edu/admin/rec_reg/university_catalogue/current/courses/pdf/center_for_student_e/s_e.pdf

¹⁰⁹ Nelson, Op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Ibid..

¹¹¹ Bulleted list and descriptions are adapted from: "Center for Student Excellence Programs." Southeastern Louisiana University. http://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/cse/cse_programs/index.html

- **Academic Support for Athletes Program** – Provides academic support that is compatible with student athlete schedules. Designed to ensure student athletes maintain academic success.
- **Career Exploration** – Provides assistance to students who are unsure which career track to pursue.
- **Supplemental Instruction** – Provides additional courses in academic subjects that students are having difficulty mastering.
- **Tutoring** – Provides peer tutors to assist those who need assistance with traditionally challenging courses.

SLU offers bridge and other special programs that target minority students or those with challenging socioeconomic backgrounds.¹¹² While these programs are not administered through the CSE, two sections of Southeastern 101 are dedicated to students in these programs.¹¹³

STAFFING

The CSE is staffed by 13 advisors, and three administrators, including the director.¹¹⁴ The advisors specialize in specific major areas, such as nursing or education, which allows them to develop expertise in advising for specific disciplines. The advisors also teach Southeastern 101. Dr. Dorothy Nelson, Director of the Center for Student Excellence, noted that, currently, 15 staff teach five sections per semester.¹¹⁵ The CSE also relies on non-advisors to teach SE 101.¹¹⁶

SUCCESS METRICS

Dr. Nelson observes that overall student retention is not increasing as strongly as hoped from the first to second years as well as from the first to third years. However, **students who complete the required course, SE 101, tend to stay enrolled more frequently than those who do not complete it.**¹¹⁷

Dr. Nelson suggests that retention is not the most insightful measure of success, as some students enter a program with no intention of completing a degree. **A more relevant measure of unit success for Dr. Nelson is student progression.** By the time they exit the CSE, students should be able to set educational goals and meet them. They need to

¹¹² "Office of Special Projects and TRIO." Southeastern Louisiana University.
http://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/trio/

¹¹³ Nelson, Op. cit.

¹¹⁴ "The Center for Student Excellence Staff." Southeastern Louisiana University.
http://www.southeastern.edu/acad_research/programs/cse/staff/index.html

¹¹⁵ Nelson, Op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

understand the consequences of progressing through their degree program and be able to draw connections between their educational goals and their anticipated careers.¹¹⁸

Student feedback can also indicate success. Course effectiveness questionnaires for SE 101 are designed to ask students about the extent to which they have applied study skills addressed in the curriculum to learning in other courses. Responses, so far, have been promising. Students have also indicated that they “loved” freshman advising.¹¹⁹

Dr. Nelson also notes that the degree completion rate at SLU is closely connected to students completing at least three years. Since students exit the CSE at the end of freshman year, taking on other advisors and participating in other university programs, **it is difficult to isolate the effectiveness of the CSE on students through their third or fourth years.**¹²⁰

McNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY

McNeese State University is a large master’s university in Lake Charles, Louisiana. MSU offers both bachelor’s and associate’s degrees. The institution has a Department of General and Basic Studies (DGBS) which provides academic advising for all incoming freshmen.

UNIT REQUIREMENTS

All freshmen must receive academic advising through the DGBS. This advising is designed to:¹²¹

- Guide students in major selection; and
- Counsel them on matters that may affect their academic progress, especially in regard to University policies and procedures.

Students satisfy the first-year advising requirement and exit the unit when they meet the following criteria:¹²²

- Have completed 12 credits with a GPA of at least 2.5, OR
- Have completed 24 credits, not including remedial coursework, OR
- Have completed 30 credits, including remedial coursework

All incoming students must also take Freshman Foundations, a one-credit course designed to “promote success of first-year students by developing skills and encouraging attitudes needed to achieve educational and personal goals.”¹²³ Freshman Foundations is not

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Bulleted items copied verbatim from: “General and Basic Studies.” McNeese State University. <http://www.mcneese.edu/gbst>

¹²² “General and Basic Studies,” Op. cit.

¹²³ “FFND 101 – Freshman Foundations.” McNeese State University – Course Descriptions. <http://catalog.mcneese.edu/content.php?filter%5B27%5D=->

required for student satisfaction of the DGBS's first-year academic advising requirements, because Freshman Foundations is not under the purview of the DGBS. This is uncommon among equivalent units, and DGBS director Alison Blevins notes that administration of this course "should be in this [DGBS's] office." However, the DGBS currently administers only the sections for undeclared students.¹²⁴

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

The unit's programs and services can be divided into four categories:¹²⁵

- **Academic Advising** – Provides academic advising for all freshmen
- **Academic Degrees** – The DGBS offers three degree programs:
 - An associate's degree in General Studies
 - A bachelor's degree in General Studies
 - A bachelor's degree in Organizational Leadership
- **Orientation** – Introduces rising freshmen to MSU's programs and policies.
- **Learning Center** – Offers developmental English and mathematics. However these offerings are being phased out as MSU admissions will cease admitting students in need of remedial education.

STAFFING

The department is staffed by five advisors and two administrators, including the director.¹²⁶ The director noted that the DGBS is currently understaffed considering current advising demands.¹²⁷ The department has no teaching faculty.

SUCCESS METRICS

The DGBS **actively seeks student and faculty feedback on their levels of satisfaction with freshman orientation and advising**. The unit also tracks the amount of time it takes undeclared students to declare their majors. The DGBS recognizes success with undeclared students if they declare a major during their first or second semesters at MSU.

1&filter%5B29%5D=&filter%5Bcourse_type%5D=215&filter%5Bkeyword%5D=freshman+foundations&filter%5B32%5D=1&filter%5Bcpage%5D=1&cur_cat_oid=3&expand=&navoid=85&search_database=Filter

¹²⁴ Blevins, Op. cit.

¹²⁵ Bulleted list adapted from: "General and Basic Studies," Op. cit. See also:

[1] Ibid.

[2] "Inventory of Degree Programs." McNeese State University – 2013-2014 Academic Catalog. <http://catalog.mcneese.edu/content.php?catoid=8&navoid=238>

[3] "General and Basic Studies," Op. cit.

[4] Blevins, Op. cit.

¹²⁶ "Staff." McNeese State University – General and Basic Studies. <http://www.mcneese.edu/gbst/staff>

¹²⁷ Blevins, Op. cit.

Mrs. Blevins notes that MSU's retention rate from freshman to sophomore years is higher than retention rates from sophomore to junior years and from junior to senior years. The General Studies major also graduates more students than any other MSU major.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ibid.

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONS WITH UNIVERSITY COLLEGES OR EQUIVALENT UNITS

In preparing this report, Hanover Research compiled a list of over 70 four-year institutions sharing at least some basic characteristics with the University of Alaska-Anchorage, such as Carnegie Classification, size, or whether it offers associate's degrees. Through a scan of institutional websites and resources such as the Association of Deans and Directors of University Colleges and Undergraduate Studies,¹²⁹ 19 institutions with a university college or similar unit were identified, which are shown in Figure A.1.

Figure A.1: Institutions with University Colleges or Equivalent Units

INSTITUTION	UNIT	LINK
Appalachian State University	University College	Link
Kennesaw State University	University Studies	Link
McNeese State University	Department of General and Basic Studies	Link
Northern Kentucky University	First-Year Programs	Link
Saginaw Valley State University	Freshman Programs (including FYRE)	Link
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania	First Year Studies	Link
Southeast Missouri State University	School of University Studies	Link
Southeastern Louisiana University	Center for Student Excellence	Link
University of Southern Indiana	Living Learning Communities Program	Link
Delaware State University	Office of University Studies and First Year Programs	Link
Nicholls State University	University College	Link
Winston-Salem State University	University College and Lifelong Learning	Link
Coastal Carolina University	University College	Link
Alcorn State University	First Year Experience	Link
Eastern Oregon University	First Year Experience	Link
Indiana University-Purdue University-Fort Wayne	First Year Experience	Link
Northwestern State University	Office of Student Life and First Year Experience	Link
Southern Utah University	University College	Link
University of South Florida	Innovative Education	Link

Source: Institutional Websites

¹²⁹ "List of Member Institutions." Association of Deans and Directors of University Colleges and Undergraduate Studies. <http://adandd.org/Resources/Documents/memb%20instit%2011-2-12.pdf>

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