



Ask Deloitte About

Closing the achievement gap at the University of North Carolina Greensboro: Uniting innovation and equity for student success

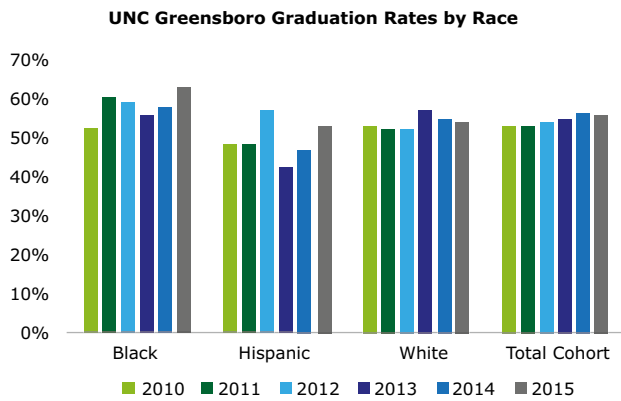
As part of a broader effort to document transformational approaches to student success, [Deloitte](#) had the opportunity to study the [University of North Carolina Greensboro's](#) (UNC Greensboro) powerful results in closing the attainment gap for African-American and Latino students.

UNC Greensboro was founded as a women's college in 1891. In 1960, it became one of the first universities in the region to graduate African-American students; in 1964, the first men enrolled. Over the same period, UNC Greensboro transitioned from a commuter school to a residential campus. Arriving in 2015, Chancellor Franklin

D. Gilliam Jr. extended UNC Greensboro's long-standing commitment to student success when he challenged the institution to take "giant steps" to further its vision and improve student outcomes.

The data show the results. Overall completion rates have gradually increased with the largest gains among black and Hispanic students. Over six years (2010–2015) the graduation rate for black students increased from 52 percent to 63 percent; for Hispanic students, it went from 48 percent to 53 percent (see figure 1). Additionally, UNC Greensboro has closed the gap between Pell and non-Pell graduation rates to 5 percent, compared to a gap nationally of 14 percent (see figure 2).

Figure 1. UNC Greensboro graduation rates by race



Source: [US Department of Education](#)

What is the key to UNC Greensboro’s results?

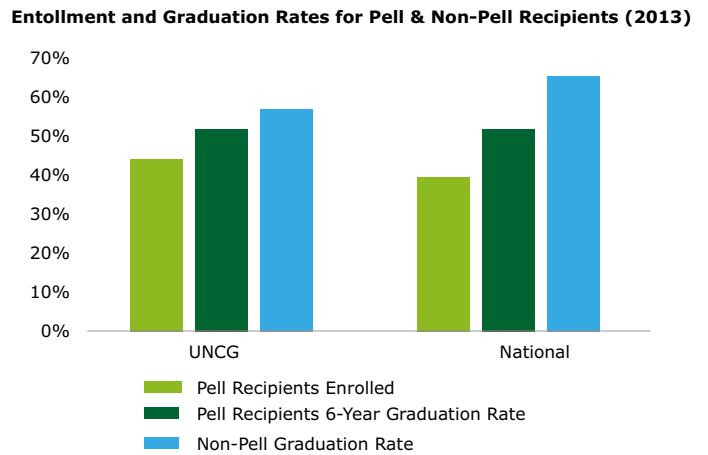
As we have found at other transforming institutions, there is no single “silver bullet,” and success has not come overnight. As Deloitte studied decades’ worth of effort to support students in an equitable way, several key themes emerged:

1. This is not a “hero’s journey.” Rather, UNC Greensboro’s success reflects the collective efforts of an entire institution embracing the belief that by supporting its students with the right programs, they can and will persist. Distributed leadership spanning faculty, staff, and administrators has created a “culture of care” infused into the institution’s daily work.
2. UNC Greensboro continually innovates through an iterative process to identify not only which resources impactfully support students, but how to deliver them as efficiently as possible.
3. As an extension of this innovation mindset, UNC Greensboro values community partnership and actively participates in a network of peer institutions that share a commitment to student success and continuous learning.

A plurality of heroes and a culture of care

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Dr. Dana Dunn explains, “Here it is more about culture...there has been a paradigm shift away from institutions aspiring to become more prestigious and elite through greater selectivity in terms of the students that they take, to an understanding that we are here to serve students and make them successful upon graduation—it is incumbent upon us to embrace that and do that well.” Though it may seem like a simple idea, holding

Figure 2. Enrollment and graduation rates for Pell and non-Pell recipients—UNC Greensboro vs. nationwide (2013)



and acting on this commitment is just as key to an institution’s student success as the specific interventions it pursues. UNC Greensboro’s progress has come under the watch of numerous institutional leaders, each building on the work of its predecessor. One broad example of its “students first” commitment can be seen through the “culture of care” initiative. Sustaining a culture of care across campus has become institutionalized through a training designed by Student Affairs that prepares faculty, staff, and administrators to learn how to effectively identify students in need and refer them to the appropriate resources. After completing a voluntary two-hour training course, attendees receive a “UNC Greensboro Cares” sticker to hang on their door as an invitation for any student to seek assistance, academic or otherwise.

Innovation mindset

UNC Greensboro has considered how to innovate in support of student success at every stage of the student experience, especially for underrepresented minority, first-generation, and low-income students. Ahead of admissions, the University has implemented programs to better engage potential students and their families, intentionally using the word “family” to represent a broad group of supporters who could aid and influence applicants.

First-year students have robust tools to adjust to UNC Greensboro’s culture and academic demands, and students identified as “at risk” receive additional support. As students arrive, Director of New Student Transitions & First Year Experience Kim Sousa-Peoples shared the special attention given to orientation: “There are a lot of first student moments, and that is a big one. We knew that many of our students came here because it felt like home, or it offered

diversity. Through how we staff orientation and present programs, we go over the top to showcase our culture of care and student services. We have a fun, informative, distinctive program—parents with multiple kids in college say our orientation is the best.

"Additionally, First Year Experience (FYE) serves as a "student success 101" course customized for first-year and transfer students to develop practical skills for success in college and beyond. All courses incorporate opportunities for students to connect with student resources and improve academic skills while realizing their full potential at the University. Other resources to support students inside and outside of the classroom exist through the campus Student Success Center, including the Supplemental Instruction Program (SIP). Coordinator for SIP and UNC Greensboro alumnus Chris Dizon shares, "SIP targets historically difficult courses with weekly study groups that focus on transferrable skills. I love that SIP gives students skills that apply to whatever they want to do."

To innovate its advising, UNC Greensboro created an Advisors Institute program for professional development and recognition, with "Blue" and "Gold" level designations (University colors) as advisors progress. Workshop topics include ethical dilemmas, building relationships with advisees, defining advising relationships through referrals, and technology.

A common complaint from institutions is that student success programs are expensive and difficult to scale. UNC Greensboro's work belies this assertion, as it has coupled continuous innovation with a commitment to data-driven decision making and efficient use of resources. The Institutional Research team works closely with each department to streamline data cleansing and reporting, and the Enrollment Management team has developed predictive analytics models to better recognize "at-risk" students, enabling UNC Greensboro to target interventions to the students in greatest need of assistance. Results are shared with all faculty, advisors, and staff who work with students, which facilitates collaboration between these groups. The nimble predictive analytics model can be updated annually based on characteristics of the new class with limited investment required. There is consensus on campus that "knowing which students likely need more support has made my life as an advisor much easier."

Peers and partnership

UNC Greensboro realized that to achieve its goals it needed to look beyond its four walls for ideas. It is an active member of the [American Association of State Colleges and Universities](#) (AASCU), an organization that represents universities and systems whose members share a learning and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved student populations, and a dedication to research and creativity. UNC Greensboro is also a member of the Frontier Set, a select group of higher education institutions

committed to significantly increasing student access and success, and eliminating racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in college attainment, that is supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In addition to the Frontier Set, UNC Greensboro has been invited to participate in the [Association of Public and Land-grant Universities'](#) new Transformational Student Success Cluster initiative, a five-year collaborative focused on student success best practices. Institutions will be clustered based on geographic location. UNC Greensboro will be a member of a cluster of southern universities with a commitment to student degree completion, eliminating the equity gap, and expanding access to higher education.

UNC Greensboro has both contributed to and benefited from its participation in these peer learning communities. Provost Dunn commented on the importance of these initiatives, "Participation in the Frontier Set means that we do not have to reinvent the wheel but can instead learn from the best practices of other high-performing institutions. This makes us more agile and able to respond quickly to student needs."

Within North Carolina, UNC Greensboro has signed agreements with six local community colleges to co-admit students who then do their first two years at community colleges and transfer to UNC Greensboro, significantly reducing the total cost of a bachelor's degree. As a community partner, UNC Greensboro works with local and state entities to expand its impact. For example, in 2016, its new Union Square Campus opened as a home to nursing and health care education programs for UNC Greensboro, NC A&T State University, Guilford Technical Community College, and Cone Health.

UNC Greensboro constantly evaluates how best to build upon its success and aims to scale its initiatives and maximize efficiency, such as with its successful UNCG Guarantee scholarship program. This program provides scholarships and numerous support services to reach 35–50 low-income students annually. In an attempt to scale the support services offered to Guarantee scholars, a new student success coaching initiative has recently been funded through a generous grant from the Edward M. Armfield, Sr. Foundation, Inc. Targeting first-year students who have been identified as likely to benefit from additional support and resources, this program will utilize graduate students as "coaches" to act as case managers and address academic skill development, perseverance, resilience, and motivation while also connecting students to other University supports and services necessary for success. This program will teach students how to recognize challenges and resolve them independently.

The UNC Greensboro team continues to explore how to scale the program benefits in a cost-effective way to reach more students. Launching the Spartan StartUp summer bridge program for the

incoming class of 2018, the institution aims to further increase retention of historically disadvantaged students through early exposure to college courses and academic supports, a first-year experience course, peer mentors, and supportive faculty-student relationships. Programming starts in the summer and continues through the academic year. With so much momentum, the institution is also mindful to track initiative fatigue to understand where faculty, staff, and administrators themselves may need support.

UNC Greensboro's success proves that innovation and equity can go hand-in-hand. With a history of leadership that places students in the center and practical innovations to drive a culture of care, UNC Greensboro shows what is possible when an entire campus commits to student success and serves as a beacon for other institutions that wish to do the same.

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