College of
Arts and Sciences

STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION PLAN

2023-2024 Planning and Implementation Focus:
Strategic Retention

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Introduction

In its **_Blueprint for Success_**, Boise State University outlines five major goals, which will guide the institution's work over the next 5 years. Goal 1, "Improve Educational Access and Student Success," begins with Strategy 1: "Create and enact a comprehensive, strategic enrollment and student success plan, including components related to supporting the whole student, recruitment, retention, graduation, and addressing equity gaps."

In Fall 2022, the University launched its Strategic Enrollment and Retention Plan (SERP), which aims to:

- Raise the level of college attainment of Idahoans in general.
- Increase college attendance among those students who are typically less likely to attend college in the first place.
- Increase attainment (retention and graduation) among those students typically less likely to graduate.
- Address equity gaps in access and attainment for four target student groups:
  - Rural students
  - Hispanic/LatinX students
  - Pell Grant Eligible students
  - First Generation students

The University SERP comes at a time when many institutions of higher education are examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrollment, retention, and graduation. The University's call for a focus on equity gaps, in particular, coincides with higher education's growing awareness that low income students, first generation students, and students of color were disproportionately, negatively impacted by the pandemic. As the U.S. Office for Civil Rights (2021) reports:

COVID-19, with all of its tragic impacts on individuals, families, and communities, appears to be deepening divides in educational opportunity across our nation's classrooms and campuses. Although the pandemic's effects will be studied for many years to come, we know from early studies that for many students, educational gaps that existed before the pandemic— in access, opportunities, achievement, and outcomes— are widening.

We have a rare moment as a country to take stock and to begin the hard work of building our schools back better and stronger—with the resolve necessary to ensure that our nation's schools are defined not by disparities but by equity and opportunity for all students (emphasis in original)[1].

In its 2022 Historical Trend Report, [2]The Pell Institute echoes this sentiment and reminds us that educational disparities have persisted for decades, despite our best efforts to close these gaps. When we focus in, for example, on education attainment rates across income levels, we can see that although over time, bachelor's degree attainment has risen for young adults in all income levels, the gaps in attainment between the highest income levels and the lowest have widened.

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[1]   U.S. Office for Civil Rights. (2021). Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students.

[2]   The Pell Institute. (2022). Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States. Historical Trend Report.

Estimated bachelor's degree attainment by age 24 for dependent family members by family income quartile: 1970 to 2020
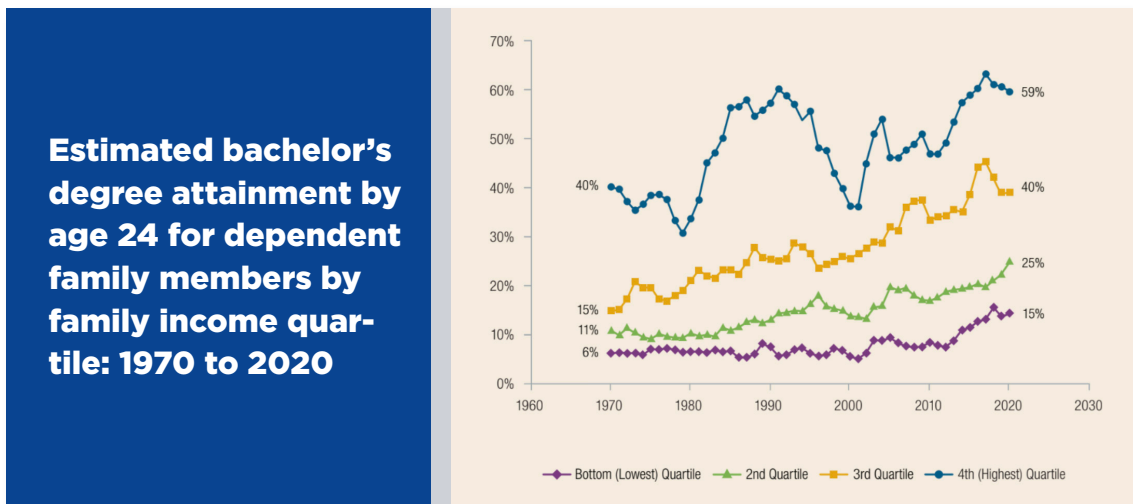
Bachelor's Degree Attainment by Income Level (The Pell Institute)[1]

The persistence of equity gaps over time can also be seen when we look at race and ethnicity. The National Center for Education Statistics reports educational attainment rates every 5 years, and while bachelor's degree attainment has increased gradually for all racial and ethnic groups for several decades, the gaps between under-represented minority groups and White and Asian adults have remained the same[2].

These disparities are directly tied to persistent equity gaps in higher education access, retention, and completion, and they are linked to disparities in physical, mental, social, and financial well-being. College graduates have been found to have higher levels of job satisfaction, civic engagement, higher salaries, and lower unemployment rates[3]. The benefits of a college education are clear, but these benefits come only to those who complete their degrees. As Tough (2023) writes, "In the decade ahead, opportunities for those without a postsecondary credential are projected to shrink even further. The fastest-growing jobs available to those with only a high school diploma, meanwhile, are mostly low-wage service jobs. . . . None of these jobs have a median salary above $31,000 a year." Given these projections, growing disparities in higher education access, retention, and completion are a cause for great concern.

The University SERP stresses the need for institutions to take responsibility for these disparities and uses the term institutional performance gaps "to capture both that it is the institution that must own responsibility for the outcomes (and the solutions) and that the outcomes of focus for this plan are based on serving students equitably." As Bensimon and Spiva (2022) explain, "It's easy for colleges and universities to say that these gaps persist on campus simply as an extension of the historic and pernicious societal challenges institutions are working so hard to address. But this view ignores the role that these institutions play in failing to close these gaps themselves. In too many cases, institutions aren't as focused as they should be on student success, especially for their most vulnerable learners." They continue:

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1   The Pell Institute. (2022). Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States. Historical Trend Report.

2   National Center for Education Statistic, Digest of Educational Statistics. (2020). Percentage of persons 25 to 29 years old with selected levels of educational attainment, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, 1920 through 2020. See also National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). Indicator 27: Educational Attainment.

3   DeAngelo et al. (2011). Completing College: Assessing Graduation Rates at 4-Year Institutions; Tough (2023). Americans are Losing Faith in the Value of College: Whose Fault is That?

Students from under-resourced families and communities battle housing and food insecurity. They work long hours and raise children, all while trying to keep up with their studies and struggling to find the support and courses they need due to a rigid adherence to campus schedules that fail to account for the busy lives of learners. And without the appropriate guidance to align coursework with careers, students often struggle to navigate the transition from college into the workforce. As a result, far too many learners drop out, leaving with no degree but plenty of loans they have little chance of ever repaying.[1]

The College of Arts and Sciences is committed to the University's goal of reducing equity gaps in access, retention, and completion. We recognize the persistence of equity gaps as a complex, entrenched problem that requires all units within COAS— and across the university— to align in a common mission and vision and to work collaboratively to improve educational outcomes.

Toward this end, COAS is developing its own Strategic Enrollment and Retention Plan, which proposes a framework for coordinating student success work across the College. The COAS SERP is a living document that will be updated yearly, as we collaborate and make progress towards our shared goals. The primary focus for the 2023-2024 academic year is Strategic Retention. In this document, we describe our strategic planning and implementation framework, define key equity concepts, set specific retention goals, and outline our strategic retention priorities. In addition, we introduce 3 new COAS-led retention initiatives that will be officially launched in Fall 2024.

COAS SERP Mission:

Reduce equity gaps in access, retention,
and completion
through targeted student support

COAS SERP Vision:

Build a COAS Student Success Network,
where COAS units are aligned towards
shared equity goals

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1   Bensimon & Spiva. (2022). The End of Equity Gaps in Higher Education?

How Do We Get There?
COAS SERP Quick Guide

We have chosen Collective Impact as a framework for SERP design and implementation. This framework has 5 essential conditions for successful initiatives[1], which guide the organization of the COAS SERP document.
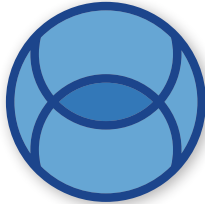
It starts with a common agenda

This means coming together to collectively define the problem and create a shared vision to solve it.

In the Introduction to our SERP, we begin to define the problem we are trying to solve:

- Widening educational disparities across the U.S.
- Disproportionate, negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on underserved communities

Relevant SERP Sections to follow:
The Collective Impact Framework
Equity Concepts and Guiding Principles

It establishes shared measurement

That means tracking progress in the same way, allowing for continuous learning and accountability.

The Blueprint for Success establishes universal goals for access, retention, and completion at Boise State University, and the BSU SERP identifies target student groups who are further away from these goals than the general population. In the COAS SERP, we summarize the equity gap data available to us at the College level, and we set specific, measurable student success goals.

Relevant SERP Sections:
University Retention and Graduation Rate Goals
COAS Approach to Understanding and Addressing Equity Gaps

It fosters mutually reinforcing activities

This means integrating the participants' many different activities to maximize the end result.

The goal of the COAS SERP is not simply to add more work to everyone's plates. We recognize that COAS schools, departments, faculty, and staff are already doing incredible work in the area of student success. Our aim is to make this work more visible; to support this work through improved access to data, tools, and strategies; and to align COAS student success efforts, with a focus on equitable outcomes.

Relevant SERP Sections:
The COAS Student Success Network

1   Collective Impact Forum. What is Collective Impact?
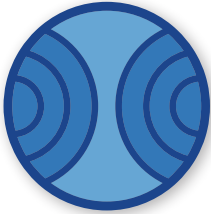
It encourages continuous communications

That means building trust and strengthening relationships

All Collective Impact efforts must build a system of communication across the network that is consistent but not burdensome. When we work more intentionally and efficiently together, we also make it easier for students to connect to the resources they need.

Relevant SERP Sections to follow:
Networked Communication for Collective Impact
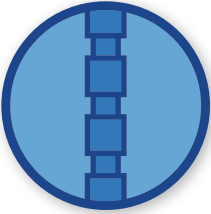
And it has a strong backbone

This means having a team dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group

With a common agenda that focuses on closing equity gaps, we need dedicated leadership and support teams. These teams will oversee the sharing of strategies and resources and will work to ensure that all members of our community—students, faculty, and staff— have a voice in SERP design and implementation.

Relevant SERP Sections:
COAS-Led Strategic Retention Initiatives
Backbone Support

The Collective Impact Framework

Kania and Kramer's (2011) article "Collective Impact," published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, launched a flurry of interest in and conversation around the "Collective Impact Model."[1] The most downloaded article in the history of the Stanford Social Innovation Review, it has more than one million downloads and thousands of academic citations. The article begins by stating a clear but bleak reality: "The scale and complexity of the US public education system has thwarted attempted reforms for decades." In the Collective Impact approach, intractable problems demand networked solutions. While a single organization or unit can chip away at a large-scale problem, a network of organizations aligned around a common agenda can create transformative and sustainable change. To achieve Collective Impact, a group of leaders across units decide "to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement." This idea of "abandoning their agenda" does not mean that the individual units cast aside their values or compromise their unique contributions; instead, it means that they join an ecosystem rather than working in isolation.

Our university SERP activates us around the complex, intractable social problem of closing persistent equity gaps. As previously stated, the university has set the goal of cutting equity gaps in half for four key student populations: Rural, Hispanic, Pell Grant Eligible, and First Generation. These are persistent gaps, and that means one-time solutions are unlikely to hold. A problem at this scale requires collective action that will lead to closing gaps in a sustainable way, disrupting long-standing patterns of inequity.

For an example of Collective Impact at work in higher education, the Division of Academic Affairs at the University of San Diego launched an initiative called "Erasing Equity Gaps via Collective Impact." Their mission is "to leverage and enhance the disparate mentoring, training, and support systems at UC San Diego that have the potential to jointly improve the experience, climate, and

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1   Kania & Kramer. (Winter, 2011). Collective Impact. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

performance for all of our undergraduates, graduate students, staff, and academics." They depict the idea of "jointly" improving experience, climate, and performance as a progression from "individualized actions" to "isolated impacts" to "coordinated effort."

Student support efforts, for example, are often "isolated actions" that exist in separate units. In some cases, cross-unit collaborations allow for some "isolated impacts" to occur. In a Collective Impact approach, the goal is to achieve "coordinated efforts" where all units move in the same direction as they deliver vital forms of student support ("sharing information toward a shared goal"). With shared goals of student support, satisfaction, and self-efficacy, units can "leverage common datasets, tools and assessments" across programs to expand resources and increase access to support. The Collective Impact approach at UC San Diego can be boiled down to "working together more intentionally."[1]

Importantly, though, Collective Impact is not simply a synonym for "collaboration." Collective Impact provides a detailed and distinctive collaborative process that begins when isolated programs with similar missions and goals work to intentionally network their efforts. The process involves five essential conditions, beginning with creating a common agenda to anchor the work[2]:

Individual Actions

Programs, units, and populations across the sector act in silo with different obectives

Coordinated Effort

Groups align their efforts and share information to collaborate towards a shared goal

Isolated Impacts

Various initiatives are working on related issues, using data to evaluate their impacts
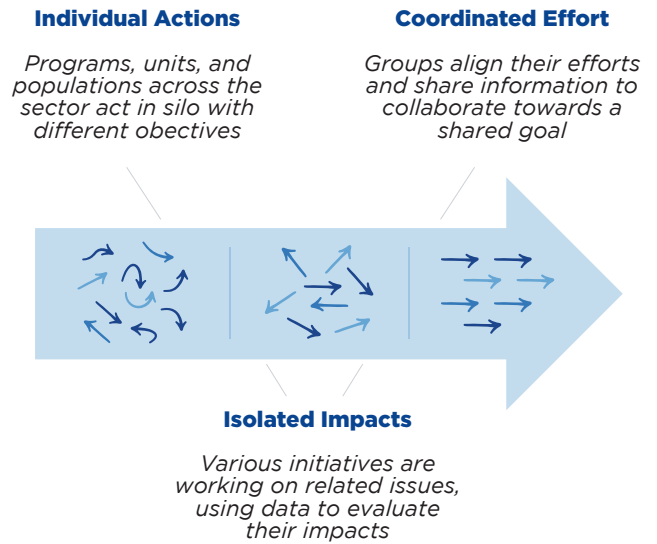
The Five Conditions of Collective Impact

It starts with a common agenda

This means coming together to collectively define the problem and create a shared vision to solve it.

It establishes shared measurement

That means tracking progress in the same way, allowing for continuous learning and accountability.

It fosters mutually reinforcing activities

This means integrating the participants' many different activities to maximize the end result.

It encourages continuous communications

That means building trust and strengthening relationships

And it has a strong backbone

This means having a team dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group

The "common agenda" helps to guard against the pervasive force of "siloing" at universities that perpetually draws attention back to the home unit. With a common agenda, stakeholders can focus on the needs of their home unit while also advancing the shared vision of the network. "Shared measurements" and "mutually reinforcing activities" enhance the work of the home unit by increasing access to data, assessments, tools, and strategies. That means, instead of each program inventing in isolation, or gathering

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1   UC San Diego. (2023). Collective Impact. Regents of the University of California

2   Collective Impact Forum. What is Collective Impact?

and analyzing data in isolation, the work becomes visible and shared across the network. Finally, Collective Impact requires two layers of infrastructure. All Collective Impact efforts must build a system of "continuous communications" across the network that activates consistent (and not burdensome) communication across units. In addition, sustaining the Collective Impact work requires a "strong backbone" with customized support that aligns with the goals (e.g., coordinated research planning and data collection support for the network).

While the idea of networked student support across a unit as large as COAS may seem daunting, the COVID pandemic revealed our capacity for cross-unit innovation and collaboration. As UC San Diego notes, "Our recent experiences dealing with the pandemic have demonstrated that the collective power of our concerted actions amplifies the effect of these individuals' work."[1] When we embrace a Collective Impact approach, we work more intentionally and efficiently toward our student support goals, and our connections to each other make it easier for students to connect to the resources they need as they navigate their educational journey.

Equity Concepts and Guiding Principles

In 2022, Kania et al. revisited their original (2011) proposal for a Collective Impact model and examined the factors that play an important role in determining an initiative's success. After reviewing a wide range of collective impact efforts over the past decade, they concluded that, "The single greatest reason why collective impact efforts fall short is a failure to center equity" (p. 38).[2] This realization prompted Kania et al. to revise their original definition of Collective Impact, which we are using to guide our SERP work:

> Collective impact is a network of community members, organizations, and institutions that ***advance equity*** by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions ***to achieve population and systems-level change.***

Boise State University, in its Blueprint for Success and SERP, has taken an important first step toward centering equity, by identifying target student groups and equity gap goals. The University clearly aims to "advance equity" and "achieve population and systems-level change." As COAS mobilizes to help the University achieve these goals, we must first arrive at a shared understanding of equity and equity-minded practice. What do we mean when we say we value equity and we want to close equity gaps?

Equity[3]	The creation of opportunities for historically underserved populations to participate in educational programs that are capable of closing achievement gaps in student success and completion.
Equity-mindedness	A demonstrated awareness of and willingness to: • address equity issues among institutional leaders, faculty, staff and students

(continued on next page)

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1   UC San Diego. (2023). Erasing Equity Gaps Using Collective Impact. Regents of the University of California.

2   Kania et al. (2022). Centering Equity in Collective Impact. Stanford Innovation Review.

3   Equity & equity-mindedness definitions come from University of Colorado, Boulder, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement. Sample Working Definitions.

	• take stock of the contradictions between the ideals of democratic education and the social, institutional and individual practices, policies, expectations and unspoken rules that contribute to persistent inequalities in outcomes among different groups. • acknowledge the socio-historical context of exclusionary practices, racism and the effect of power asymmetries on opportunities and outcomes for those who are underserved, underrepresented or marginalized.
Historically under-served students[1]	Students with identities that were not considered when the system and institutions of higher education in the U.S. were originally designed. Examples include but are not limited to first-generation; low-income; adult [age 25+] students; students of color; marginalized orientations, gender identities, and intersex students; students with multiple-language backgrounds; undocumented students; Veterans; students with disabilities; students with dependents; foster care youth; formerly and currently incarcerated students.
Equity-gap	An alternative to "achievement gap" that evokes the notion that institutions have a responsibility to create equity for students.

Kania et al. outline 5 major principles for centering equity in a Collective Impact initiative:

5 Principles for Centering Equity

1. Ground the work in data and context, and target solutions.
2. Focus on systems change, in addition to programs and services.
3. Shift power within the collaborative.
4. Listen to and act with community.
5. Build equity leadership and accountability.

Ground the work in data and context, and target solutions. As COAS begins SERP implementation, we must prioritize data access and disaggregation, so we can identify key inequities. This is crucial to developing solutions that are targeted, rather than broadly conceived to support all students in the same way.[2] In addition, quantitative data (e.g., retention and graduation rates) should be paired with qualitative data, so that the experiences and perspectives of those directly impacted by SERP initiatives are centered. Community members (e.g., administrators, faculty, staff, and students) should collaboratively build a shared understanding of what the data means and how it might inform our SERP moving forward.

Focus on systems change, in addition to programs and services. Because the COAS SERP aims to achieve population level change, we cannot simply focus on developing individual initiatives or programs, as equity gaps in higher education are rooted in larger systems of oppression that have maintained inequities for centuries. "Equitable outcomes and solutions . . . cannot be achieved

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1   Historically under-served students and equity gap definitions come from: Achieving the Dream. Knowing our Students, Understanding & Designing for Success: A Guidebook for Institutional Leaders.

2   For a detailed guide to interventions that are targeted, rather than broadly conceived to support students in the same way, see powell et al.'s (2019) Targeted Universalism: Policy and Practice. Othering and Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley.

one program at a time. They require deeper changes in public and private systems, structures, policies, and culture" (Kania et al., p. 42). Both programmatic work and structural work are crucial to our SERP mission.

Shift power within the collaborative. In a university context, this means being more intentional about engaging faculty, staff, and students in the building of collective impact initiatives. Too often, agendas are set and decisions are made in a top-down fashion, despite the fact that the knowledge and experience most crucial to the initiative is that of faculty, staff, and students. University initiatives that do not center this knowledge and experience often fail to achieve buy-in from the departments, programs, and offices that are charged with initiative implementation.

Listen and act with community. Engaging community members does not simply mean seeking out their input. Community member voices (faculty, staff, students) should not just inform the work; rather, community members should be actively engaged as "co-creators of the solution." This means engaging community members at every phase of strategic planning and implementation.

Build equity leadership and accountability. In a Collective Impact model, a Backbone organization or steering committee takes on the responsibility of facilitating communication and aligning efforts across a wide range of units within the network. It is crucial for this group of leaders to keep equity as the central focus of all collective impact efforts. Kania et al. explain that "although many collective impact practitioners envision the backbone role as an impartial broker, the backbone cannot, and should not, be neutral when it comes to explicitly elevating the importance of equity in the group's work" (p. 45).

The Importance of Trauma-Informed Practice in Equity Work

In April 2023, at the Collective Impact Forum's annual Action Summit, Kania et al. (2023) identified trauma "as a critical missing lens in systems change."[1] Equity gaps are rooted in systems of oppression, and systems of oppression are responsible for the individual, collective, and intergenerational trauma experienced by members of marginalized communities. In her (2021) book Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education, Venet explains:

Scholars now recognize what people from marginalized communities have always known: oppression, bias, and discrimination cause trauma. . . . Oppression causes trauma through the ways it is built into the everyday structures of school and society and how these structures have persisted through generations. Trauma doesn't just happen at home— students can be traumatized by conditions and events in schools, and schools can cause trauma.

A trauma-informed lens requires that we critically think about the status quo in education and be willing to make significant changes to the ways we do things (pp. 8-10).[2]

The importance of attending to trauma and chronic stress was brought into high relief during the height of the pandemic. Scholars recognize the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of "collective trauma," which can be defined as "the population level impacts of a catastrophic event . . . that disrupts the basic structures and systems that a community or society has created to sustain its way of life" (Kania et al., 2023). This disruption to basic systems of support and safety

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1   Kania et al. (April, 2023). Trauma as a Critical Missing Lens to Systems Change. Collective Impact Action Summit. See also: Carter & Blanch. (Summer, 2019). A Trauma Lens for Systems Change. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

2   Venet. (2021). Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education.

disproportionately, negatively impacted communities of color, individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions, and low-income and rural communities with limited access to health care.

These inequities, which existed before COVID and which persist today, impact student success.

It is well-documented that exposure to traumatic and adverse events is common among college students. Studies show that 66% to 85% of youth report lifetime traumatic event exposure by the time they reach college and that as many as 50% of students are exposed to a potentially traumatic event in their first year of college. Research indicates that students with cumulative trauma histories are more likely to have difficulty adjusting to college, get lower grades, and drop out. Trauma and other highly stressful life experiences also put college students at greater risk of developing post-traumatic stress, depression, substance abuse disorders, and other physical and mental health problems. . . . A 2020 survey found that the mental health of students and the mental health of faculty and staff were among the top three concerns of college and university presidents" (Carello and Thompson, 2022, p. 3).[1]

At an individual level, an event can be traumatic when a person feels both overwhelmed and help-less in the face of threat or danger.[2] This has a lasting impact on the brain, so much so that mundane events and situations can be triggering, especially if they recreate a sense of overwhelm and an inability to stop (or at least pause) what is happening.

Not all individuals will experience highly stressful or overwhelming events as traumatic, and the impact of these events can vary in terms of severity and duration. For many, however, "their response to threat and danger causes enduring negative psychological, physical, and spiritual harm" (Venet, p. xv). From a student support perspective, it is important to keep in mind that this variation in response is not simply dependent on the individual (e.g., their resilience or ability to manage stress), but rather is rooted in community. In her discussion of trauma-informed approaches in K-12 education, Venet explains, "Children with access to [a] supportive community are more likely to recover from stress and not experience lasting challenges. . . . Healing from trauma requires a community that cares" (p. xv).

How a community responds to individual trauma sets the foundation for the impact of the traumatic event, experience, and effect. Communities that provide a context of understanding and self-determination may facilitate the healing and recovery process for the individual. Alternatively, communities that avoid, overlook, or misunderstand the impact of trauma may often be re-traumatizing and interfere with the healing process. Individuals can be re-traumatized by the very people whose intent is to be helpful (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 17).[3]

Given the importance of community in trauma recovery, it is crucial for COAS to consider how we might move towards SERP implementation in a trauma-informed way. As a first step, we are partnering with the Center for Teaching and Learning to develop faculty learning communities around trauma-informed practice, so that we can design strategies for embedding these practices into our student success work.

1　　　Carello & Thompson. (2022). Developing a New Default in Higher Education: We Are Not Alone in This Work. In Thompson & Carello. (Eds.), Trauma-Informed Pedagogies: A Guide for Responding to Crisis and Inequality in Higher Education.

2　　　Imad. (2020). Examining the Intersections of Equity, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy, and Student Learning.

3　　　SAMHSA. (2014). Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.

We also want to clarify that we do not expect (or want) faculty and staff to take on the role of clinician or counselor, or to attempt to diagnose students. Trauma-informed practice focuses on developing an awareness of trauma and its impact on learning and behavior, as well as improving campus resources, classroom practices, student support systems, and organizational policies and procedures.

Trauma-informed practice is not a passing trend. It is about wanting to disrupt an educational system that too often prioritizes knowing over caring, competition over collaboration, intervention over prevention, and individuals over communities. It is about restoration and healing past injustices at the individual and community levels. It is about revealing our humanity to our students to show them that we are on their side, that we have their back, that we see them and they matter. We build connections with them and empower them to cultivate connections with themselves, their classmates, and the course contents. Trauma-informed education is about centering students' well-being and providing them with the tools to learn, to succeed, and to thrive (Imad, 2022, p. 44).[1]

The Importance of Relationships and Connections in Equity Work

In Fall 2023, the Provost's Office hosted Peter Felten, Executive Director of the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University and lead author of *Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Student Success in College.*[2] In his presentation for academic leaders at Boise State, Felten shared key principles of relationship-rich education, and he stressed the importance of providing all students with access to relationship-rich environments.

"Student-faculty, student-staff, and student-student relationships are crucial for learning, well-being, belonging, and success" (Felten, 2023).
1. All students must experience genuine welcome and deep care.
2. Relationships are a powerful means to inspire all students to learn.
3. All students must develop webs of significant relationships.
4. All students need meaningful relationships to help them––and to challenge them––to explore the big questions of their lives.[3]

In a follow-up session with Boise State's Academic Leadership Council, Susan Shadle, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, highlighted the important connection between relationship-rich education and equity.[4] One key finding of Felten's work is that opportunities for connection that happen outside of the classroom (e.g., events and social gatherings) impact students unevenly, as factors such as work, transportation, and child care can prevent participation. Although the ideal number of meaningful relationships that a student develops over time is 7-10, first generation students and students of color are more likely to report having developed no meaningful relationships or connections over the course of their academic careers. A key takeaway for academic leaders was this:

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1   Imad, M. (2022). Our Brains, Emotions, and Learning: Eight Principles of Trauma-Informed Teaching. In Thompson & Carello. (Eds.), Trauma-Informed Pedagogies: A Guide for Responding to Crisis and Inequality in Higher Education

2   Felten, P. & Lambert, L. Relationship-Rich Education, How Human Connections Drive Student Success in College. Johns Hopkins.

3   Felten, P. (September, 2023). How a Relationship-Rich Culture Drives Student Success. BSU Presentation for Academic Leaders.

4   Relationship-Rich Education. Three Take-Aways for Academic Leaders. Handout provided at the Academic Leadership Council.

> If engaging students in relationship-rich environments doesn't happen in our courses, then it doesn't happen for all students.

Given that there are far more students at a university than faculty and staff, relationship-rich environments must also help students to connect with one another. The classroom is a space that can foster peer-to-peer relationships in addition to instructor-student relationships.

Both the Provost's Office and the Center for Teaching and Learning have taken the lead in offering professional development opportunities around relationship-rich practices, and COAS, through its Innovation Hub, will be providing support for projects that aim to enhance student learning and engagement through relationship-rich strategies.

Both trauma-informed practice and relationship-rich education are crucial to our mission of closing equity gaps in student success outcomes. These approaches help us to envision the "how" of student success, and they can help to guide the design of specific retention strategies. Before we describe our strategic retention initiatives, however, we first want to situate the COAS SERP with the larger context of the Blueprint for Success and University SERP. In the following sections, we share the University's first-year retention and completion goals, we identify student groups that are further from these goals than others, and we set specific, measurable retention and equity goals for the College.

University Retention and Graduation Rate Goals

The University's Blueprint for Success sets ambitious goals for the university in the area of student success.[1] Among these are first-year retention and 6-year graduation rate goals.

Blueprint for Success: First-Year Retention Rate goals

First Year Retention Rate (2)	Fall 2018 Cohort	Fall 2019 Cohort	Fall 2020 Cohort	Fall 2021 Cohort	Fall 2022 Cohort (NA)	Fall 2023 Cohort Benchmark	Fall 2027 Cohort Benchmark
Percent of first-time, full-time freshman retained	79.5%	77.8%	76.0%	79.2%		79.4%	80.6%
Percent of first-time transfers retained or graduated	74.7%	78.4%	77.8%	78.4%		79.0%	83.0%

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1   Boise State University Blueprint for Success. Goal 1 Select Performance Measures.

Blueprint for Success: 6-Year Graduation Rate Goals

6-Year Graduation Rate (2)	Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 20161 Cohort	Fall 2017 Cohort (NA)	Fall 2018 Cohort Benchmark	Fall 2022 Cohort Benchmark
Percent of first-time, full-time freshman who graduated	50.4%	54.1%	53.0%	59.1%		62.0%	65.1%
Percent of first-time transfers who graduated	58.5%	56.9%	59.7%	60.4%		62.0%	65.0%

In addition to these broad goals, the university has identified four target student groups, which are the focus of the University's Strategic Enrollment and Retention Plan (SERP): Rural students, Hispanic/LatinX students, Pell Eligible Students, and First Generation Students.
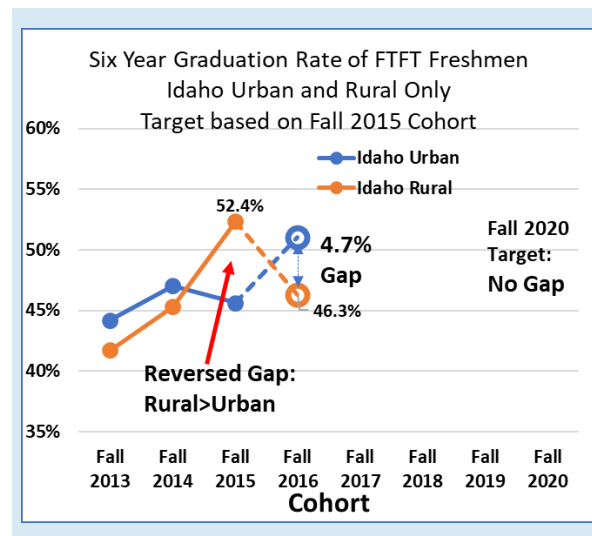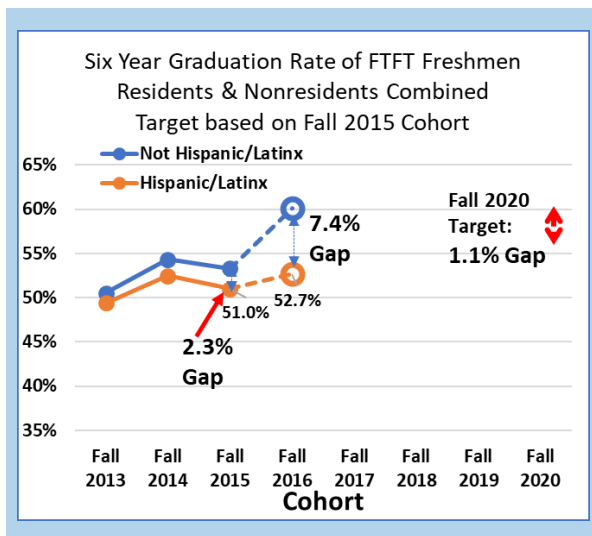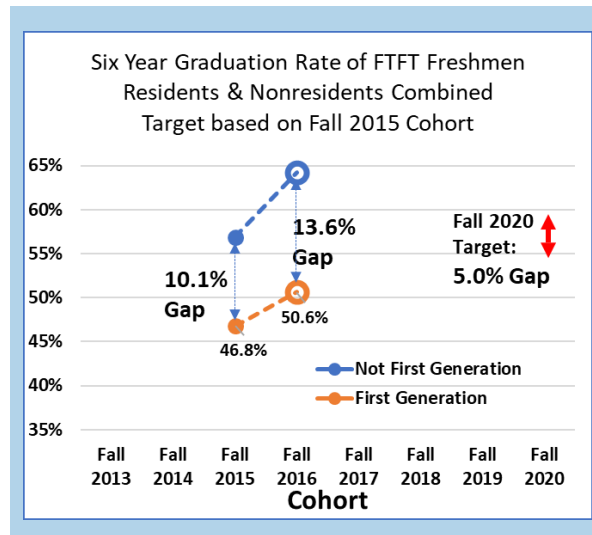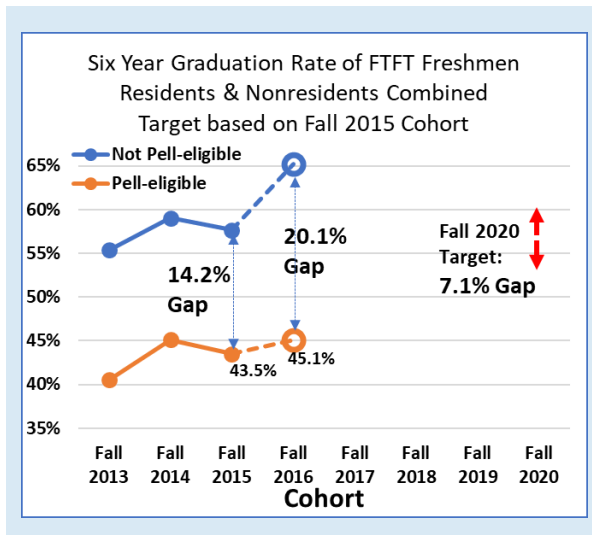
To determine graduation rate goals for each target group, the university first identified a baseline graduation rate, using the Fall 2015 Cohort of First-Time Full Time (FTFT) students. Next, the university identified the gap between each target group's baseline graduation rate and the rate for all other FTFT students in the same cohort. The University SERP states that within 5 years, the goal is to reduce each target group equity gap by 50%. This means that, by 2028, the University would like to see the following equity gap reductions:

University SERP Equity Gap Goals

SERP Target Group	Baseline FTFT Equity Gap	Fall 2028 FTFT Equity Gap Goal
Pell Eligible Students vs. All Others	14.2%	7%
First Generation Students vs. All Others	10.1%	5%
Hispanic Students vs. All Others	2.3%	1%
Rural Students vs. Urban Students	Reversed gap (Rural rate higher than Urban)	0%

Although SERP implementation is in its early stages, the University is tracking access, retention, and graduation rates yearly. In its most recent update, the University found that, for 3 of the 4 Target Student Groups, Fall 2016 Cohort graduation rate gaps were larger than Fall 2015 Cohort gaps, and there was a change in the gap between Urban and Rural Students. The increase in equity gaps in just one year's time is likely connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Fall 2016 Cohort experienced several years of intense pandemic conditions, from 2019 to 2021.

# Equity Gaps in Graduation Rates: Fall 2013 - Fall 2016 Cohorts

Six Year Graduation Rate of FTFT Freshmen Residents & Nonresidents Combined Target based on Fall 2015 Cohort

Six Year Graduation Rate of FTFT Freshmen Residents & Nonresidents Combined Target based on Fall 2015 Cohort

Six Year Graduation Rate of FTFT Freshmen Residents & Nonresidents Combined Target based on Fall 2015 Cohort

Six Year Graduation Rate of FTFT Freshmen Idaho Urban and Rural Only Target based on Fall 2015 Cohort

In addition to highlighting equity gaps between each SERP Target Group and "All Others," the University's Institutional Effectiveness office has begun the process of looking at SERP intersectionality. While some students may only have one SERP identity (e.g., Hispanic), others may have 2 or more (e.g., Hispanic and First Generation). In addition, Institutional Effectiveness is disaggregating data to better understand equity gaps among Idaho Residents in particular. Their most recent report, prepared for the Provost's Office, summarizes SERP identity intersectionality for both First Time and Transfer Idaho Residents who are part of the Fall 2021 Full-Time Cohort.

The majority of Idaho Resident students in this Cohort have one or more SERP identities. This is the case for both First Time and Transfer students, though the proportion of students with SERP identities is larger for the Transfer group: 78% of Transfer students and 61% of First Time students have one or more SERP identities.

First-Time, Full-Time, Idaho Residents (n=1,413) | **Transfer**, Full-Time, Idaho Residents (n=624)
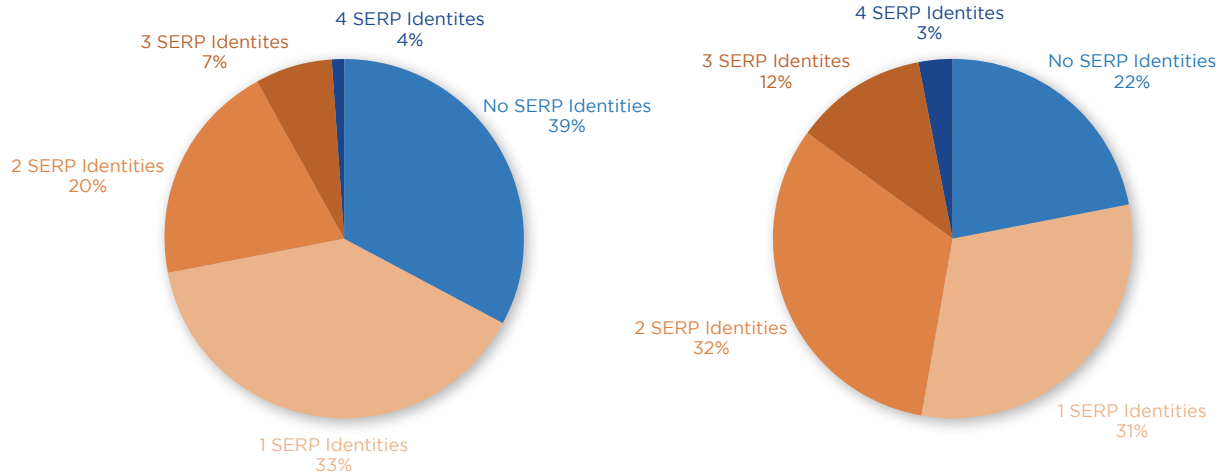
Institutional Effectiveness also found differences in graduation rates for students with one or more SERP identities and students with no SERP identities. For Idaho Residents who began their career at Boise State in Fall 2016, the 4-year and 6-year graduation rates look different across No SERP and 1+ SERP categories.

The University's universal goal for all first-time, full-time students is 65%. If we look at the 2016 Cohort, we can see that students with 0 SERP identities are not very far from this goal. Students with 1 or more SERP identities, however, are much further from this goal, with a 6-year graduation rate of only 45%. This underscores the importance of data disaggregation and reminds us that our focus must not only be on overall graduation rates, but also persistent equity gaps in student success outcomes.

COAS Approach to Understanding and Addressing Equity Gaps

COAS is committed to the University's goal of reducing equity gaps and improving retention and graduation rates for all students. As can be seen in the University's recent status updates, and in the COAS-specific data we share in this section, some student groups are closer to the University's retention and graduation goals than others.

To organize how we might approach bringing all students closer to the University's goals, we are drawing on john a. powell's Targeted Universalism framework[1], which helps institutions to set ambitious universal goals for all members of a community and to design targeted intervention strategies for particular groups that are the furthest from these goals:

How Do We Help All Students Reach Our Student Success Goals?

1. Establish a universal goal based upon a broadly shared recognition of a societal problem and collective aspirations.

The Blueprint for Success sets universal first-year retention and 4- and 6-year graduation rate goals for First-Time and Transfer Full-Time students. (See the Blueprint for Success Goal 1 Metrics.)

2. Assess general population performance relative to the universal goal.

The University's retention and graduation goals are based on the performance of the general student population of First-Time and Transfer Full-Time students. (These numbers can also be found under the Blueprint's Goal 1 Metrics.)

3. Identify groups that are performing differently with respect to the goal. Groups should be disaggregated.

The University SERP identifies 4 target student groups that are performing differently with respect to the University's retention and graduation rate goals. COAS is also examining how SERP groups are performing in comparison to the general population of COAS majors. To do this, we are using Fate Data (year-to-year enrollment data), which includes not only first-time, full-time students, but all students enrolled with a COAS major.

It should be noted that the 4 SERP Target Groups are just a start. Both the University and COAS have begun to identify additional student groups that are currently performing differently with respect to our retention and graduation goals. These groups include:

- Idaho Residents
- Men
- Under-Represented Minority (URM) Students (American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander)
- Transfer students

4. Assess and understand the structures that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal

This is a crucial step that is often missed in university strategic planning. Equity gap data helps us to identify which groups are in need of attention, but it does not provide any magical answers as to why some student groups are performing better than others and what interventions are needed. Compiling equity gap data is one step in a larger process of needs assessment and strategy planning.

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1   John a. powell et al. (2019), Targeted Universalism: Policy and Practice

Needs assessment involves a number of research strategies, including the identification and examination of existing qualitative data (e.g., student surveys, focus groups); review of existing research on underrepresented students and promising practices; and the design and implementation of additional data collection efforts. Ideally, these research activities are conducted in collaboration with students who are members of the groups in focus.

5. Develop and implement targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal.

Once we have a better understanding of particular groups' experiences at BSU— the barriers they've faced and the supports they need— we can move to designing targeted interventions. The recommendation here is to focus on changes to structures, rather than isolated efforts that impact a small number of students. When structural deficits are addressed, based on what was learned about a particular student group, it is often the case that these structural changes also benefit many other students, not just the target group. This brings us back to the universal goal. Through targeted interventions, we bring not only one group closer to the goal, but several groups at one time.

To help orient COAS to the universal goals set by the University and the COAS-level data available for examining year-to-year retention and equity gaps, we have compiled a SERP Appendix of tables and figures, which provide more detailed information regarding University benchmarks and goals, as well as the demographics of our COAS majors and key equity gaps in need of attention. This Appendix is divided into two major sections, based on the types of data we have been able to access thus far. As we gain access to additional data and initiate new data collection efforts, we will update the COAS SERP Appendix accordingly.

COAS SERP Appendix

1. *University-Level Data*
   - University Access Goals and Status Updates
   - University Graduation Rate Goals and Status Updates
   - First Year Retention & Graduation Rates for Idaho Residents vs. Non-Residents
   - SERP Intersectionality for First-Time and Transfer Idaho Resident Students

2. *COAS Success Rates for Fall 21 - Fall 22 (Baseline)*
   - The number of students who were enrolled in a particular Fall semester and who were retained, graduated or no longer enrolled by the following Fall.
   - Disaggregation of Fate Data across variables such as SERP identity, Gender, and Idaho Residency.
   - COAS students who did not return to BSU in Fall 2022, broken down by Academic Level, Academic Standing, SERP Identity, and other variables.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness has provided Colleges with access to Fate Data, through dashboards available on their website. Fate Data is not Cohort-based, but rather is based on "the enrollment status of a group of undergraduate students for a given fall semester (10th day) one year later in the following fall semester." This data includes all undergraduate degree-seeking students, whereas official University retention and graduation rates are limited to First-Time, Full-Time students. Numbers displayed on the Fate Dashboards for COAS include both Associate's and Bachelor's degree-seeking students who have a COAS Major.

The Fate Data Dashboards allow us to take an enrollment snapshot of any given year and to explore how many students returned the following year. We can look at all COAS majors, or focus on a particular student group (e.g., students with Freshman standing) and disaggregate further (e.g., Men and Women). The Fate Dashboard displays a "Success Rate" for each group or subgroup, defined as "The percent of students who enrolled at Boise State (even if in a different major) the next fall or graduated before the next fall." For example, if the Success Rate for a particular group is 67%, this means that 33% of the students in that group did not return to Boise State the following year.

In Summer 2023, Institutional Effectiveness took a snapshot of Fall 2021 COAS Fate Data, so we could use this as a baseline for setting Success Rate goals. The overall COAS Success Rate for all majors in Fall 2021 was 82%. The SERP Appendix breaks this data down further and highlights key equity gaps in our baseline data. In the following sections, we draw on this data to set Success Rate goals for students with Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior standing, and we identify student groups that are further away from our Success Rate goals than other student groups.

COAS Strategic Retention Goals

The universal Success Rate goal we have set for all COAS majors by 2030 is 90%. Achieving this goal means that, from the time we began our strategic planning process, up until 2030, we will have raised our overall baseline Success Rate by 10%. Over time, this means we will need to improve our success rates by about 2% each year, from 2024 to 2030.

COAS SERP Universal Goal:

Achieve a 90% Success Rate for all
COAS majors by 2030

Once a universal success rate goal is set, it is important to examine the performance of the general population of COAS majors relative to the universal goal, and to identify student groups that are further away from the universal goal than others. The following table displays our Fall 2021 baseline data, broken down by Academic Standing.

General Population Performance Relative to the Universal Goal

	Freshman Standing	Sophmore Standing	Junior Standing	Senior Standing	All Academic Levels Combined
Percent of all BSU students retained or graduated, 2021-2022	73% (2,503/3,451)	81% (2,703/3,333)	86% (3,456/4,015)	91% (5,171/5,662)	84% (13,814/16,46)
Percent of all COAS students retained or graduated 2021-2022[1]	**69%** (607/886)	**79%** (802/1010	**83%** (1,116/1,341)	**90%** (1,651/1,849)	**82%** (4,176/5,086)

A total of 910 undergraduate COAS majors enrolled in Fall 2021 did not return to Boise State in Fall 2022. The largest losses occurred among students with Freshman standing: 31% of these students (279/886) were no longer enrolled the following Fall. If we had achieved an overall 90% Success Rate for Fall 2021 to Fall 2022, we would have retained 400 additional COAS students in that year.

Given that Success Rates vary considerably across Academic Standing, we have also set specific Success Rate goals for students with Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior Standing.

Success Rate Goals, broken down by Academic Standing
(Percent enrolled who were retained or graduated the following Fall)

	F21-F22 Baseline	F29-F30 Goal
Freshman Standing:	69%	**76%**
Sophmore Standing:	79%	**87%**
Junior Standing:	83%	**91%**
Senior Standing:	90%	**99%**
All COAS Majors:	82%	**90%**

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[1]   The 2021-2022 counts do not include Post-Baccalaureate students. A total of 139 Post-Bacc students were enrolled in a COAS major in Fall 2021. 50% of these students did not return the following Fall.

COAS SERP Groups and Equity Gaps

COAS Equity Gap Goal:
Cut equity gaps in half by 2030, with a focus on the following student groups:
- First Generation Students
- Hispanic Students
- Pell Eligible Students
- Idaho Residents

The University has identified four groups that are performing differently than the general student population in regards to a number of retention and completion goals: First Generation students, Hispanic students, Pell Eligible students, and Rural Idaho students. Similarly, within COAS, we can see equity gaps in Success Rates for these students when we examine our Fate Data. Over the course of the pandemic, many of these gaps widened.

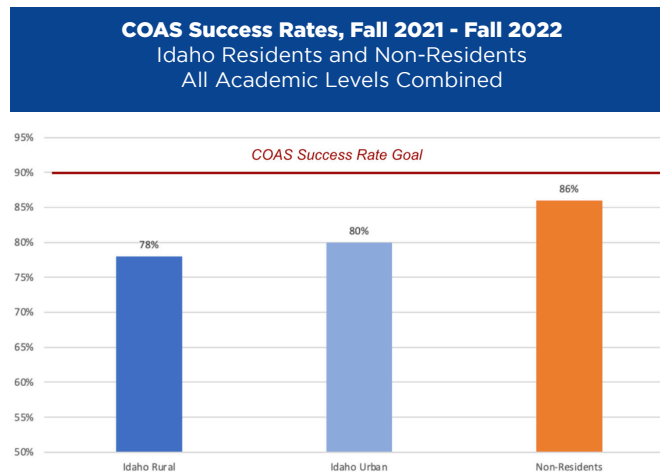## SERP Target Group Success Rate Gaps for COAS, 2017-2021[1]
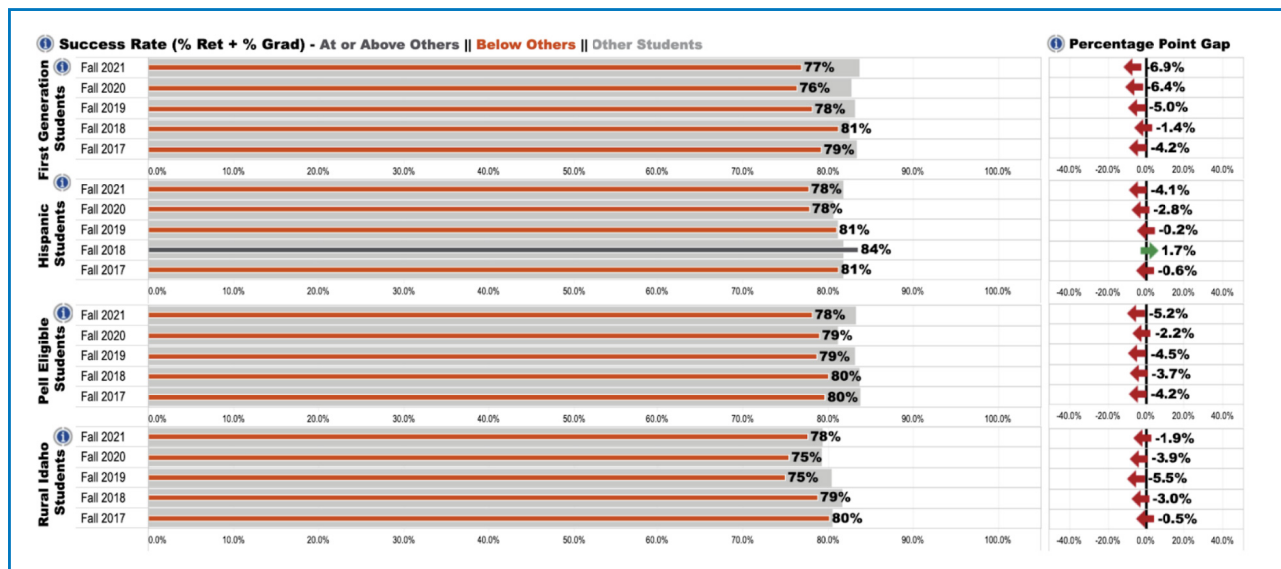
In our **SERP Appendix**, we provide raw counts for the number of students that were either retained or graduated the following fall, for each SERP Group and All Others, and we highlight key equity gaps. In the following figures, we display the Success Rates for each SERP Group and All Others in relation to the universal Success Rate goal of 90%. We also display Idaho Rural and Urban students alongside Non-Residents. When we focus on this baseline data, we can see that the 4 SERP Target Groups are further away from our universal Success Rate goals than the general population of COAS majors. Both Idaho Rural and Idaho Urban students are further from this goal than Non-residents.

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1   Boise State Institutional Effectiveness. SERP Fate Data Dashboard.
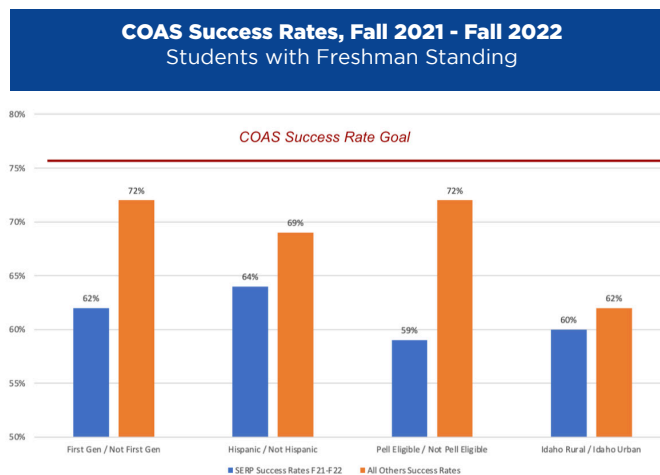
COAS Group Success Rates

COAS Success Rates, Fall 2021 - Fall 2022
All Academic Levels Combined

COAS Success Rate Goal

Group	SERP Success Rates F 21-F 22	All Others Success Rates
First Gen / Not First Gen	78%	85%
Hispanic / Not Hispanic	79%	83%
Pell Eligible / Not Pell Eligible	79%	84%
Idaho Rural / Idaho Urban	78%	80%

Idaho Residents vs. Non-Residents

COAS Success Rates, Fall 2021 - Fall 2022
Idaho Residents and Non-Residents
All Academic Levels Combined

COAS Success Rate Goal

Idaho Rural	Idaho Urban	Non-Residents
78%	80%	86%

In addition to the equity gaps observed for all COAS majors, we found that equity gaps were even larger among students with Freshman and Junior Standing.

Idaho Groups - Freshman Standing

COAS Success Rates, Fall 2021 - Fall 2022
Students with Freshman Standing

COAS Success Rate Goal

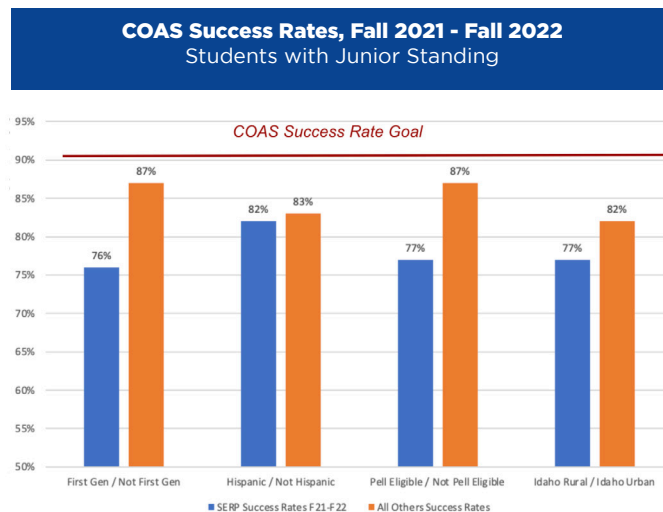| Group	SERP Success Rates F 21-F 22	All Others Success Rates
First Gen / Not First Gen	62%	72%
Hispanic / Not Hispanic	64%	69%
Pell Eligible / Not Pell Eligible	59%	72%
Idaho Rural / Idaho Urban	60%	62%

For students with Freshman Standing, the gaps between our SERP Groups and All Others is substantial, particularly for First Generation, Hispanic, and Pell Eligible students. The gap between Idaho Rural and Idaho Urban students is not large, but when Idaho students are compared with Non-residents, there is a large gap. While Idaho residents are relatively far from our Freshman Standing goal of 76%, Non-residents already exceed this goal in the baseline data.
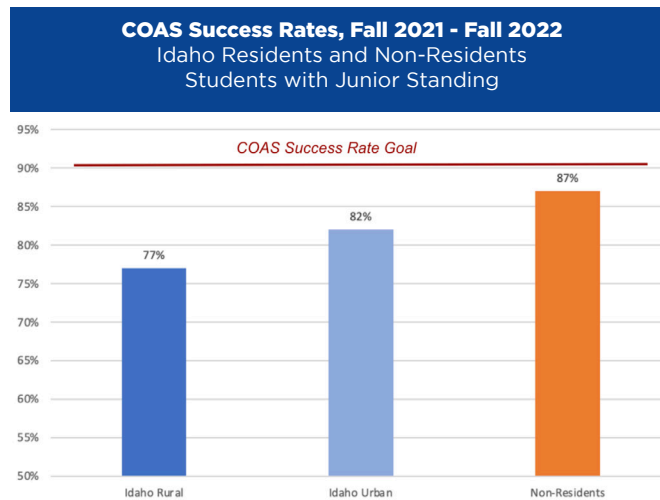
Idaho Residents vs. Non-Residents - Freshman Standing

COAS Success Rates, Fall 2021 - Fall 2022
Idaho Residents and Non-Residents
Students with Freshman Standing
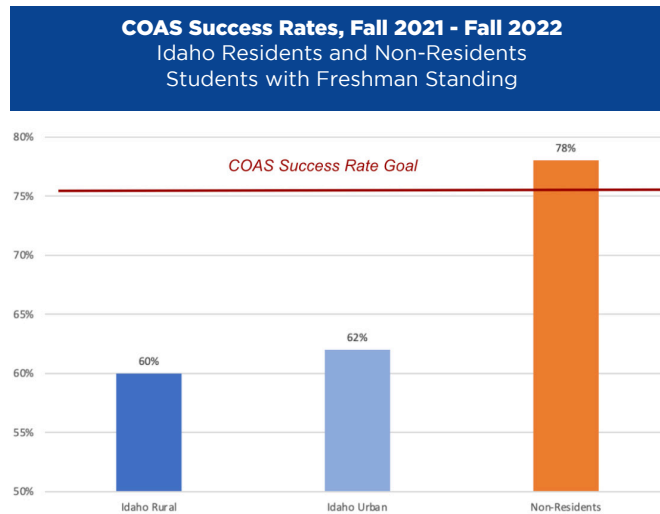
SERP Groups - Junior Standing

COAS Success Rates, Fall 2021 - Fall 2022
Students with Junior Standing

Idaho Residents vs. Non-Residents - Junior Standing

The equity gaps we have observed in our baseline data mirror the gaps we highlighted in the Introduction to our SERP. These gaps have persisted for decades, and they were worsened by the pandemic. Thus, in addition to our universal Success Rate goal, we also aim to cut these equity gaps in half by 2030.

Additional Student Groups in Need of Attention

Both the Provost's Office and COAS have begun the process of disaggregating student success data further, to identify additional student groups in need of attention. These groups include Men, Under-represented minority students (in addition to Hispanic students, this includes Black, American Indian, and Pacific Islander students), Transfer students, Part-Time students, and students enrolled in fully online programs. The SERP Appendix displays COAS Success Rates and equity gaps for these groups.

In addition, in its 2021 report, the U.S. Office for Civil Rights[1] identified students with disabilities and students with LGBTQIA+ identities as groups disproportionately, negatively impacted by the pandemic. Persistent equity gaps in retention and completion related to disability, gender, age, and first-generation status also impact student veterans. Nationally, 62% of student veterans are first-generation, 85% are over the age of 24, and 73% are men[2]. As we design our COAS-led retention initiatives, we will collaborate with support offices on campus to learn more about the barriers faced by these students.

Moving from Strategic Planning to Strategic Implementation

Since receiving our initial baseline data from Institutional Effectiveness, we have made substantial progress in setting Success Rate goals and identifying student groups who are further away from these goals than others. We are now poised to move from strategic planning into strategic implementation.

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1   U.S. Office for Civil Rights. (2021). Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students.

2   U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Characteristics of Student Veterans. VA College Toolkit Handout.

COAS SERP Strategic Planning

Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Spring 2023
☑ Fall 2021 Fate Data provided by Institutional Effectiveness and chosen as baseline	☑ Success Rate Goals Set for all COAS majors and each academic standing	■ Engage COAS departments in strategic retention planning, through opt-in Listening Tours and Data Walks
☑ Fate Data further disaggregated by Academic Standing, SERP Group, Idaho Residency, Gender, and Enrollment Status	☑ SERP groups examined to determine how far from the goal they are when compared to other groups	■ Introduce COAS-led initiatives that are focused on achieving our Success Rate goals; initiate soft launch/pilot phase
	☑ Success Rate goals and equity gaps shared with the College through the dissemination of the COAS Strategic Enrollment & Retention Plan	■ Select projects for Innovation Hub funding
	☑ Innovation Hub call for proposals announced, with a focus on student success	

COAS SERP Strategic Implementation

| Fall 2024	Fall 2026 - Fall 2027	Fall 2029 - Fall 2030
■ Launch COAS-led initiatives and Innovation Hub student success projects; begin tracking students who participate	■ Half-way checkpoint for progress towards our Success Rate goals; share progress report with College and University	■ 5-year check point for progress towards our Success Rate goals; share culminating report with College and University
■ Begin tracking semester to semester retention for all COAS majors, each academic standing, and each SERP group	**Mid-Point Goal: 86% Success Rate**	**Goal by 2030: 90% Success Rate**

In the following sections, we outline our strategic implementation vision in more detail.

The COAS Student Success Network

In a college as large and complex as ours, there is much that we could and should do to support our students and address inequities (e.g., advising and mentoring, inclusive pedagogies, basic needs and wrap-around services, social and community engagement, career readiness and experiential education, and so on). The question becomes: where do we begin?

In 2022-23, we assembled an Implementation Team of 22 faculty and staff members from across the college to focus on implementation of Student Success and Retention (SSR) strategies. We prioritized the creation of a college-level SERP that would adapt the university-level goals for the complexities of our college. Our process began with an in-depth needs assessment that surfaced the many barriers that disrupt not only student success, but also the success of our faculty and staff. Guided by the goal of closing persistent equity gaps, we must address these barriers and constraints directly in order to design feasible, sustainable strategies. If, for example, a strategy ends up creating an additional burden for a faculty or staff group that is already experiencing burn-out, we have not created a feasible, sustainable strategy for addressing equity gaps.

Coordination and alignment of student success initiatives is challenging and complex. To accomplish this work, we are drawing on existing frameworks for leadership and equity-minded strategic planning. One of these frameworks, Collective Impact, we have already described at length. The second framework is Marshall Ganz' "Snowflake" Model of Distributed Leadership. This model is a community organizing strategy where leadership is not held by a single individual or several individuals in charge of isolated initiatives. Rather, leadership is distributed across a network, so that initiatives can be interconnected and aligned.[1]

"I'm The Leader"   **"We're The Leaders"**   **"Snowflake/ Interdependent Leadership"**
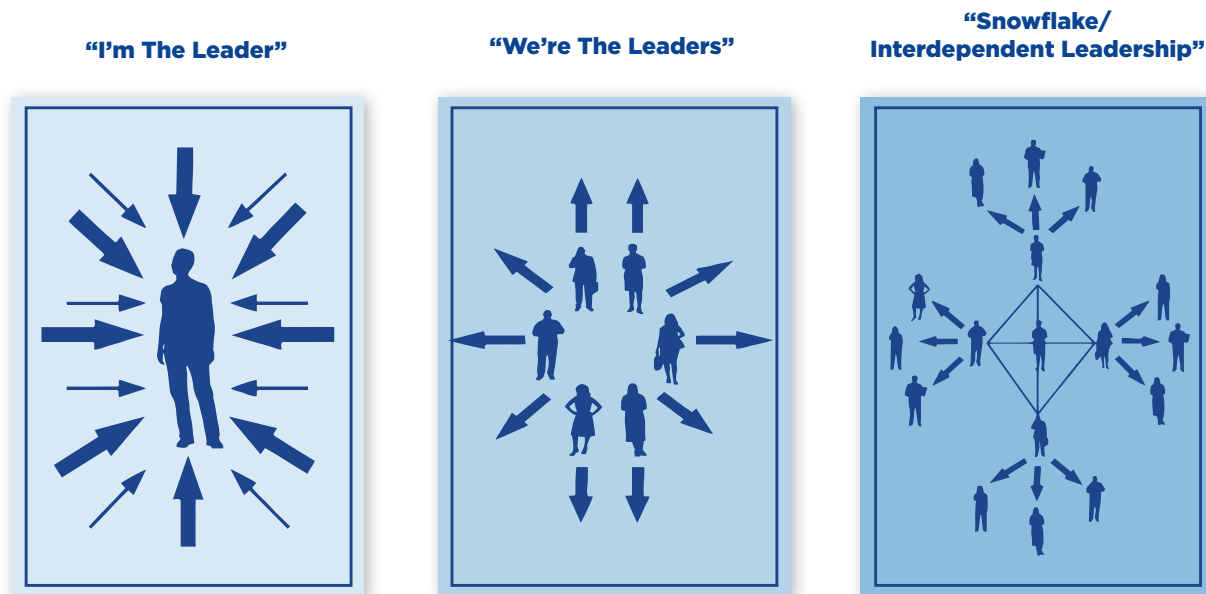
Kania et al.'s Collective Impact model[2] outlines how distributed leadership might be utilized to combat complex, entrenched social problems. Collective Impact provides a distinctive collaborative process that begins when isolated programs with similar missions and goals work intentionally to align their efforts.

Both the "Snowflake" Model of Distributed Leadership and the Collective Impact model inform how we plan to organize and align student success work across the College.

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1   Ganz. (Accessed 2023). Organizing: People, Power, Change.

2   Kania et al. (2011). Collective Impact. Kania et al. (2022). Centering Equity in Collective Impact.

Networked Communication for Collective Impact
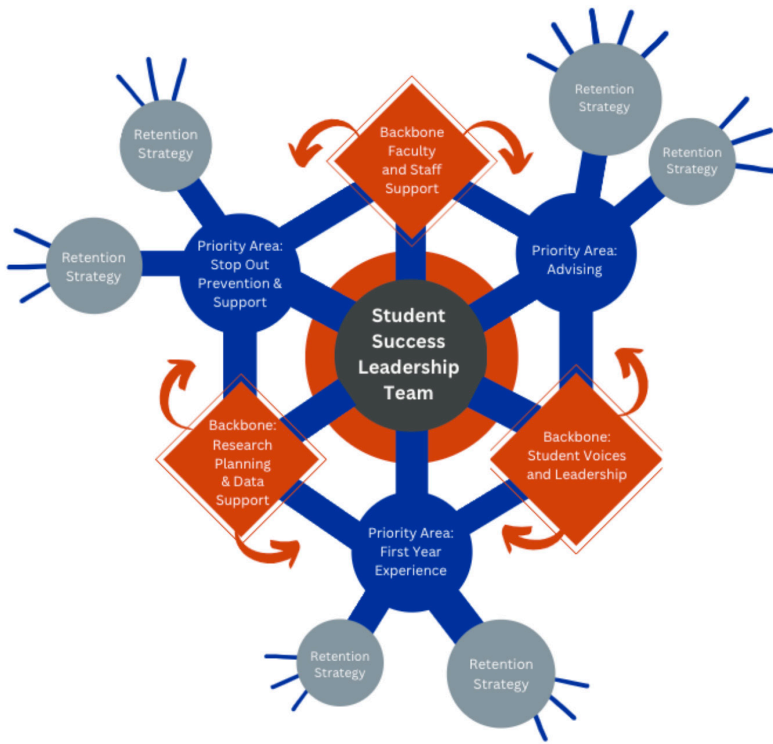
Student Success Leadership Team
COAS Dean, Associate Dean of Education, COAS SERP Lead, Director of First-Year Experiences, Associate Director of Advising, Associate Director of Student Success Initiatives

SERP Priortity Area
Three college-level priority areas for coordinated student support that each contain dedicated leadership, signature strategies, and retention targets

SERP Priortity Area
Customized infrastructure designed to remove barriers and reach our SERP goals. Backbone support is available to stakeholders across the network

Retention Strategies
Data-informed initiatives with clear targetsthat will be tracked, assessed, and reported on

The COAS Student Support Network is designed to both distribute leadership and facilitate communication across the College. Each major node on the network plays a role in maintaining consistent communication, so that we can share information, resources, and strategies and align our efforts toward common student success goals.

Student Success Leadership Team: The Leadership Team oversees the common agenda and is responsible for reporting regularly on SERP progress.

Kelly Myers, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and Student Success, leads the student success mission in COAS

Casey Iezzi, COAS SERP Lead, coordinates the alignment of student success initiatives and tracks progress towards our shared retention and equity goals

José Lee-Perez, Director of First Year Experiences, leads our effort to better support students across their first year at Boise State

David Brandt, Associate Director of Advising Services, leads our advising team and works closely with our newly formed COAS Advising Council to provide both proactive and responsive advising support

Megan Gambs, Associate Director of Student Success Initiatives, leads our work to create new ways of understanding and supporting students who stop out or who are considering stopping out

Priority Areas: Three Members of the Leadership Team each oversee one Priority Area. These leaders plan COAS-level Retention Strategies (described in detail below), and they help individuals and teams who are working on related initiatives connect to the network.

First Year Experience: All new students will be empowered to maximize their academic and personal well-being, discover their unique skills, and build meaningful relationships.

Advising: All COAS students will receive clear and consistent advising support from orientation through graduation.

Stop Out Prevention and Support: All COAS students who have considered stopping out, or who have stopped out with some credit and no credential, will feel welcome, valued, and seen through our dedicated support systems.

Backbone Support: The Leadership Team and the SSR Implementation Team are working to build Backbone Support for the Network, and they have identified three specific types of support that are needed to sustain and align our student success work.

Faculty and Staff Support: Support those who support our students. Recognize and address burnout. Make visible and reward faculty and staff student success efforts.

Student Voices and Leadership: Engage students in the strategic planning and implementation process.

Research Planning and Data Support: Improve data access and support data-informed decision-making.

Retention Strategies: These strategies include COAS-led initiatives, as well as projects and initiatives happening within COAS Schools, Departments, and Programs. A major goal of the Student Success Network is to facilitate connection and alignment of student success efforts across the college, so that their collective impact can be tracked over time.

COAS-Led Strategic Retention Initiatives

In Spring 2024, the Student Success Leadership Team will introduce three new initiatives that are designed to improve student retention in the College over the next 5 years. These initiatives are not meant to eliminate or overshadow other student support work in the College. We still need nuanced student support at the department and program level, and we will remain responsive to student needs as they surface. What we are adding is a college-level commitment to reducing equity gaps through targeted interventions, and that commitment demands coordinated strategies with new kinds of leadership, assessment, and invention.

The theme that unites each of our strategic retention initiatives is "You Are Here." Our goal is for students to experience an overwhelming message of welcoming and belonging— We are so happy you are here! In addition, we want to help students identify and reflect on where they are, where they have been, and where they want to go.

You Are Here
Strategic Retention Initiatives

| First Year Experience | Advising | Stop-Out Prevention and Support |

First Year Experience

Priority Area Lead: José Lee-Perez

Vision: Create an extended first-year student onboarding experience that supports college readiness, student transition, and self-efficacy in equitable educational environments. Elements will foster early student success in five focus areas: sense of capability, connectedness, sense of purpose, sense of resourcefulness, and academic self-efficacy.[1]

Our approach will:

1. Build meaningful relationships
2. Set clear expectations and motivations for students
3. Promote active learning
4. Integrate student support into the learning process
5. Validate students' journeys and ensure students know where they stand

Signature Initiatives:

FYE Weeks of Welcome. Our "Weeks of Welcome'' design employs a unique integration of student support systems, experiences, and events (what we call the "SEE" approach). Through a combination of new and existing programming, we strategically place SEE markers throughout the first part of the fall semester, culminating in Bronco Social. Through our coordinated "Weeks of Welcome," resources and programming in both Academic and Student Affairs become more visible to students, better integrated into classrooms, and intentionally delivered according to student needs.

FYE Spring Re-Welcome. To celebrate the importance and accomplishment of returning in the spring, and to re-energize our first-year students, we will formally re-welcome them when they return in the spring. The re-welcome provides another opportunity to reorient our students to the resources and support we offer.

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[1]   Lizzio, A. (2006). Designing an Orientation and Transition Strategy for Commencing Students: Applying the Five Senses Model.

Advising

Priority Area Lead: David Brandt

Objective: Improve consistency of COAS technical advising and build self-efficacy in our students so that all COAS students:

1. Know where to go for advising
2. Get a timely response from an advisor
3. Receive the advising information they need and have a clear sense of next steps

Our approach will:

Increase self-efficacy in our students because they understand the following:

- Their degree requirements at the college and university level
- Where exactly they are in their degree plan and what they need to do next
- How to connect to resources and opportunities
- Key university policies and processes

Signature Initiatives:

Enhanced Technical Advising. We will bring all professional advisors under the umbrella of COAS Advising and Student Success to enhance our capacity to deliver clear and consistent technical advising to all COAS students. The advising team will engage in consistent data tracking, proactive outreach, and strategic campaigns that will result in increased retention, streamlined time to degree, and improved graduation rates. We will address equity gaps through improved accessibility and consistency of technical advising.

Spring Group Advising. To address fall to spring melt, the COAS Advising team will implement group advising for first-year students in their spring semester. This approach formally extends orientation-support into the spring, with targeted recruitment designed for our SERP populations.

Graduation Checks. We will launch a semesterly system for grad check appointments aimed at removing barriers and increasing graduation rates. Our process includes the following steps each semester:

- Run report on students with 98+ credits
  Strategic communication sent to all COAS students who meet the criteria of 98+ credits
- COAS Advising Team offers dedicated timeslots specifically for "Graduation Check Appointments"
- Students are guided through the steps for finalizing their degree. Through these appointments, advisors surface barriers to graduation and work to address them. All students leave with a clear path to graduation.

Stop-Out Prevention and Support

Priority Area Lead: Megan Gambs

Objective: Create a clear path to dedicated support for students who are considering stopping out, or who have stopped out with Some Credit and No Credential (SCNC)[1]

Our approach will:

Launch a new office dedicated to Student Persistence and Re-Enrollment that provides a place for students to come to reflect on their educational experience, explore their goals, and identify the best path forward for them. All programming affiliated with the Office will extend our "You Are Here" theme from our First Year Experience, with four distinct phases:

- YOU ARE HERE: Understand the landscape, the student experience, and where you are

- WHERE YOU'VE BEEN: Understand where you have been: What worked? What didn't? When and How did you thrive? Why? What strengths do you bring to this journey?

- WHERE YOU WANT TO GO: Identify where you want to go. Explore, connect, and build meaningful relationships across campus.

- HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR JOURNEY: What do you need to do to be ready? Consider everything from building your network to habit building to thinking through what needs to be in place for you to be successful next semester.

Signature Initiatives:

Bronco Gap Year Relaunch. Housed within the Office of Student Persistence and Re-Enrollment, the reimagined Bronco Gap Year program offers our students a one-semester pause, or break, with guided support from COAS staff that keeps them connected (or re-engaged) with the university.

Bronco Check-in. The Office of Student Persistence and Re-Enrollment gives students the opportunity to connect with COAS staff to "check-in" about their current university experience. Based on the needs of the student, COAS staff will support students in guiding them through a relationship-rich path to success, connecting students with resources and opportunities.

Bronco Break. As a third component of the Office of Student Persistence and Re-Enrollment, Bronco Break provides students with a hard-stop break. In this low-touch program, students will not be enrolled in classes or in the guided pause program (Bronco Gap Year), but the office will stay connected to students through strategic communications and warm invitations.

Finish Line Initiative. The Finish Line Initiative aims to re-engage and re-enroll students who have stopped out with 90+ credits. As part of this initiative, we will also explore ways to financially support students with SCNC in their path to graduation, drawing on existing initiatives that have proven successful at peer and aspiring institutions. (See, for example, Georgia State's Panther Retention Grants.)[2]

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[1]   See IHEP's Degrees when Due report for an overview of SCNC (also called SCND, "some credit, no degree") and promising practices.

[2]   Georgia State University Panther Retention Grants Executive Summary.

Backbone Support

The SSR Implementation Team, in collaboration with the Student Success Leadership Team, will support strategic retention initiatives, with a focus on identifying and building the infrastructure needed to sustain these initiatives and achieve our retention goals. The Backbone also plays a crucial role in ensuring that all members of our community—students, faculty, and staff—have a voice in SERP implementation.

To ensure broad community participation, COAS convened the SSR Implementation Team in Fall 2022, and this team continues to plan and develop Backbone infrastructure. To date, 30 COAS faculty and staff have served on this team.

Student Success and Retention Implementation Team Membership

Fall 2023 - Spring 2024		Fall 2022 - Spring 2023	
Casey Iezzi	Kathrine Johnson	Casey Iezzi	Lori Gray
Clay Cox	Kelly Myers	Clay Cox	Manda Hicks
Cynthia Campbell	Manda Hicks	Eric Landrum	Melanie Jones
Dan Scott	Nancy Tacke	Jason Herbeck	Melissa Keith
David Brandt	Nico Diaz	John Bieter	Michael Kreiter
Debra Purdy	Nicole Brun-Mercer	Jon Schneider	Nancy Tacke
John Bieter	Sarah Dalrymple	Joseph Low	Nico Diaz
Jon Schneider	Jason Herbeck	Karen Viskupic	Nicole Brun-Mercer
Jose Lee-Perez	Megan Gambs	Kelly Myers	Sarah Dalrymple
Karen Viskupic	Kimberly Henderson	Kimberly Henderson	Beverly Sherman
		Kristin Snopkowski	Debra Purdy
		Larissa Samson	Kathrine Johnson

The SSR Implementation Team has established four working groups that will focus on key areas of Backbone Support. These working groups include:

Faculty and Staff SERP Advisory Board
This team focuses on assessing the structures that either support or impede faculty and staff as they work to help students navigate their path to graduation. Two key questions guide this work: (1) How do we recognize and address burnout? (2) How do we make visible and reward faculty/staff student success efforts?

Advising Council
The COAS Advising Council assembles a team of stakeholders from across the college (faculty, staff, and students) to help the COAS Advising Director identify and prioritize college-level advising strengths, needs, and challenges.

COAS SERP Data Team
This team provides COAS units with research support, with a focus on data access and data-informed decision-making. The Data Team will assess department data needs, lead equity-focused data walks, and model how data can be used to design targeted interventions and assess impact.

COAS Student Leadership
The COAS Student Success Team formed a partnership with our COAS ASBSU representatives. Through monthly meetings, we share updates from the college and from ASBSU, and we work on dedicated projects. Our first project focuses on gathering student perspectives on advising experiences and needs.

Key Accomplishments and Next Steps

Since we began our SERP planning work in the Fall of 2022, we have made significant progress. We are now at a crucial stage where we are moving from strategic planning to strategic implementation. To clearly document our progress and next steps, we are using a tool developed by the Tamarack Institute, which outlines 5 Phases of Collective Impact initiatives.[1] In the Table below, we list key strategies for each phase and outline what COAS has accomplished thus far.

Phase	Strategies
1 **Assess Readiness** Fall 2022-Spring 2023	☑ Assemble Student Success and Retention Implementation Team ☑ Conduct needs assessment ☑ Name priority areas
2 **Initiate Action** Spring 2023-Fall 2023	☑ Hire Student Success Leadership Team to advance priority projects and reach retention targets ☑ Begin outreach to COAS academic leadership and campus partners ☑ Analyze baseline data to identify key issues and gaps
3 **Organize for Impact** Fall 2023-Spring 2024	☑ Determine initial working groups and establish backbone support ☑ Create common agenda, clear problem definition, and population level goals; distribute via the SERP ☑ Design high level (COAS-led) retention initiatives ☑ Call for SERP-focused Innovation Hub NOIs ◼ Incorporate community voice through department listening tours, data walks, and collaboration with ASBSU ◼ Develop metrics and milestones for COAS-led retention initiatives
4 **Implementation** Spring 2024-Fall 2024	◼ Initiate COAS-led retention strategies ◼ Identify and initiate SERP-related Innovation HUB projects ◼ Determine shared measurement systems and align student success initiatives across the College
5 **Sustain Action & Impact** Fall 2024 Onward	◼ Collect, track, and report progress on each COAS retention initiative and related Innovation Hub project

We enter the organization and implementation phase with a clearly defined plan, while maintaining our commitment to a learning-centered approach. As we learn more from data analysis, student experiences, and faculty and staff perspectives, we will adapt our plans. As stated previously, the SERP is a living document that emphasizes process. We will work and learn together, and we will not shy away from difficult questions and complex barriers. We will maintain our focus on retaining more students and reducing persistent equity gaps in access, retention, and completion.

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1   Tamarack Institute. The 5 Phases of Collective Impact.