

Committee on Academic Affairs, Research and Student Life | December 15, 2022

Student Success: Strategies for Increasing Graduation Rates Among Underrepresented Students at Penn State Panelists



Jeff Adams has served Penn State as Associate Vice President and Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education since 2018. He previously held administrative and faculty positions at Millersville University of Pennsylvania and Montana State University. Adams is originally from Kingston,

Ontario, Canada, where he earned degrees in engineering, physics, and education from Queen's University.



Whitney Arjun is Director of Enrollment Management at Penn State Abington. As part of the college's senior administrative team, she provides counsel to the Chancellor around strategic initiatives as it pertains to recruitment, enrollment, and retention in an effort to safeguard the overall sustainability of the college.



Caitlin Bertrand is a former member of the Student Leadership Council for the Multicultural Resource Center. She is a senior from Piscataway, New Jersey, studying Supply Chain with a minor in Information Systems Management in the Smeal College of Business.



Yvonne Gaudelius is Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education at Penn State. She has responsibility for the 14 units that comprise the Office of Undergraduate Education and that provide university-wide support for student success. Dr. Gaudelius previously served as the Associate Vice

President and Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and was the Interim Dean (2006-07) and the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Outreach (2003-06) in the College of Arts and Architecture.



Kelly Griffith is the Director of the Office for Summer Session and has worked at the university since 2006 in a variety of roles in undergraduate education and residence life. She earned her doctorate from Penn State in Educational Theory and Policy in 2017.



Lance Kennedy-Phillips is the Vice Provost for Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research. As vice provost, he is responsible for leading the Vice Provost for Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (OPAIR). OPAIR provides leadership and support for four essential University functions: institutional

research, learning outcomes assessment, accreditation, and strategic planning. Lance has over 20 years of experience in higher education administration.



Melissa Landrau Vega has been a staff member with Educational Equity for 23 years. She is currently the Director of the Multicultural Resource Center and a Penn State doctoral candidate in Higher Education. During her time at Penn State, she has focused her work on developing and

managing initiatives to promote the success, retention and graduation of underrepresented students.



Denise Poole is the Director of Student Success Initiatives. Poole has led the Student Success Center (SSC) within Undergraduate Education since it opened in 2019. The SSC supports undergraduate students who experience barriers to

persistence and timely degree completion. The SSC administers the Complete Penn State program, First-generation student success initiatives, and advises the First-Gen Advocates (FGA) student org.



Re'naijah Purvis is a current Resident Assistant at Penn State Abington's residential housing, Lionsgate. She is a senior from Niagara Falls, New York, studying Biology and specializing in Vertebrate Physiology.



Justin Schwartz As interim Executive Vice President, Dr. Schwartz serves as the chief executive officer in the President's absence, and he is centrally involved in most University operations. As interim Provost, Dr. Schwartz is the University's chief academic officer, responsible for the

administration of all of Penn State's educational and research programs. He is charged with enabling and driving the success of thousands of faculty and more than 90,000 students at Penn State's 25 campuses, including 24 throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the online World Campus.



Troy Turner is a Lenfest Scholar from Philadelphia, PA. He is a senior in Labor and Human Resources, with a minor in Sociology. Troy is also an active member of the Multicultural Resource Center's Student Leadership Council.



Marcus Whitehurst serves as Vice Provost for Educational Equity at Penn State. He collaborates with offices both internal and external to the University to help foster equity, inclusion, and belonging for a diverse body of students, faculty, and staff. Whitehurst chairs the University Equity Leadership

Council and the Campus Environment Team, serves on President's Council and the Academic Leadership Council, and works with the three President's Commissions for Equity. Whitehurst earned his Ph.D. in Educational Theory and Policy and an M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration from Penn State.

Student Success: Strategies for increasing graduation rates among underrepresented students at Penn State

Board of Trustees Committee Academic Affairs, Research and Student Life

December 15, 2022

OVERVIEW

The University has seen increasing gaps in retention and graduation rates between underrepresented minority students (URM) and the overall student population. There is also a growing gap between URM and White students. The following pre-read provides data highlighting the trends both at Penn State and nationally. The offices of Undergraduate Education and Educational Equity provide an overview of services and initiatives the University will implement to address these gaps. Additional data can be found on the [Data Digest website](#).

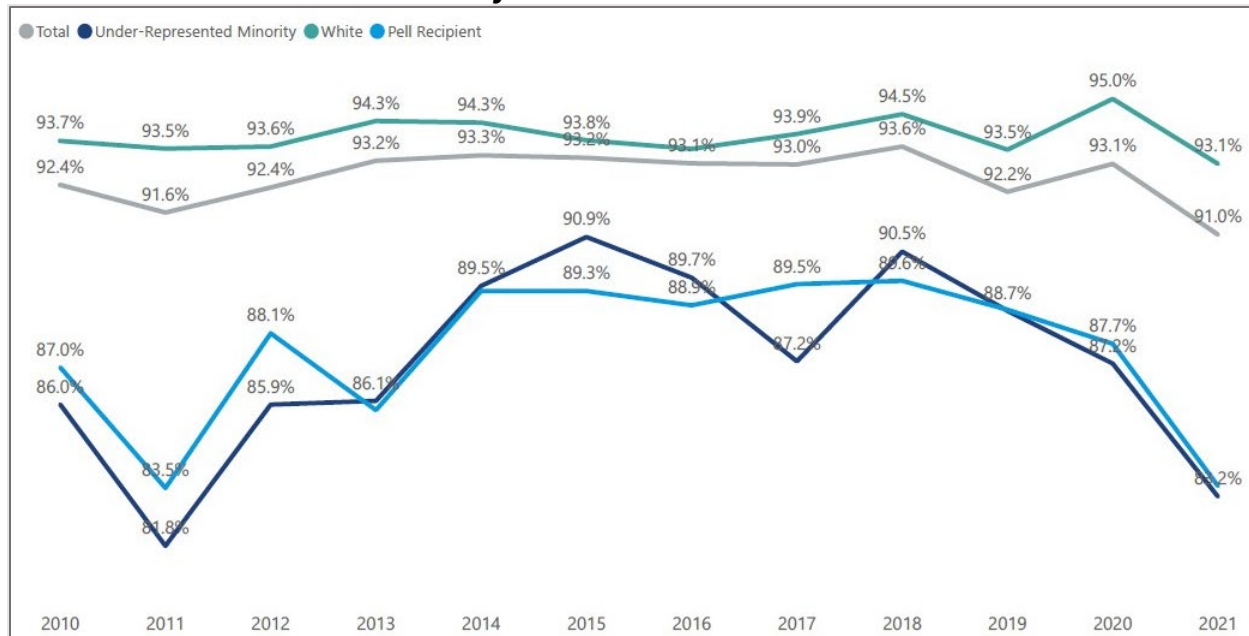
DATA

ONE-YEAR RETENTION RATE

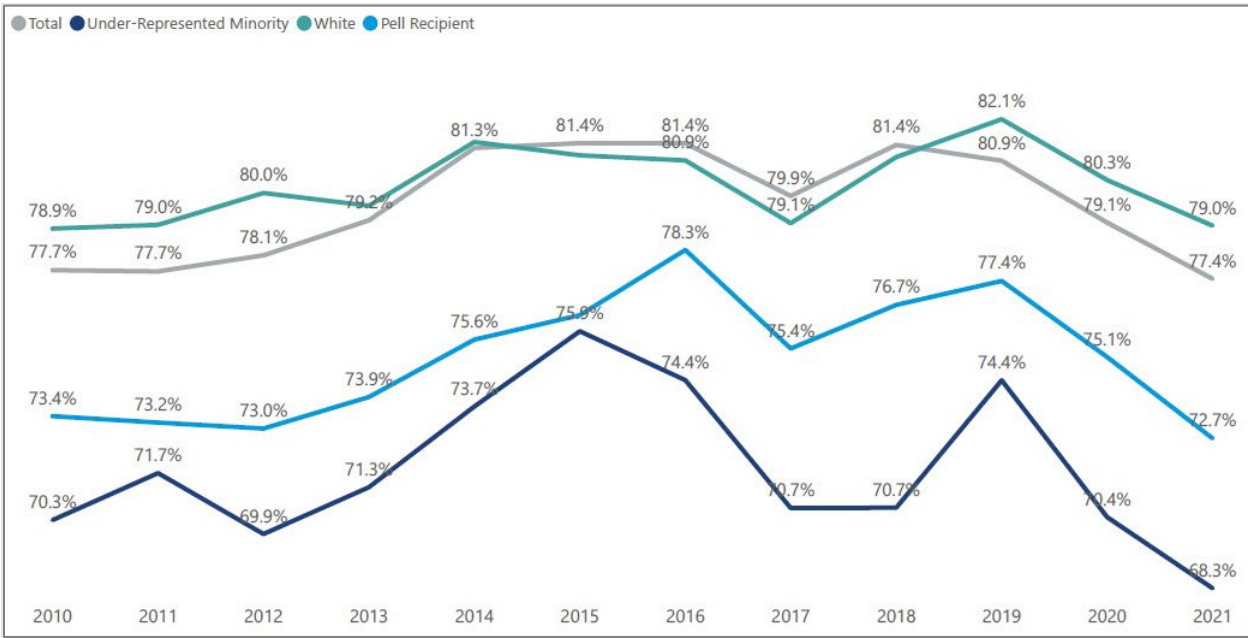
Nationwide, the graduation and retention gap for URM students remains prevalent when compared against their White counterparts, according to a 2022 [report from National Student Clearinghouse](#). One year retention rates among the URM group illustrate an 11% gap for Black/African American students (64.7%) at public four-year institutions compared to a 5% gap for their Hispanic/Latino counterparts (70.6%). First-time, full-time, first-year out-of-state students are at greater risk of leaving.

First year retention is down in every category except Hispanic/Latino students at the Commonwealth Campuses (CWC), with an out-of-state, first-year retention rate drop from 85.1% in 2018 to 74.5% in 2021. More than 50% of the Black/African American (61%) and Hispanic/Latino students (54%) who were not retained between 2018-2021 were Pell eligible students. Only 28% of White Pell eligible students were not retained. These gaps persist through the second and third years, affecting graduation rates.

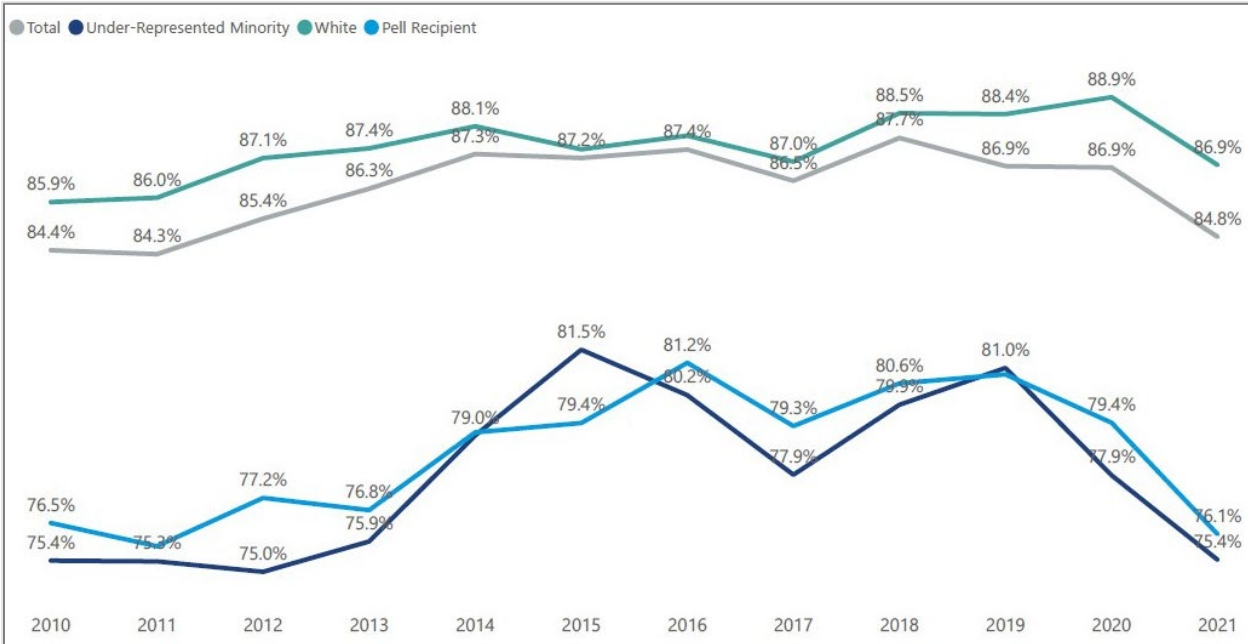
One-Year Retention Rate - University Park



One-Year Retention Rate - Commonwealth Campuses



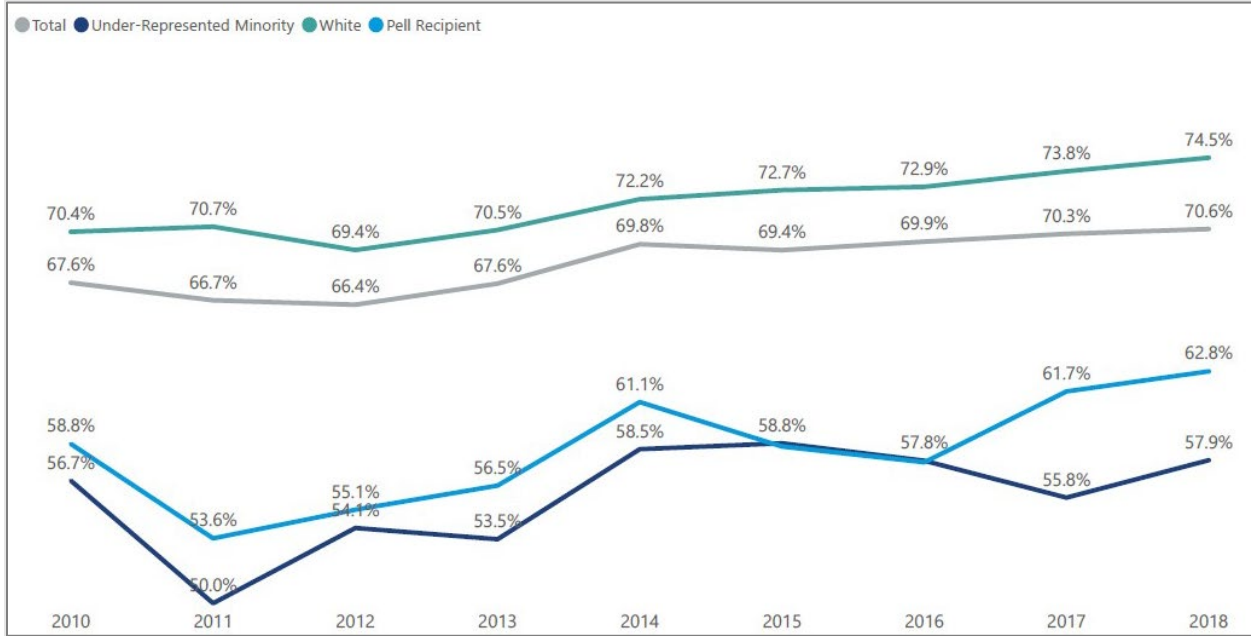
One-Year Retention Rate - Overall



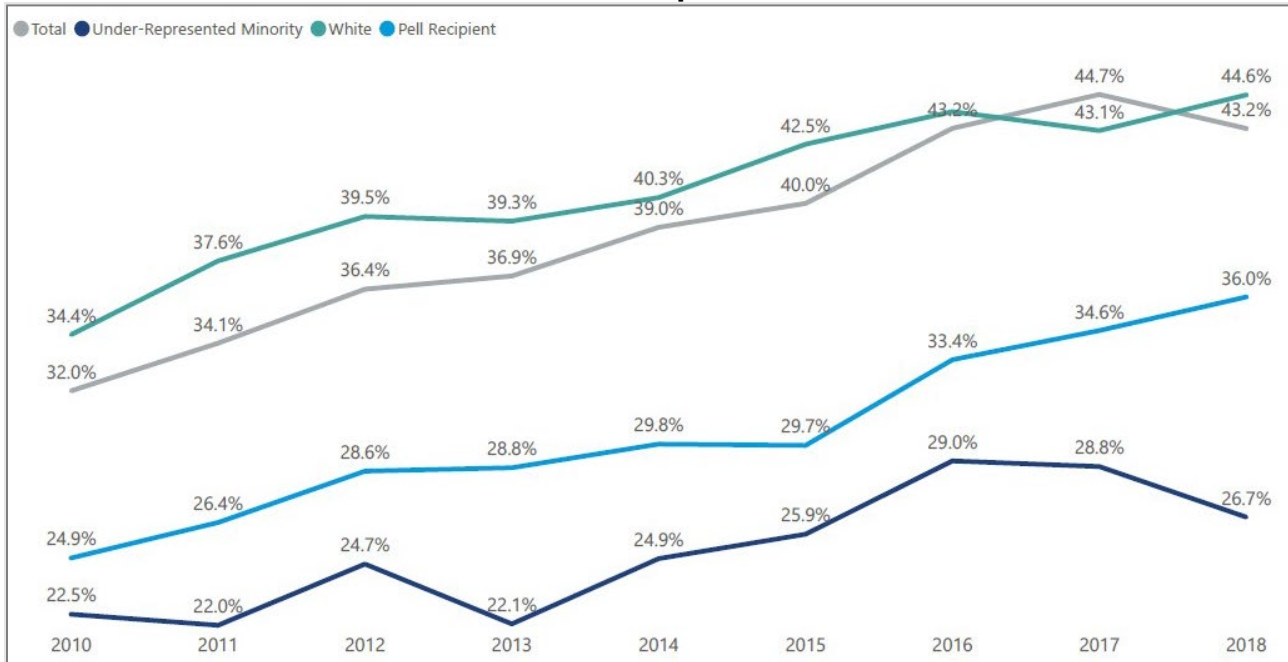
FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE

Institutions nationally are trying to increase their four-year graduation rates, particularly to mitigate student debt and advocate for the role institutions play in state workforce development needs. As seen in the first chart below, 70.6% of University Park (UP) students graduate in four years. Our rates far surpass the national four-year graduation rate of 42.4% as measured across all public four-year institutions. While a substantial achievement, the four-year rate for URM students remains below 60%, more than 16% below White students.

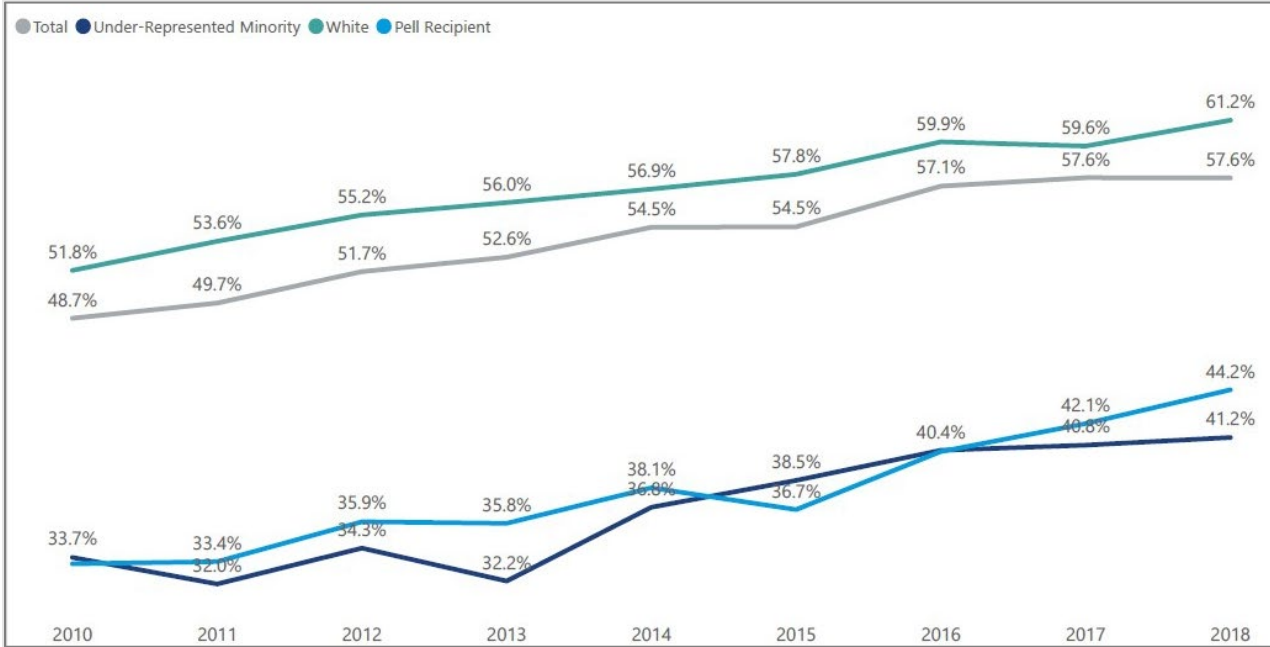
Four-Year Graduation Rate - University Park



Four-Year Graduation Rate - Commonwealth Campuses



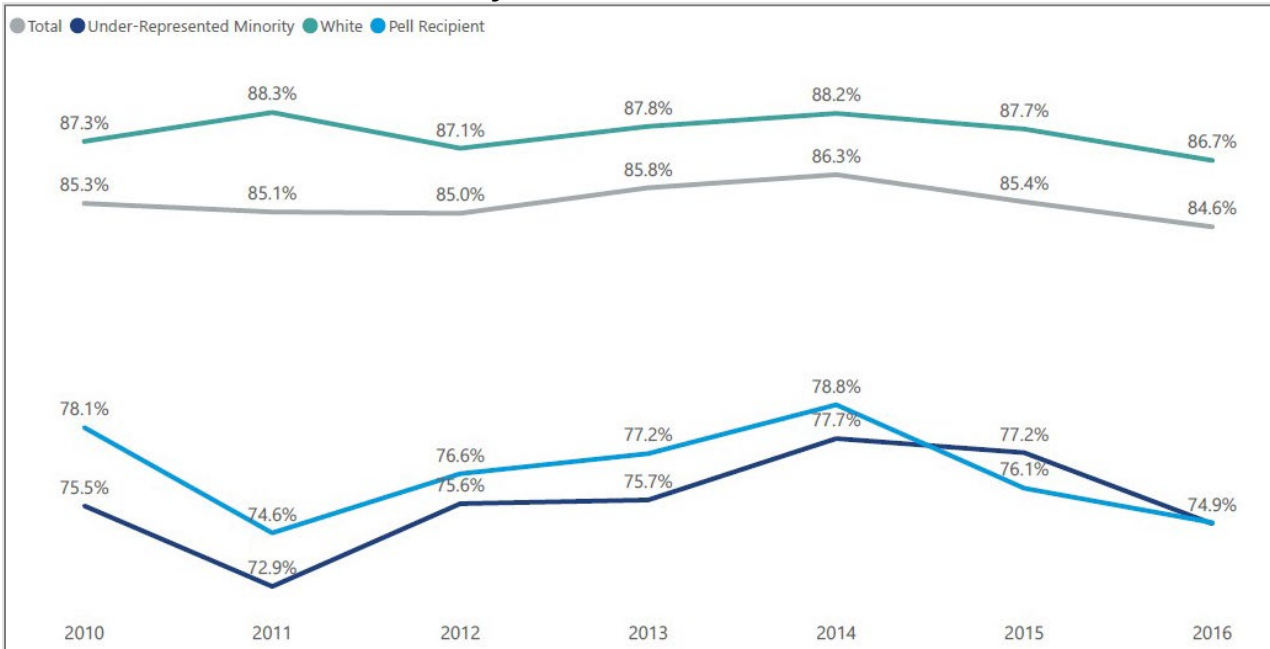
Four-Year Graduation Rate - Overall



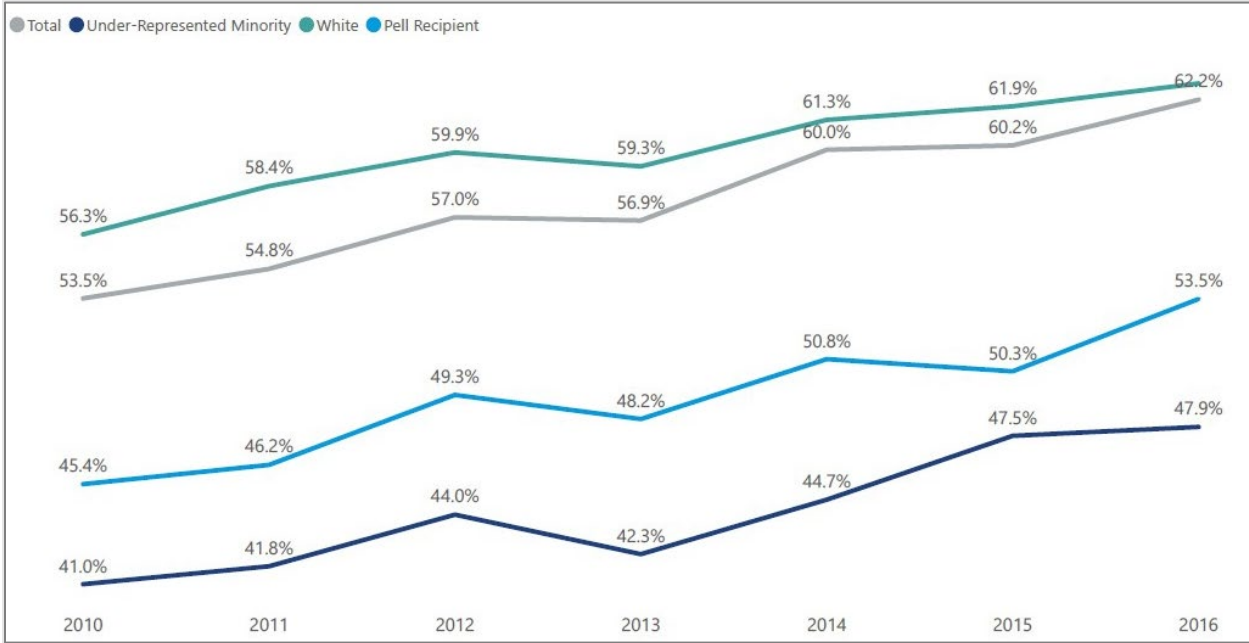
SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATE

The six-year graduation rate is the traditional measure used for most rankings and public information. [National data show](#) that across public, four-year institutions, an 18% gap exists for Black/African American students, compared to 16% for American Indian/Alaska Native students. Hispanic/Latino students hold the highest retention rates with an 11% gap. The overall rate for all of Penn State has been increasing, however, despite slight decreases among the UP cohorts. We exceed the national six-year rate of 63% among all public institutions. There is a 12% gap between URM and White students at the UP campus and a nearly 18% gap between these same population across the entire university.

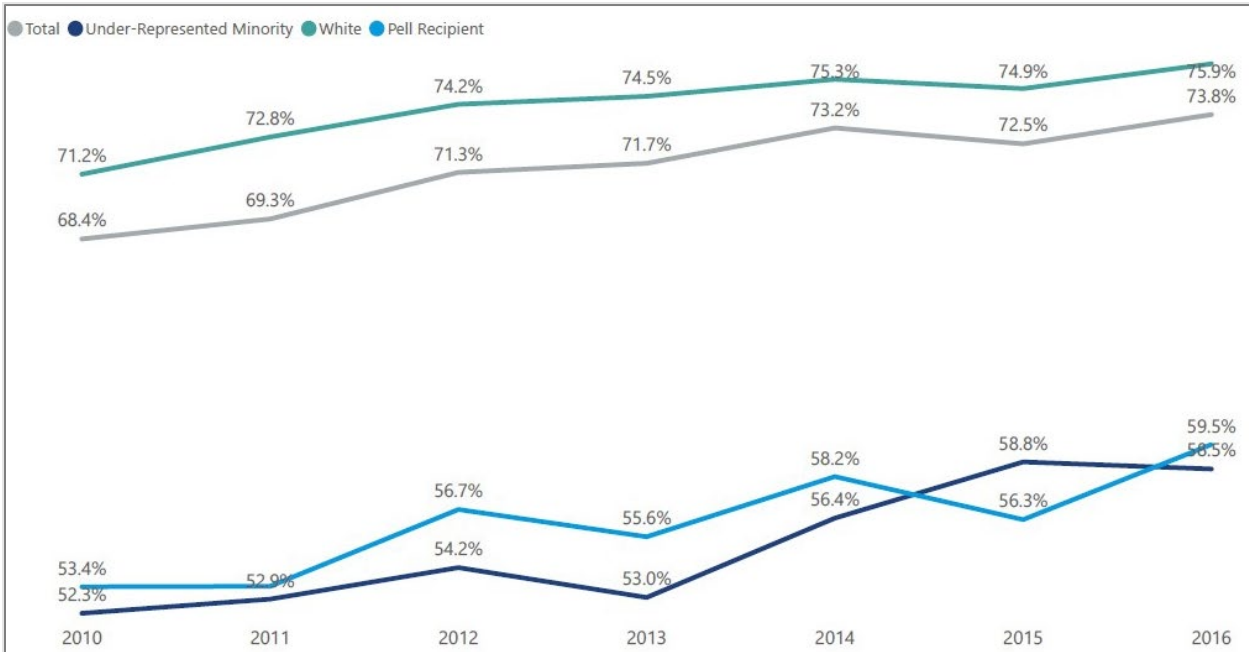
Six-Year Graduation Rate - University Park



Six-Year Graduation Rate - Commonwealth Campuses



Six-Year Graduation Rate - Overall



CLOSING THE GAPS

Closing opportunity gaps for undergraduate students at Penn State is a foundation upon which the work of Undergraduate Education (UE) is built. This is clearly reflected in its [2020-2025 Strategic Plan](#) and as reflected in the three overarching goals within the plan:

- **Goal 1:** Improve success of minoritized and marginalized students, thereby having a positive effect on all students
- **Goal 2:** Foster institution-wide connection and collaboration
- **Goal 3:** Prioritize and model student-centeredness, equity, diversity, inclusion, and transparency in our work

These approaches inform all of the work done by UE and, by developing efforts and metrics, enable progress in closing gaps. The role of UE is providing leadership for units that do this work, both through the structure and work of the unit and through specific initiatives. The office also collaboratively brings together others from across the University to address specific issues. All of these efforts will improve the undergraduate educational experience for all students but also represent specific, timely and targeted interventions that should assist in closing opportunity gaps.

Examples of UE units and collaborative initiatives:

Division of Undergraduate Studies. The Division of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) is an enrollment unit for first- and second-year students who are undecided, exploratory, or shifting direction and is present at all 20 of Penn State's undergraduate campuses. At least 25% of all first-year students at Penn State enroll in DUS. At UP alone, DUS is the steward of approximately \$111.8 million of tuition dollars annually and a similar amount of annual tuition dollars at the CWCs. As a professional academic advising unit, DUS grounds its practice in national standards to support individual students at every point in the foundational years of their academic journeys, lead institutional professional development around academic advising and proactive student outreach, and identify and mitigate systemic barriers to student success.

The DUS plays a critical role in enrolling and retaining Penn State students even if their plans are uncertain or change, including a higher number of students who are historically at risk of not being retained or completing their degree in four years compared to other enrollment units. Starfish Analytics data show that 34.1% of first-year admits to DUS at UP are at high or very high risk of not completing a Penn State degree, compared to 23.9% of first-year admits to UP overall. Nevertheless, DUS students go on to graduate at similar rates to students who started in colleges. The DUS is the academic home for students whose interests no longer fit their intended major or who have been required to leave their degree-granting college due to academic difficulty. The DUS at UP enrolls about 450 of these continuing students annually who might otherwise leave the University entirely - representing approximately \$12.6 million in persevered tuition revenue. Specific programs directed toward retaining DUS students include individual and group academic advising, the Academic Peer Mentoring Program, and \$15,000 in annual scholarships, which allow us to provide limited financial support to three of our 7,500 students.

The DUS locally manages Starfish and Starfish Analytics for the University as a whole. Starfish connects all Penn State students to people and resources, simplifies communication with the people who support students, and provides a key link between support services critical to student success. Along with millions of additional Starfish notes, these records narrate students' experience and their holistic engagement with learning at the University. Starfish Analytics is a new predictive analytics tool that identifies equity gaps and systemic barriers to student success and positions the University to strategically address them.

Student Success Center: First-Generation Student Success. Penn State defines a "first-generation student" as an undergraduate student whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have not completed a baccalaureate degree. Per the fall 2022 enrollment data available on the University's Data Digest dashboard, we currently have 17,645 first-generation undergraduate students enrolled across the University. Of this population, 16,446 students are U.S. citizens (76% of which are PA permanent residents). The UP campus is home to 43% of the University's first-generation students (n = 7,133), 53% are enrolled across the 19 Commonwealth Campuses (n = 8872), and 6% are enrolled through the World Campus (n=1640). The Student Success Center (SSC) views first-generation students as resilient trailblazers whose ambitious spirit brings immense value to the Penn State community. However, contemporary research shows that first-generation students are more likely to experience financial hardship, less likely to graduate on time or complete their degree (than next-gen or continuing-gen students), often need extra support navigating a college curriculum and utilizing critical campus resources (e.g., learning support), often end up under-employed or unemployed due to having an underdeveloped professional network, have less transferrable work experience upon degree completion, and have fewer opportunities for research or travel abroad.

While Penn State has many offices that possess a long-standing history of serving first-generation students, this support has often been provided as a result of the student also having other relevant intersecting identities (e.g., minoritized racial or gender identity, neurodiverse, marginalized sexual identity, adult learner, veteran, international student, etc.). When the SSC within UE launched in fall 2019, the office recognized the need to unify the University's first-generation student support services. The SSC has been working to build strong partnerships with a wide scope of support offices that span the organizational silos of student affairs, UE, and educational equity, and strengthen the infrastructure or "constellation of care" for first-generation Penn Staters. Through annual events such as the First-Generation Celebration Day and the virtual First-Generation Student Support Summit, the SSC has amplified the voices of the University's first-gen community and strengthened the support network. In fall 2022, the SSC became advisers of the First-Gen Advocates (student org at UP), helped the University be recognized as a "First-gen Forward" institution by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Center for First-Generation Student Success, and launched a University-wide First-Generation Advisory Council that helps to both support and propel first-generation student success initiatives.

Student Success Center: Complete Penn State. Complete Penn State (CPS) launched in 2017 as one of the University's five "Open Doors" programs centered around access and affordability. Now, in its sixth year of existence, the program has awarded just over \$ 8.7 million in scholarship funding to nearly 3,000 students and assisted thousands more by connecting them with appropriate and timely resources. Since August 2019, CPS has been administered by the SSC within UE. The program offers a "completion scholarship" that supports eligible students enrolled in their final two semesters who are experiencing financial hardship. The completion scholarship offers up to \$3,000 to support both billable or non-billable ("related") educational expenses that may prevent students from persisting and completing their degrees on time.

The SSC works with 32 scholarship-awarding units to identify and award eligible students and the program receives between 1400 and 2000 applications and referrals annually. During the 2021-2022 academic year, 53% of completion scholarship recipients were Pell eligible, 27% had a need index of 100 (highest document need per FAFSA data), 36% were first-generation students, and 34% identified as underrepresented minoritized race/ethnicity. Beyond the scholarship, the program offers support for students who have left the University and are interested in returning to complete their degree. The program also provides holistic resource referrals and success planning for students experiencing a wide variety of barriers to completion. While we do not have competition statistics for all students who have participated in CPS, recent analysis shows that between 75% to 85% of students who receive the completion scholarship complete their degree in two to three semesters.

Office of Summer Sessions: Summer Success Scholarships. Through the Summer Success Scholarship (SSS) pilot, first implemented in summer 2019, we have awarded approximately \$4.4 million dollars to approximately 2,200 students across the institution. The purpose of the SSS is to assist students who have fallen behind in degree progress, would benefit from a summer course to catch up, and have financial challenges to doing so.

The percent of scholarship recipients from marginalized backgrounds is higher than the university population percentage. For example, in summer 2022, 22% of scholarship recipients identified as Black/African American compared to 5.8% in the overall university population. Similarly, 48% of recipients were first-generation college students compared to 20.7% in the overall university population. The outcomes of scholarship recipients have been positive. Of all students awarded the scholarship in summer 2020, 90% are either still enrolled or have graduated. Of all students awarded the scholarship in summer 2021, 99% are either still enrolled or have graduated. Given the demographics and outcomes of scholarship recipients, the SSS pilot is an initiative that has the potential to help close opportunity gaps.

Policies Influencing Equity Committee. The Faculty Senate and UE co-charged the Policies Influencing Equity (PIE) Committee to apply an equity lens to reviewing academic policies and procedures to identify how they might contribute to inequities in outcomes for non-advantaged populations, and to make recommendations. It is co-led by two members of UE leadership and two faculty and has broad faculty and staff representation from across Penn State. The committee's first initiative was the recommendation for a significantly updated and expanded pass/fail policy, which was supported by the relevant Senate committees and passed by Senate. The committee also initiated research on the use of substitutions in general education, which documented that populations with traditionally lower social capital were taking less advantage of intended flexibility. This study was a critical component in initiating and finding support for the recently approved updates to our general education requirements. The committee has identified additional policies it believes may be differentially impacting certain populations and is working with our data analyst to study these.

American Talent Initiative/Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities' Powered-by-Publics Initiative.

For several years, Penn State has been participating in two national initiatives focusing on issues of equity in higher education, although with slightly different foci. To coordinate these efforts, UE established a combined steering committee to provide leadership and guidance on both. The American Talent Initiative (ATI) "seeks to substantially expand access and opportunity for talented, low- and moderate-income students at the nation's colleges and universities with the highest graduation rates." The ATI has made special efforts directed toward transfer students, veterans, and equity in the academic experience. The final strand led to Penn State Harrisburg's leadership in hosting this summer's highly successful three-day Summer Institute for Equity in the Academic Experience, which drew 16 teams from across Penn State colleges and campuses, as well as seven teams from regional colleges and universities, to gather in person at Penn State Harrisburg and virtually to focus on expanding access and advancing academic equity at their institutions. The APLU initiated its Powered-by-Publics (PxP) initiative in 2018, and among the 130+ participating institutions is a group of eight Big-10 schools that operate as a cluster. This cluster serves as a forum for data sharing (esp. DFW rates and disaggregated success data) and co-learning. Our internal efforts to create tools to better share disaggregated data on student performance with faculty has been heavily informed by this group. The ATI/PxP Steering Committee continues to serve as an important clearing house and idea generator for equity-focused projects and initiatives.

Integrative Coaching Collaborative. Penn State's Integrated Coaching Collaborative (ICC) is a network of Penn State student support staff across UE, Student Affairs, World Campus, and Educational Equity committed to providing equitable academic life coaching to students at risk of attrition from the institution. This year, the ICC is supporting three professionals in becoming certified as Associate Certified Coaches by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). These coaches will pilot academic life coaching in their work with students and assess the impact of this intervention. In the longer term, our vision for this program is to follow in the footsteps of universities such as the University of Kentucky and establish an ICF certification center where professional certified coaches train student support professionals on coaching skills and techniques and to create a network of academic coaches across Penn State. This network will provide critical support for historically underserved student populations. The ICC program will not replace existing support services, but will complement them to help students to set goals and strategically utilize available resources to achieve success.

STUDENT RESOURCES

The Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) provides individual college counseling and educational services for undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds and assists students in meeting the challenges associated with attaining a degree at a major research institution. Counselors at MRC inform, prepare, support, and empower students to facilitate their success and Penn State graduation.

Who does the MRC serve?

The MRC serves thousands of students at UP and prioritizes the following cohorts:

- First-year students
- Change-of-campus and transfer students
- Students who can benefit from additional academic support (<2.3 GPA)

What does the MRC do for students?

The MRC staff function as advocates for students as they deal with the complex makeup of a large university. They practice a holistic approach to college counseling, with the goal of facilitating and enhancing students' college experiences in three fundamental areas: academic success, engagement with educational opportunities, and sense of belonging. The MRC staff focus on helping students develop skills and strategies that lead to success and graduation. More specifically, MRC staff work with students in a variety of areas including:

- University policies, procedures, and regulations
- Study skills, time management, test-taking strategies, goal setting, and tutoring
- Careers, internships, graduate and professional school, and job opportunities
- Assistance with questions on financial aid, scholarships, and money management
- Educational opportunities such as education abroad, research, study groups, and seminars
- Interpersonal relationships with peers and family, conflict resolution, and personal development
- Assisting targets of bias-motivated incidents in finding resolution

This work is accomplished through the following MRC activities:

- Individual counseling, mentoring, and coaching
- Orientation programs
- Affinity groups
- Programs and workshops
- Transition seminars

How can students find out more information about the MRC?

Students can visit the MRC webpage at www.equity.psu.edu/mrc and follow the MRC on Instagram at @mrcpennstate. They can also stop by the Center at 220 Grange Building or call 814-865-1773 to speak with their counselor or use our communal spaces.