



# Armstrong State University

\*\*Note: Armstrong State University is undergoing consolidation with Georgia Southern University. January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 Armstrong will become the new Georgia Southern University - Armstrong Campus.

## INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

### MISSION

Armstrong is a comprehensive public university, with select professional and graduate programs grounded in the liberal arts. Armstrong emphasizes the value of student-focused and transformative educational experiences, and it fosters student success through its initiatives in rigorous scholarship, visionary leadership, and responsible stewardship. Armstrong's strategic plan, Charting Excellence Together, serves as the lens through which faculty members, staff and administrators focus their efforts to help students realize their potential as productive and globally aware citizens. Armstrong's Complete College Georgia plan operationalizes our institutional mission of providing diverse learning experiences and co-curricular programs that support student success from matriculation through graduation.

### FALL 2016 SUMMARY OF STUDENT PROFILE

Our campus serves traditional, transfer, and non-traditional students drawn largely from a six-county region of Georgia (Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Glynn, Liberty, and McIntosh counties). As of fall 2016, more than 48% of our new undergraduates are first-generation students, and more than one-third (34.1%) are non-traditional adult learners. The number of potential non-traditional students in this region – including the roughly 75,000 veterans and more than 24,000 active duty personnel who reside here – is significant and drives many of our initiatives. Seventy-eight percent of our students received some form of federal financial aid (39% of students received Pell grants). Even with this funding, however, the average Armstrong bachelor-seeking student loan debt is \$19,631 (USG Academic Warehouse).

Armstrong's undergraduate student population is primarily full-time (75.1%) and female (65.8%), with 39.0% of our students being Pell-eligible (Table 1 – Fall 2016). The distribution of our student population across demographic groups remains mostly stable, with a trend over the last three years towards increases in the number of minority students (from 24.9% to 25.7% Black/African-American; from 7.2% to 8.8% Latino/Hispanic; and from 4.3% to 4.8% multi-racial), Veteran/Military Affiliated students (from 8.5% to 17%), and Learning Support students (from 2.6% to 4.1%) (Tables 1 & 2). Our new students are increasingly adult, first generation, and military-affiliated learners. (Some of the growth of the military-affiliated student population is due to improved coding mechanisms.) Yet the gender ratio and minority status of our entering student population has remained fairly consistent, at nearly two-thirds female and one-half minority of the entering student body (Table 2).

We intentionally target student success programs to serve first generation, minority, veteran, and learning support populations to assure they are progressing timely toward degree completion. These include programs such as Academic Intervention, TRiO, Boost Child Care Tuition Assistance program, Prior Learning Assessments, First Year Experience peer mentoring, as well as academic and social support structures for our minority students i.e. Men of Vision and Excellence, Hispanic Outreach & Leadership, Hermano A Hermano (Brother 2 Brother), and Student African American Sisterhood.

## INSTITUTIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Since the implementation of the Complete College Georgia initiative, Armstrong has established the overarching goal of increasing student retention, progression and graduation. The institution was successful in increasing the FTFTF retention rate from 65.1% to 72.7% (Table 9: Fall 2012 to Fall 2015 freshmen cohort), while experiencing a slight drop (0.3%) in the six-year graduation rate (31.0% to 30.7% between the 2006 and 2010 cohorts) (Table 3). With improved retention rates, Armstrong is poised to have improved graduation rates in the years to come. In fact, the number of degrees Armstrong has conferred rose by nearly 20% since 2012 (Table 4). The collaborative efforts already underway with our colleagues at Georgia Southern University will ensure the continued growth in student retention, progression and graduation.

To reinforce improvements in student retention, progression and graduation, Armstrong chose the following six Complete College Georgia goals:

1. Increase the number of undergraduate degrees awarded by 0.5% per year (CCG Goal 1).
2. Increase the 6-year graduation rate 0.5% per year (CCG Goal 2).
3. Decrease the number of excess credits toward degree 10% by 2020 (CCG Goal 3).
4. Implement and expand improvements in advising services for FTFTF and at-risk students to improve freshmen and sophomore retention rates to 80% and 59% respectively by 2020 (CCG Goal 4).

5. Improve college access for students who are non-traditional, military, first-generation, and/or from historically underrepresented groups (CCG Goal 6).
6. Restructure instructional delivery to support educational excellence and student success, especially in the area of remediation (CCG Goal 7).

**CCG Goal 1:** Increase the number of undergraduate degrees awarded.

Because Armstrong is an institution that enrolls a significant number of transfer students, it is imperative for us to monitor our total number of degrees granted, not just the FTFTF graduation rate. Table 4 shows an overall increase of 2.7% in degrees conferred (75% increase in Associate degrees and 2.3% decrease in Bachelor's degrees conferred since FY 2015). Tables 5 and 6 also show the breakdown of the Associate and Bachelor degrees awarded by race and ethnicity. The largest gains have been with Black/African American students. Degree conferral increased by 16.7% for this student population. The number of STEM degrees awarded also rose from 583 to 592 – a 1.5% increase. Degree conferrals overall have been trending up over the past five years (Tables 5, 6, 7).

A concerted effort to ensure students graduate is a top priority. In fact, Armstrong has been engaged in the Reverse Transfer initiative in which students who have transferred from Armstrong with the requisite coursework to grant an Associate's degree are contacted and assisted with the graduation application process. Additionally, Armstrong reviews students who have "stopped out" and possess the coursework for an Associate's degree, are close to earning an Associate's degree and assists them with the graduation application process, or advises them into the remaining courses needed to earn the credential. Similarly, students who have stopped out after unsuccessfully applying to a secondary admission program are contacted and guided into an alternative bachelor degree program.

### **CCG GOAL 2: INCREASE THE 6-YEAR GRADUATION RATE**

Table 3 highlights Armstrong's 6-year graduation rates. The 6-year graduation rate for the 2010 first-time full-time Bachelor seeking students was 30.7%. This was a slight drop from the 2009 cohort, which was 32.6% six-year graduation rate, but higher than the 2008 graduation rate of 29.7%. The graduation rate for learning support students was the lowest at 18.4%, while female students attained the highest rate of 36.0%. Overall, we have found that the student populations of learning support (18.4%), adult (20.0%), military affiliated (22.0%), and male students (22.3%) graduate at a lower rate than other students (Table 3). Comparing these 2010 numbers to those of the 2009 cohort, we find declining graduation rates in each group. It is important to note, however, that simultaneously we have seen increases in enrollments in each of the four categories (Female, Black/African American, Pell Recipients, and Learning Support) compared to the 2008 cohort.

One effort to improve graduation rates is Armstrong's embrace of the Complete College Georgia Fifteen-to-Finish initiative. Advisors – both professional and faculty – guide students to take fifteen credit hours per semester (or 30 credit hours per year) with the goal of progressing to graduate within two years for Associate degree seeking students and within four years for Bachelor degree seeking students enrolled in bachelor degree programs. Tables 10a and 10b highlight the increasing number of students taking 15 hours or more. Most gains are seen among Seniors – 32.5% of whom take 15 or more credit hours.

Armstrong is making strides towards improving the two year graduation rates for Associate degrees and four year graduation rates for Bachelor degrees (Table 8a and 8b). The conferral of Bachelor degrees increased nearly 3% from last year. Conferral of Associate degrees are statistically insignificant due to the low number of students enrolled in those programs. However, there has been a significant increase of students enrolled in Associate programs. The expectation, then, is for a corresponding increase in degrees conferred in the coming years.

Improvements to student retention will also enhance the graduation rates. Our retention rates (Table 9) indicate that students are increasingly retained across the board –and in some cases, part-time students for example, there is more than a 15 percentage point increase. Institutionally, retention improved from 67.8% in 2014 to 72.7% in 2016, while Pell Recipient retention went from 63.8% in 2014 to 74.9% in 2015. Again, the corresponding increase in graduation rates are expected.

**CCG Goal 3:** Decrease excess credits earned on the path to a degree.

Table 11 indicates the number of credits to complete a degree has fluctuated since 2012; but, there has been a slight upward trend (85.18 credits in 2012 to 87.74 credits in 2016 at the time of associate degree conferral and 136.96 credits in 2012 to 137.63 credits at the time of bachelor degree conferral). This is a 3% increase in the total credits earned for Associate's degree, and a 0.5% increase in total credits earned for Bachelor degree seeking students. Overall, students are taking approximately 37% more credits than necessary to obtain an Associate's degree and 11% more than needed to receive a Bachelor's degree. It is important to point out, however, that some of our Bachelor degree programs require between 128 and 132 hours, which may skew the data and override the fact that the majority of our programs require a number that is not too far from the average number of credits earned.

An encouraging piece of data that points toward successes in our efforts on Goal Three is that students are successfully completing an average of 84% of their courses each year (Table 12). To actively address the additional accumulation of credits prior to graduation, advisors use the EAB Student Success Collaborative software to closely monitor student's course schedules. When essential benchmarks for their major are not successfully reached, advisors talk with the student about the fit of the major for him or her as well as the resources available for them to succeed in that major if they choose to continue.

These conversations are now happening earlier due to the expanded use of the software. We also employ DegreeWorks (a degree auditing system). The use of DegreeWorks has reduced advising errors and helps students map their path to a degree.

**CCC Goal 4:** Implement and expand improvements in advising services for FTFTF and at-risk students to improve freshman and sophomore retention rates.

The overall institutional increase in freshman retention was 4.9% (Table 9). One at-risk population of students are our Pell recipients. Impressively, the retention rate of first-time freshmen Pell recipient students increased over 11% from last year. The retention rate for the 2014 cohort was 63.8% which was raised to 74.9% for the 2015 cohort. Similarly, the retention rate for first-time freshmen in Learning Support improved by 0.2% over the year before. The sophomore retention rate for the 2015 FTFTF cohort increased from 37.0% to 52.3% -- a 15.3% improvement from the previous year and a 7% overall improvement over the last five years. There was a similar increase in retention for sophomore Pell recipients – a 7.5% increase from the previous year and a 8.2% increase over the last five years. While the retention of sophomores in Learning Support declined by 8.3%, it is still a 5.3% increase over the last five years (Table 9).

In addition to implementing the EAB's Student Success Collaborative and DegreeWorks tools previously discussed, advisors receive Early Alerts through the GradesFirst software from faculty regarding students' behavioral and/or academic deficiencies in their current courses. Once identified, advisors work with students to get them the needed resources in order for the student to be successful while in the course. With these intrusive advising and targeted academic coaching efforts, we expect further positive impacts on freshman and sophomore retention rates.

**CCG Goal 6:** Shorten the time to degree completion through programs that allow students to earn college credit while still in high school and by awarding credit for prior learning.

As seen in Table 13, the number of students enrolled in dual and joint enrollment (including Move on When Ready) programs have increased more than 15% since 2012, and the number of college credits awarded for dual and joint enrollment has increased more than 25%. There has also been a 20% increase in the number of credits awarded based on Advanced Placement exams and a substantial increase in the number of credits awarded for CLEP testing (34.8%). However, there has been a significant reduction of credits awarded for International Baccalaureate exams (108%).

Additional opportunities for Move on When Ready has been created in two area high schools (Richmond Hill High School and Effingham STEM Academy). Additionally, the Director of Military Education has also been expanding the use of ACE certification of military credit and developing charts for advisors and faculty to easily identify acceptable course equivalents thereby increasing the number of credits toward the student's degree.

**CCG Goal 7:** Increase the likelihood of degree completion by transforming the way remediation is accomplished.

The learning support courses were overhauled to implement a co-remediation model Fall of 2015. Co-remediation is a best practice in learning support. We also restructured our academic advising model to provide a dedicated advisor for learning support and non-traditional students. What we find thus far is that of the 108 students in Learning Support, 26.9% successfully completed the course(s) within 2 semesters, 46.3% successfully completed the courses within three semesters, and 50.9% successfully completed the courses within 4 semesters (Table 14).

## **HIGH PRIORITY/IMPACT OF GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

Assigning students to professional academic advisors from matriculation to the transition to faculty advisors/mentors, we assist them in developing appropriate career-related goals and establishing a workable plan for completing their degree requirements. Armstrong implemented the EAB's Student Success Collaborative technology in the Spring of 2017, which has helped us to identify student success markers; these markers improve advisement strategies and therefore increase the number of students who complete their degrees. These strategies are intended to establish plans for students that better enable them to graduate in four years with a Baccalaureate degree or in two years with an Associate's degree.

In addition, targeted intervention strategies for students not meeting academic progress markers (i.e. students earning less than a 1.8 GPA for attempted hours between 0 and 29; less than a 1.9 GPA for attempted hours between 30 and 45; or less than a 2.0 for 45 or more attempted hours). These students are required to enroll in the Strategies for Success course (UNIV 1101) to develop and reinforce their skills for success in college. This academic intervention policy took effect Fall 2016 with the intended purpose of increasing retention, progression and graduation rates of struggling students—many of whom are adult learners and first-generation students. This intervention initiative addresses the student's academic progress prior to the student being placed on academic warning, probation, or suspension.

We have found that identifying, examining, and removing barriers to student success reduces the amount of time to complete a degree. Our goal is to ensure that students receive appropriate transfer credit and not take unneeded courses. Table 13 shows that the number of credits awarded to dual or joint enrolled students increased by nearly 29% between 2012 and 2016, while the number of credits awarded based on AP exams increased by over 22%. The number of DANTES credits awarded went from 0 in 2012 to 14 in 2016, and the number of credits awarded for CLEP scores increased by 42%. Moreover, the number of students who enrolled in dual or joint enrollment programs increased by 16.6% between 2012 and 2016. The only drop came with the number of credits awarded for IB exams (which is down 70% since 2012).

Further, by continuing strategic pedagogical practices—such as co-remediation for learning support and supplemental instruction as well as peer-mentors in core and high DFW rate courses—students are more successful in their efforts to earn course credit on-time. Students in nearly all of the First Year Experience (FYE) courses have peer mentors assigned to them—peer mentors work alongside their content area faculty member. Additionally, some of the students in FYE classes were also participants in the Fall 2016 Living-Learning Communities. The participants in the Fall 2016 Living Learning Communities had a one-year (Fall 2016 to Fall 2017) retention rate of 72.0%. This is compared to the Fall 2016 commuter community's retention rate of 66.8%. While both groups had higher retention rates than our first-time, full-time freshman (FTFTF) of 65%, clearly demonstrating the Living-Learning Community benefits.

Similarly, with our continued participation in the African American Male Initiative (AAMI) program, we provide student support services for our low-income, Pell-eligible students. These services aim to improve the retention and graduation rates among this at-risk population. Tables 5 and 6 show the increase in the numbers of Associate and Bachelor degrees conferred to African American students (increasing from 19 Associate degrees in 2012 to 22 in 2016 and increasing from 189 Bachelor degrees in 2012 to 270 in 2016). Armstrong received our first \$1.1 Million TRiO grant from the Department of Education in 2015. This grant enables us to offer academic assistance in the form of guidance with course selection; academic coaching; workshops on study skill techniques and research paper writing; and tutoring. In particular, this program is designed for target our first generation, minority and handicapped students. The TRiO grant has allowed us to serve 140 of our most at-risk students during the 2016-2017 academic year. Of the 140 students enrolled last year, 115 have returned fall 2017 with a retention rate of 80.4%.

Finally, the Director of Armstrong's Military Education has been instrumental in providing increased access to our university's services for the military population in our geographic area and beyond. The number of military-affiliated students have more than doubled since 2012 (jumping from 146 in 2012 to 298 in 2016), which means that our military student population has increased from 8.2% in 2012 to 16.5% of our overall student population in 2016 (Table 2). Our efforts in assisting our military-affiliated students has led Armstrong to be ranked fourth in the nation for Veterans by the *Military Times*, to having earned the Gold-level Military Friendly Award, and to be cited in the list of the top 100 Military Spouse Friendly Schools. Our services—such as military credit evaluations, expanding our Military Resource Center, establishing Green Zone campus partners (to aid in military-affiliated student transition to college), as well as our student success strategies—have substantially increased access for this student population.

#### PRINCIPLE POINT OF CONTACT FOR INSTITUTIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Dr. Becky da Cruz, Interim Associate Provost for Student Engagement and Success, serves as the principle point of contact for Complete College Georgia and Armstrong's Student Success initiatives. Assisting in these efforts has been the Retention Subcommittee of the university's Enrollment Management Committee. The principle point of contact for advising services is Dr. Mark Taylor, Director of Academic Advising and Support.

## **SUMMARY OF RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED**

Based on FY 2016 numbers, our degree production is up 18% since 2012. Bachelor degrees awarded within four years has increased nearly four percentage points, and one-year retention rates have improved by nine percentage points. While these increases may not be solely attributable to CCG activities, the results of our collective efforts are positive. We remain committed to making a positive impact on our students, and we hope to build on the successes we have created for our students since we first outlined our CCG goals in our 2012 plan.

Because Armstrong and Georgia Southern are merging, The Student Success OWG on Retention, Progression, Graduation and Complete College Georgia—which is comprised of representatives from both campus—will be working closely throughout the Fall semester to develop a consolidated plan for student success—one that blends both institutions' goals and strategies for the broadest impact on our newly combined student population.