**Salisbury University**

Salisbury University exceeds its peers on all ten core performance indicators. Entering freshmen SAT scores in the 25th-75th percentile range are among the highest in the peer group (1070-1220 compared to peer group average of 972-1159). Salisbury’s percentages of minority and African American undergraduate students are 17.7 percent and 10.7 percent respectively and both exceed the peer averages. The second-year retention rate of 81 percent is 1.0 percentage point higher than the peer average. Salisbury’s overall six-year graduation rate of 66.8 percent is 7.8 percentage points above the peer average. Minority and African American graduation rates are 61.1 percent and 59.6 percent, respectively. Both rates remain above peer averages: 15.0 points higher for all minority students and 14.7 points for African American students. Salisbury’s pass rate on teacher licensure exams of 98 percent is 1 percent above the peer average and the nursing licensing exam rate of 95.5 percent is 3.9 points higher than the peer average. Salisbury’s undergraduate alumni giving rate (17 percent) is 9.4 points above peers on this measure.

Salisbury selected five institution-specific indicators and outperforms the peers on three of them. Salisbury is more selective than its peers with an acceptance rate of 53 percent compared to a peer average of 66 percent. The student-faculty ratio is 17 to 1, better than the 19 to 1 peer average. The average high school GPA for entering freshmen of 3.7 is three points higher than the average. Salisbury lags the peers in two metrics. Eighty-four percent of Salisbury faculty hold the terminal degree, 2.0 points below than the peer average and the state appropriation per FTE level of $5,001, which is $1,521 below the peer average.

Commission staff commends Salisbury on maintaining diversity and its performance on its retention and graduation rate metrics. The Commission would request that Salisbury share what policies the university is using to perform so highly, especially in the retention and graduation of its students.

##### Institution’s Response

SU attributes its success in retaining and graduating students to the continued expansion of retention initiatives and encouraging strong student, faculty and staff interactions in a supportive and academically challenging environment. Our success in these areas was recently demonstrated on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). In 2012, SU used the NSSE to collect valuable information on students’ lives and the quality of their college experience. The results show that first-year and senior students at SU report significantly higher levels of academic challenge, greater opportunities for enriching educational experiences, and a more supportive campus environment as compared to our peer institutions. Additionally, seniors reported significantly greater participation in active and collaborative learning opportunities and a high level of interaction between students and faculty.

The development of a student culture that places the highest priority on academic engagement and personal growth is at the core of SU’s mission and strategic plan. We feel that the NSSE results are just one example of the positive impact that our outstanding faculty and staff have on the success of our students.

SU also attributes its success in retaining and graduating students to the continued expansion of several retention initiatives. Since the 2009 implementation of supplemental instruction (SI) and mid-semester reports, and the expansion of living-learning communities (LLCs) and the Powerful Connections program, retention rates have increased four percentage points. Additionally, African-American and minority retention increases have been notable: three and six percentage points, respectively between the 2008 and the 2011 cohorts. To ensure that limited resources are allocated appropriately, the University annually evaluates the achievement (e.g., grades and retention) of students participating in initiatives aimed at improving success.

The following initiatives are underway to increase retention and close the achievement gap:

1. **Supplemental instruction (SI)** is an initiative targeted toward freshman courses with high D, F, and W rates. Based on positive results for the previous three academic years, SI was expanded from 16 to more than 60 SI sections during 2012-13. Since its implementation in 2009, the program has grown to include more than three times the original number of SI sections and to include courses across each of the four endowed schools. Students who attended five or more SI sessions had higher first-year grades than students who attended fewer than five SI sessions. Additionally, SI students who attended five or more sessions had higher second-year retention rates than the overall first-time student cohort.
2. Based on positive data from the previous three academic years, the **living-learning community (LLC)** program has also been expanded. Students enrolled in LLCs earned higher first-year grades and were retained at a greater rate than those that were not in an LLC during their first year at SU. These positive results led the University to expand from nine LLCs in 2009 to 15 LLCs in 2012.

With two additional residence hall renovations completed for fall 2011, SU created the physical infrastructure for additional LLCs. Two years of increased retention rates and academic performance for students engaged in LLCs led SU to establish three additional LLCs for academic year 2012. In fall 2011, there were 12 LLCs, three per building, including three STEM-related LLCs. In fact, the growing interest in STEM disciplines has resulted in a dedicated residence hall just for STEM majors.

For fall 2012, three new LLCs were offered. A new community known as *Achieve* includes first generation students. Due to the increased interest, the Education LLC was divided into two communities: one for Elementary Education and one for Secondary Education majors. The addition of a performing arts LLC targeted toward students majoring in various liberal arts disciplines expanded on existing LLCs.

For fall 2013, the final renovations of SU’s residence halls will be completed. With this completion, at least one more LLC will be added and housed in one of our two high-rise facilities. At least 16 LLCs will be available to students for the 2013-14 academic year.

1. As another remediation effort, all first-time, first-year students with a D or F at mid-semester are contacted by the Center for Student Achievement (CSA) to offer academic support, advising and/or tutorial assistance. Students that sought assistance from the CSA following their poor mid-semester performance were tracked to determine if their semester performance (i.e., grades) and retention were similar to those with failing mid-semester grades that did not seek remediation from the CSA. For the past three years, students that attended the CSA for academic support had higher grades at the end of their first year than those that had a “D” or “F” at mid-semester but did not attend the CSA.Additionally, students that attended the CSA following poor mid-semester performance were retained into their second year at higher rates than students that did not seek out assistance at the CSA. Based on these positive results, the CSA expanded the number of tutors and opened remote sites in two campus buildings in fall 2011.
2. The **Powerful Connections** mentor program, offered through Multicultural Student Services also has been expanded. **A** program that matches upper class students with first-time freshmen from underrepresented groups, Powerful Connections is designed to assist in the college transition. During the past year, the program has achieved significant growth and success growing from 47 first-year students to 66. The 2010 cohort of 47 first-year students had a 91% retention rate into their sophomore year compared to an average retention rate of 83% for all first-time students.

Additionally, SU has implemented other methods to understand why students may leave the University. SU completes exit interviews with students who withdraw during an academic semester. Over the coming months, an analysis will be conducted to identify those factors that play a role in students’ decisions to leave, with the goal of addressing those that can be changed and, thereby, improve retention and graduation.

Special efforts are also underway to engage undecided students in campus life. Data revealed that students that have not selected a major are less likely to return for their sophomore year at SU than students that have selected a major during their first year. Each fall, a major/minor fair is held to promote various majors and encourage students to select an area of study. An Assistant Director for the CSA serves as an advisor for many undecided students and provides assistance in selecting a major. In spring 2013, the University launched a pilot program which involves academic coaching for undecided freshman on academic probation. Students in the program must complete an academic plan with the CSA prior to being able to register for classes in fall 2013. A hold is placed on their account until they meet with a coach, complete the Learning and Study Skills Inventory (LASSI) and develop their academic plan.

Beginning with the incoming fall 2013 class, a new sophomore housing residency requirement will be implemented. Two years of data showed that students that lived on campus during their sophomore year were retained at higher rates, earned more credit hours, and achieved higher grades than students that lived off-campus. Therefore, it is believed that the new housing requirement will further support student retention and advancement toward degree completion.

Efforts to increase graduation and retention rates are also integral to assisting the State in meeting its 55 percent degree attainment goal. In addition to the strategies already identified, SU tracks progress on several other institutional initiatives that can positively impact completion rates.

Strategies continue for closing the achievement gap including recruitment of students into the federal TRiO program. The award of SU’s first federal TRiO student support services grant in 2010 provides an additional $1.2 million in support to help low-income and first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities. The achievement of this inaugural award positions SU to receive future TRiO grant awards. This award will assist SU in attracting, retaining and graduating low-income and first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities.

In the two years since its implementation, the TRiO program has served nearly 140 students each year. The program offers participants peer and professional mentoring, academic audits to keep students on track for graduation, reading /writing workshops, and financial literacy training. The results show that students that participate in the program have high persistence rates, above 90%.

In 2011, the USM Board of Regents approved SU’s continuation of its test-optional policy for high-achieving students. The decision follows a five-year pilot study completed by the campus. Prospective students with grade point averages of 3.5 or higher will continue to have the choice of submitting SAT/ACT scores when applying to SU. The program also has contributed to greater economic diversity among incoming students. The pilot study showed that test-optional students outperform those who submitted test scores in such areas as course completion. Based on the 2007 and 2008 classes, the test-optional students also graduate at a higher rate than the others. Retention rates and grade point averages for test-optional students and their classmates are similar.

To provide opportunities for transfer students to earn credits that will simultaneously apply towards a baccalaureate degree and completion of an associate’s degree, SU has developed Reverse Transfer agreements with Wor-Wic Community College, Chesapeake College, and the College of Southern Maryland. Following the completion of the summer II session, SU forwarded its first set of transcripts to Wor-Wic Community College. We were able to assist Wor-Wic with the awarding of 63 additional degrees. The first set of transcripts were sent from SU to the Chesapeake College and the College of Southern Maryland at the end of the fall 2012 term. We are awaiting a final count of degrees awarded. SU will be working on collaborations with Montgomery and Prince George’s Community Colleges next.