FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY.

Final Monitoring Report
Florida Atlantic University's Improvement Plan

May 19, 2015

In June 2014, the State University System of Florida's Board of Governors (BOG) approved the *Improvement Plan for Florida Atlantic University's Performance Based Funding Model Scores*. At that time, the newly-appointed president of Florida Atlantic University (FAU), John Kelly, assured the Governors that the University embraced accountability measures and would be committed to improving its baseline scores in the BOG Performance Based Funding Model.

The BOG then established guidelines for the universities to develop an improvement plan that would be undertaken during the 2014-2015 fiscal year. The foundational theme for the guidelines was that "gains realized on these metrics will not be available for at least a year," and as such, "specific initiatives in the improvement plan must be measurable and verifiable" (BOG Budget and Finance Committee). In December 2014, FAU submitted a monitoring report to the Chancellor that documented the progress made on initiatives, as specified in the University's individual improvement plan. The Governors reviewed FAU's report on January 22, 2015, and they determined that satisfactory progress had been made, subsequently releasing 50% of the baseline allocations that the state withheld (~$3.5 million). This is the final report for review.

As a reminder, FAU placed a strategic emphasis on improving the following two metrics:

> **Metric 4** - 6-year graduation rate for First-Time-In-College (FTIC) students; and

> **Metric 5 -** Academic progress rate, which is measured by the 2nd year retention of students with at least a 2.0 grade point average

FAU's broad goal for the year was to enrich the educational experience in a manner that supports an organizational culture in which all units are dedicated to student success. Subsequently, FAU implemented six specific, actionable strategies with measurable targets:

A. Increase the number of academic advisors
B. Purchase and implement advising software
C. Launch "Jump Start" pilot for undergraduates admitted in summer
D. Develop study plans for undergraduates, also known as "Flight Plans"
E. Launch bachelors of general studies degree program
F. Launch "Major KnOWLedge" early career exploration module

Reporting on Improvement Plan Strategies

As is evidenced in the following report, FAU can confirm that it has met every single final target as established by the University's Board of Trustees and as approved by the Board of Governors. This monitoring report provides up-to-date data on the May 2015 expectations, as well as supplemental information, often showcasing progress beyond the established targets.

A. Increase the number of academic advisors

May 2015 – Expectation	Final Status Report
26 new academic advisors are hired and strategically placed in FAU's University Advising Services (10) as well as FAU's colleges and departments (16)	26 new academic advisors have been hired and strategically placed in FAU's University Advising Services (9), as well as FAU's colleges and departments (17)

As mentioned in FAU's original improvement plan, the National Academic Advising Association recommends a 300 student to 1 advisor ratio in order to offer students a personal connection to the institution. Before the hiring push, FAU was at roughly 400 students to every 1 advisor. In addition to the 9 placements in the central office, 17 advisors have been hired to work in academic colleges and departments.

Adding new hires has increased raw advising capacity, but FAU also had a clear need to increase the *effectiveness* of advising. The institution is improving efficacy by revitalizing the central advising office with a new mission, reorganizing staff, and revising position descriptions. A new Director (Mr. Joe Murray) hired in 2013 has been instrumental in effecting these changes. Our Freshmen Academic Advising Services became University Advising Services (UAS), a center for the advising of first and second-year students. All incoming freshmen are connected to a personal advisor prior to attending orientation, and that advisor remains with the students throughout their first two years. The Advisor also serves as an *academic coach* for students at risk. Advisors provide career guidance by connecting students to academic disciplines and promoting early selection of majors.

All advisors in UAS are certified as having completed *training* in Appreciative Advising (AA) offered through the University of South Carolina's Office of Appreciative Education and considered best practice. AA is the intentional collaborative practice of asking positive, open-ended questions that help students optimize their educational experience and achieve their potential. The advisee and advisor, *as partners*, work together to discover the student's passions, design a plan to achieve their dreams, deliver on that plan, and make changes as necessary. FAU has become a national leader in Appreciative Advising; the director and staff have conducted webinars and presented at national conferences. Another significant innovation is the reach of advisors into the residence halls. *Every* first-year residence hall floor now has a UAS advisor assigned to it, and resident assistants are being trained in the proper referral information and skills needed to identify students in academic difficulty. In January 2015, FAU launched a new academic and career counseling resource center in one residence hall, known as Get Wise @ GPT (Glades Park Tower). As noted in the January 19 edition of the Sun Sentinel, academic advising is also available to all students in the parking garages, which "brings services directly to commuter students whose busy schedules have traditionally made them less likely to visit academic advisors." Discussions are underway to expand the Get Wise @ GPT model to all first-year residence halls and to mandate advising and tutoring

sessions for residents of these halls who are academically at risk.

FAU is committed to hiring an adequate number of personnel to support our students, but the most important commitment is to *improving* the overall advising experience. The university advising experience is now exponentially more *effective*, as it has been improved through innovative advisor training and by promoting and implementing nationally-accepted best practices.

B. Purchase and implement advising software

May 2015 – Expectation	Final Status Report
Starfish advising software is functional for use and 100% of advisors are trained and using system with students	Starfish advising software has been installed and integrated with University systems; 100% of undergraduate advisors have completed training

While FAU's advising capacity is growing and the institution has implemented a number of measures to improve the overall effectiveness of academic advisors, it was also imperative that the advising system become more *streamlined*. After completing the procurement process per Board of Governors Regulations 18.002, 18.003, and University Regulation 6.008, the institution purchased software and integrated it with University systems. FAU's "Success Network" advising system, powered by Starfish Solutions, launched at the start of the Fall 2014 semester. Since then, the institution attained the goal of training 100% of undergraduate advisors, as established in the improvement plan. The system is now available to *all* FAU undergraduates.

Previously, there was no common advising software in use university-wide. The first-year advising office and some of the colleges used one software system, but they operated independently of one another. Advisors were unable to view notes on students maintained by other offices. Now, regardless of the level of student or whether or not they have already declared a major, students use the Starfish "Success Network" system throughout their entire collegiate experience. Digital notes on the students will stay with them as they progress in their studies. Students can schedule advising appointments, communicate with advisors, track their academic progress, and learn how and where to find increased support, such as tutoring. FAU also launched a pilot study of additional Starfish features, in particular its *early warning system*. With this system, instructors can flag students as "at-risk" if they have poor attendance—or even give "kudos" to students who excel. The system also can automatically generate these flags by pulling performance data from instructors' grade books. The Fall 2014 pilot took place in the two highest enrollment courses, College Composition I and College Composition II. Faculty participation was impressive: 70 percent of the instructors in these courses submitted 1,134 early warning "flags." Advisors responded to these flags by *promptly* contacting the students and, when necessary, arranging in-person interventions.

The University expanded this intervention feature in spring 2015 to *all* general education courses. Faculty members were asked early in the semester to raise flags on attendance concerns in their classes (especially important in mathematics, the sciences, and foreign languages) and, later in the semester, to address any concerns about students who are underperforming. Out of a total of 62,724 seats in the Intellectual Foundations Program, faculty members distributed 4,580 notices that a student's average course grade was below 70% (some students received multiple notices). Roughly half of these flags resulted in students improving their standing in the course by the middle of the spring term. It is also worth noting that the advising system enables faculty members to send positive notes about student performance. 2,838 individual "kudos" were distributed to students via the system in the spring term.

FAU is also working with Starfish Solutions to include data on *all* student tutoring sessions, attendance at Supplemental Instruction, and participation in review sessions. Finally, we are developing mechanisms to *assess the effectiveness* of advising overall through data provided by Starfish. FAU wishes to ensure that there is a clear system of *accountability* in place: in the advising offices to ensure that the advisors are meeting with students and making the necessary interventions to ensure student success; and among students, to let them know that they must take responsibility in the end for their own academic performance.

C. Launch "Jump Start" pilot for undergraduates admitted in summer

May 2015 – Expectation	Final Status Report
50% of students who completed JumpStart have been retained after receiving special advising, and an assessment of the program has been completed.	210 students completed summer portion of pilot, with 76% (154) students successfully completing the spring 2015 semester with at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA or higher. Additionally, an assessment led to process improvements for future JumpStart programming.

JumpStart launched as a pilot program in summer 2014 with 210 students. Students enrolled in the JumpStart pilot voluntarily. The purpose of JumpStart is to *ensure* student success by creating a unique support system. Students establish relationships with academic advisors and faculty; build a community of friends with other first-year students and develop stronger bonds with FAU; and acquire the academic support tools necessary to ensure their success in later semesters. Students enroll in two regular general education courses (6 credit hours), as well as a zero-credit Learning Community Experience course that meets six times over the summer term. The purpose of the Learning Community Experience course is to inform students about *strategies* for success and to connect students to university resources and support offices.

The average grade point average for summer 2014 JumpStart students was 3.28, with 98 percent of students earning a GPA of 2.0 or higher and 47 percent earning 3.5 or higher. Only one student did not return for the Fall 2014 semester. Beginning summer 2015, JumpStart is *mandatory* for all students admitted conditionally (currently includes those with a high school GPA between 3.0 and 3.29). The program is also open to all students admitted for the summer term. Based on program assessments, future JumpStart students who successfully complete the summer portion will be required to take in the Fall SLS 1503 Learning Strategies & Human Development, a success skills course designed to offer students strategies for achieving their collegiate and professional goals.

The purpose of the JumpStart program remains the same: to provide the resources necessary for student success but also give students a head start on their university coursework, thus ensuring more timely graduations for FTICs.

D. Develop study plans for undergraduates, also known as "Flight Plans"

May 2015 – Expectation	Final Status Report
100% of baccalaureate programs complete Flight Plans for all enrolled 2014-15 FTIC students	100% (98 of 98) of baccalaureate programs have completed Flight Plan templates, and 100% of FTIC students who entered Fall 2014 have completed individualized Flight Plans.

Previously, FAU had no standardized study plans for its undergraduate students. While some of the colleges, departments, and degree programs independently established step-by-step roadmaps to track academic progress, the reliability and thoroughness of these plans varied greatly. This complicated the advising process, making it difficult for advisors to tell when students had deviated from their plans. In the Fall 2014 semester, *every* baccalaureate degree program had completed a Flight Plan template, which lists the specific course requirements and other academic milestones and identifies the term-by-term plan that students must follow in order to stay on track with their studies. Some of the degree programs even offer *accelerated* versions of the Flight Plan if students are able to take full course loads in the summer semesters. For example, the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program offers a 32 credit track for students who are already Registered Nurses. These RN-to-BSN students can choose a 3, 4, 5, or 6 semester Flight Plan to complete these 32 credit hours, allowing FAU to cater to working students who have additional family or professional obligations. At the same time, the BSN also features a traditional four-year Flight Plan for the 100 students who are annually directly admitted into the program as FTICs. A complete list of Flight Plans is available online.

With the guidance of their advisors, students now customize these templates into study plans that fit their unique needs. As of May 2015, all students who entered the institution as FTIC students in Fall 2014 have completed individualized Flight Plans. The standardization of Flight Plans is also assisting the university administration in

establishing a *predictive* course scheduling process based on more reliable data, such as student demand.

E. Launch bachelors of general studies (BGS) degree program

May 2015 – Expectation	Final Status Report
New BGS degree program approved by FAU Faculty Senate and FAU Board of Trustees.	BGS degree program approved Fall 2014. The first cohort of 34 Bachelors of General Studies students graduated in May 2015.

The Bachelors of General Studies (BGS) degree allows students to design a plan of study to meet their personal interests and career goals. The plan of study is more flexible than that required in traditional degree programs. The degree is intended for those members of the local community already in careers but who need a degree to advance professionally or personally. Current FAU students who meet the 120-hour requirement but, because of personal or employment imperatives, need to hasten their time to degree completion can now graduate with the BGS degree.

While flexible, the BGS still maintains all other FAU degree requirements for baccalaureate programs. In consultation with an advisor, students select a concentration (such as business, communications, or computer science, among many others) and then map out a plan of study that includes 15 credit hours of upper-division coursework in the discipline. The BGS was approved by the University Faculty Senate at the October 2014 meeting and was approved by the FAU Board of Trustees at the November 2014 meeting.

The first cohort of 34 BGS students graduated in May 2015. These are all students who would not have been able to graduate in their original majors of choice. Many of them had already found employment or were eligible to receive promotions that included conditions of receiving baccalaureate diplomas (of any kind). In coming years, FAU aims to graduate growing numbers of BGS students. Most of these graduates will be existing students who haven't been able to succeed in their current degree programs.

F. Launch "Major KnOWLedge" early career exploration module

May 2015 – Expectation	Final Status Report
75% of at least 400 students who completed the module have declared a major, with the remainder being referred to SLS 1301 – Career Life Planning, and an assessment of the module has been completed	99% of the 1,314 FTIC students who completed the module have declared a major, and an assessment of the module has been completed.

Students who have declared a major are less susceptible to attrition than undeclared students. Historically, FAU has lost over 75 percent of those undecided entering freshmen who are still undecided by the end of the second year. The goal of the Major KnOWLedge module, offered through the Career Development Center at FAU, is to help all incoming undecided students determine majors that fit their career aspirations and subsequently decrease time-to-degree and increase degree completion. The Career Development Center has also developed an assessment plan to measure the impact of the Major KnOWLedge model.

To reinforce the insights students gained from the Major KnOWLedge module, University Advising Services launched in Fall 2014 the Owl Nation Exploration (ONE) program, which involved more than 15 exploratory activities related to career and major exploration (see www.fau.edu/uas/one.php for full details). Workshops and seminars include peer panels, as well as career and graduate school fairs. The capstone event of this program was the "I Declared!" week that occurred March 16-20. Additionally, two of the academic advisors who were hired as part of the first strategy of the improvement plan will be housed in the Career Development Center with a primary responsibility of working with undeclared students to help them identify a major area of study and potential career path.

Between April and September 2014, 1,314 FTICs, 118 new transfers, and 313 current students both registered and completed this module, thus far exceeding our May 2015 expectation. *By January 2015, 96% of these FTICs declared majors*. That figure is now at 99%. Those students still undeclared at the end of their first semester have been *required* to take a 1-credit course, SLS 1301 - Career and Life Planning. The outcome of this course is that students declare a major at the end of the semester. The 1% of FTICs who have not declared majors include students who have left the University.

FAU also embarked on an assessment of the early career exploration and major declaration programming. The current proposal is to make Major KnOWLedge a mandatory requirement for all incoming FTIC and transfer students, which would require building it into the "on-boarding" process. Further assessment is necessary, but the module is currently available to all incoming and current students.

Above and Beyond – FAU's Ongoing Commitment to Student Success

Retooling Academic Operations

Student success is not a new topic for the academic leadership team at FAU. Shortly before the release of the scores for the SUS performance based funding initiative in January 2014, FAU engaged in a number of self-assessment activities and operational improvements to ensure that students are graduating in a timely manner. Perhaps the most influential action taken was engaging the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) in a consultation regarding the operations of the enrollment management units. The primary goal of the review was to determine if these areas were providing effective, efficient, and student-centered service in support of students and student success. As a result of the AACRAO report, the University took a number of important steps towards improving its admissions procedures and academic operations. The Provost conducted a reorganization of the Offices of Undergraduate Admissions, the Registrar, and Student Financial Aid so that the three units reported to a newly-formed Enrollment Management Oversight Committee (EMOC).

The Provost also charged Associate Provost Dr. Michele Hawkins with chairing EMOC and overseeing the daily operations of these units, which are so integral to student success. The team initiated reviews of burdensome registration holds, overhauled the transfer credit evaluation process, conducted surveys of non-returning students, and implemented technological upgrades to the degree audit reporting system. Academic advisors made phone calls to students who were nearing their final term but had not yet registered for their last fifteen credit hours in order for the institution to better *understand* and *remove* any obstacles to graduation. Lastly, the University initiated a customer service improvement effort, which is currently being conducted in collaboration with partners like the Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center.

FAU completely overhauled its processes in a way that would attract higher-performing students. Perhaps the most revealing discovery in this self-assessment process appeared in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, where it was taking anywhere from twelve to sixteen weeks to respond to applicants with an admissions decision. After the reorganization, the response rate is down to an average of 24-48 hours, beating the national average of three days. High-achieving students are now more likely to confirm their attendance to FAU now that they receive their admissions decisions promptly. In addition, despite the fact that nearly twenty-five percent of FAU students are of Hispanic origin, the Admissions Office on the Boca Raton campus did not have a full-time English/Spanish-speaking staff member to respond to the Spanish-speaking parents of prospective students. That has changed. Lastly, recruiters were spending approximately eighty percent of their time in their office on campus and only twenty percent of their time on the road, actively recruiting students. This has been reversed, so that recruiters are visiting high school students eighty percent of their time.

The Provost also convened a scheduling committee, made of faculty and staff members from all of FAU's colleges, to determine best practices scheduling format to meet student needs for timely graduation. They engaged consultants and surveyed the needs of students and faculty, proposing a new university-wide schedule model that maximizes classroom space throughout the week and promotes accessible scheduling for timely progression.

Additionally, FAU established a one-stop-service committee to develop a model for a responsive phone and online system at the institution. Rather than transferring students from one department to the next to attend to specific issues, this one-stop-service will enable highly-trained customer service representatives to troubleshoot student issues. This concierge-style service will assist students with everything from registration to account payments. Similarly, FAU developed an on-boarding process to provide newly admitted students with a step-by-step approach to a smooth transition to collegiate life and university procedures. This system is intended to reduce the bottlenecks of holds and the various frustrations experienced by incoming students. Overall, FAU has taken a renewed strategic look at the best practices of its business processes – with a focus on attracting, retaining, graduating, and preparing students for future success.

Revitalizing Relationships

While the academic operations are improving, President Kelly has committed to recruiting high-ability students who are adequately-prepared and interested in staying at FAU and graduating in a timely manner. Students who are not quite ready for university study are referred to the local state college partners and encouraged to articulate to FAU after completing the associate's degree. FAU has strong connections to Palm Beach State College and Broward College through vehicles such as "2+2" degree packages, the LINK program wherein state college students are served by FAU advisors, and the BOG TEAm grant-funded CAPTURE initiative to meet workforce demands in computer science and computer engineering fields. Following changes to the University's admissions standards for Fall 2015, the average weighted high school grade point average of FTICs entering in Fall 2014 was 3.77, compared to 3.51 in Fall 2013. FAu will continue to raise admission standards. When considered alongside the institution's student success initiatives, these changes will greatly and positively impact academic progress rates and six-year graduation rates at FAU.

In order to showcase the incredible undergraduate opportunities available to prospective local students, FAU hosted two expos for high school students prior to home football games – October 18 for Palm Beach County students and November 1 for Broward County students. A combined 16,000+ prospective students and family members attended these two events, where they learned about the variety of degree programs and student life offered by FAU. The ten academic colleges and various student and administrative offices were present to answer questions on topics ranging from the classroom experience, to admissions, financial aid, sports, and residential life. Both faculty and student researchers were able to exhibit their works, while high school students attending the expos were granted free admission to the football games at the on-campus stadium. Discounted tickets were available for parents, guardians and family members. These were two incredibly exciting days that offer a clear example of the renewed focus on excellence and innovation at FAU.

Responding to Stakeholders

The University has an ongoing commitment to enhancing the educational experience for both current and future students, using technology as a tool. The Center for eLearning developed an *online* orientation for new students, which provides an alternative for those who are unable to attend traditional face-to-face sessions due to work or personal obligations. Additionally, a 1-credit online course, SLS 1300, was created to offer non-traditional students the same options as

their traditional counterparts to explore careers and make informed decisions when choosing career paths. Finally the Center for eLearning converted high-demand, lower-division general studies courses into an online format to prevent *bottlenecks* in registration and keep students on track for graduation. With these changes in processes, FAU also expanded online tutorial support to ensure students who need help have access to it at all times.

Beyond the improvements in academic support services, the University launched a new department called Owls Care to prevent campus population-level health problems in many areas including: stress management, substance abuse prevention, sexual assault prevention, sexual health, HIV/AIDS awareness, self-esteem, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention training. This department will help students whose studies are negatively impacted by unfortunate external factors. These are just a selection of changes that FAU is implementing to *ensure* that the institutional culture continues to embrace and support student success.

The focus on undergraduate student success has inspired our graduate programs to reflect on how the University engages all of its students. While graduate students comprise a smaller percentage of the university population, an organizational culture that supports graduate students is integral to the mission of a major research university. Toward that end, the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Dean of the Graduate College formed a Task Force on Graduate Student Life to study and offer recommendations regarding the condition of and opportunities to improve graduate student life at FAU. The Task Force has been charged with researching and documenting best practices as well as recommendations for action regarding graduate student life programs, services, and facilities. The Task Force's final report details efforts that FAU can take to engage all of its students, regardless of level or circumstance.

Next Steps -- Becoming the Nation's Fastest-Improving University

As is evidenced in this final report, FAU has improved across the board, with a laser-sharp focus on tackling issues related to student success. These innovative yet often common-sense and best practice improvements have helped the institution as a whole. The next step was to conduct a thorough review of institutional priorities, so that FAU can openly embrace its role as comprehensive research university with world-acclaimed partners, located in a beautiful subtropical setting. In its strategic planning process, the University articulated its dedication to change and finding its place on the national stage.

President Kelly and Provost Perry visited every single academic department in each of the colleges, in addition to a number of administrative departments and student groups. First and foremost—the hope was to reinforce the ongoing commitment to improving retention and graduation rates, while simultaneously learning about and growing some of the University's most valuable resources, faculty projects, and community outreach efforts. With more than 45 academic departments in 10 colleges and a dozen "academic units" across 6 campuses and sites, this was no easy feat. However, it was incredibly important for the executive leadership team to hear an unfiltered message directly from the faculty. This way, the team could immediately attend to any issues or opportunities that arose related to student success and the reputation of the institution.

Building on the success of this improvement plan and the aforementioned efforts of the new leadership, the FAU Board of Trustees adopted *A Strategic Plan for the Race to Excellence, 2015-2025*. The first broad goal of this plan is to build a uniquely competitive and globalized student body, meaning that the University will pursue the success of its students with unprecedented and unbridled ambition. With a truly strategic vision, FAU can become the nation's fastest-improving university, which only raises the profile of the State University System of Florida—and the incredible citizens that the universities produce.