Transforming the Foundational Postsecondary Experience: Using Data and Design to Improve First-Year Outcomes

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Welcome and Introductions!

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Discussion

If you could change ONE student outcome at your institution… what would it be?

https://www.menti.com/alnvdb3nupxk

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Agenda

The National Picture and Problems with Student Success Measures

Three Questions to Guide Improvement

Rebalancing the Measurement Portfolio and Designing for Measures for Earlier Student Success

Reflection, Alignment, and Closing Insights

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Guided Notes

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Transforming the Foundational Postsecondary Experience: Using Data and Design to Improve First-Year Outcomes

BREAKOUT #1:

Framing the Institutional Challenge and Aim

What student success problem or output is most critical to address at your institution?

Many people name the **outputs** of the system as their problem, that's ok to start.

- Do you know why students are not persisting in the first two years at your institution?
- How do you know? What critical evidence do you use as measures of first-year student success?
- What measures are currently missing?

What is the AIM associated with that undesired output? What is the ideal outcome?

Student Success: Current Metrics

List the primary student success metrics your institution regularly monitors related to your AIM
(for example mid-terms, retention, GPA, completion, DFWI rates, attendance, engagement, etc.).

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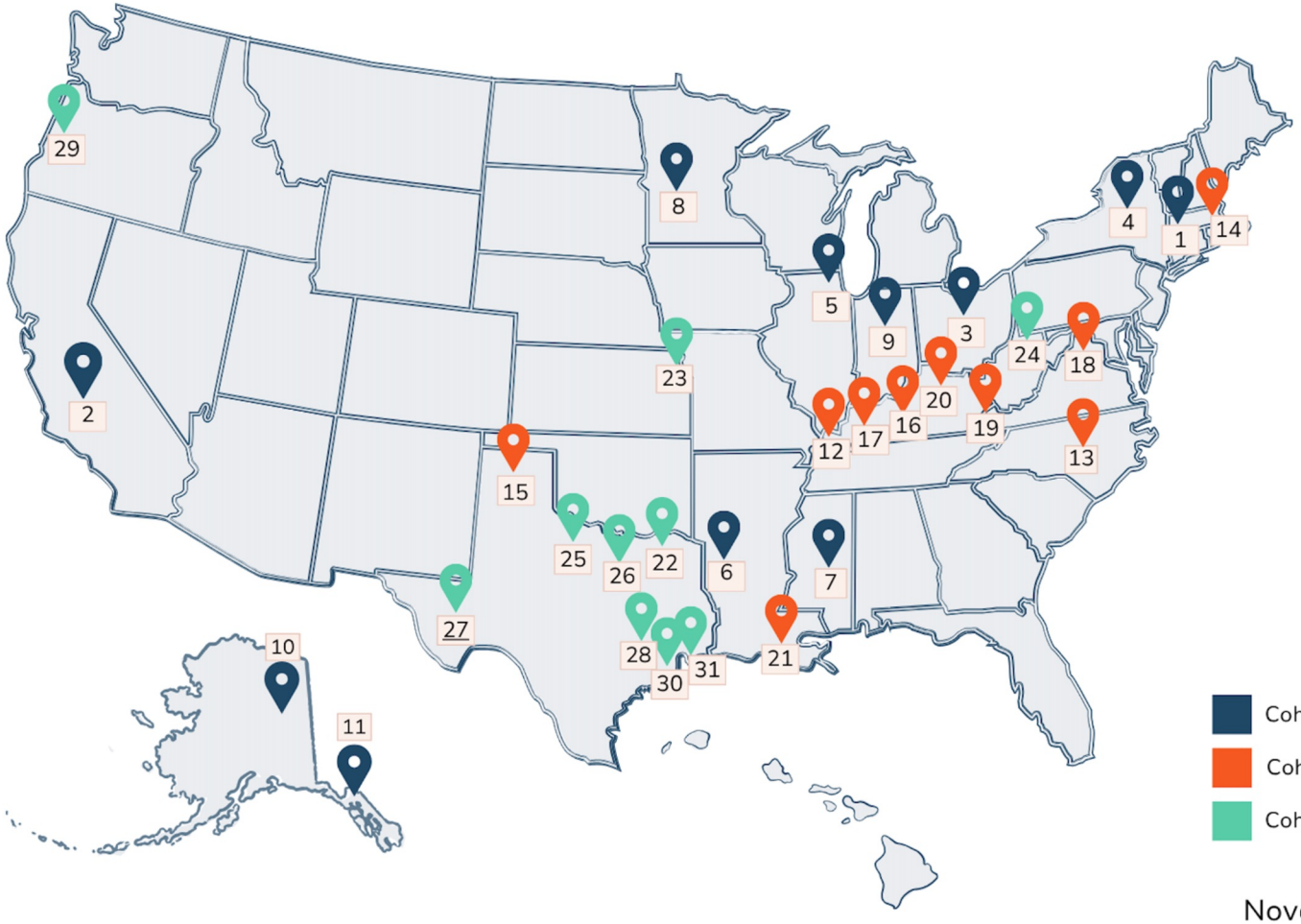
Transforming the Postsecondary Experience™

Participating Institutions



1. Bridgewater State University
2. California State University-San Bernardino
3. Capital University
4. CUNY Queensborough Community College
5. Columbia College of Chicago
6. Louisiana State University-Shreveport
7. Mississippi State University
8. Normandale Community College
9. Purdue University Global
10. University of Alaska Fairbanks
11. University of Alaska Southeast

12. Bellarmine University
13. Brevard College
14. Emmanuel College
15. Frank Phillips College
16. Kentucky State University
17. Lindsey Wilson University
18. Mary Baldwin University
19. Simmons College of Kentucky
20. Thomas More University
21. University of New Orleans

22. Austin College
23. Baker University
24. Fairmont State University
25. Midwestern State University
26. Sam Houston State University
27. Sul Ross State University
28. Texas Wesleyan University
29. The University of Oregon
30. University of Houston-Clear Lake
31. University of Houston

Cohort I

Cohort II

Cohort III

November 2025

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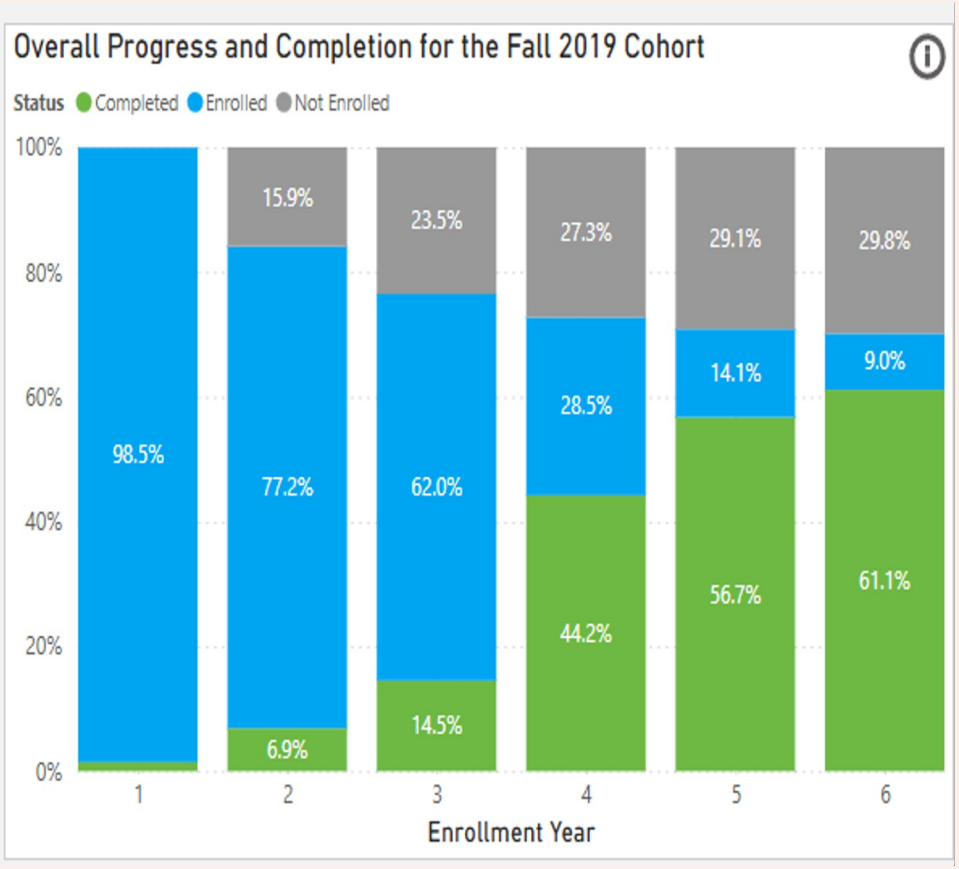
- Of the students who leave higher education, 53% are gone after year 1
- 79% are gone after year 2

Females 79%
Males 78%
20 or younger at entry 77%
21 or older at entry 86%
Black 79%
Hispanic 77%
American Indian/Alaska Native 81%
2 or more races 79%
Asian 73%



Source: National Student Clearinghouse, Yearly Progress and Completion Report

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Discussion

When you think about the first two years of college, **what do you measure related to student success?**

https://www.menti.com/alnvdb3nupxk

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We all want to do better by our students, so why is it so difficult?

National retention data show us that higher education is not currently supporting student success for many of our students.

This isn't a new issue... so why is it taking so long for us to develop agility when it comes to supporting more students to persist and graduate?

Multivariate systems are tough to address – in part, because of how we design and measure them!

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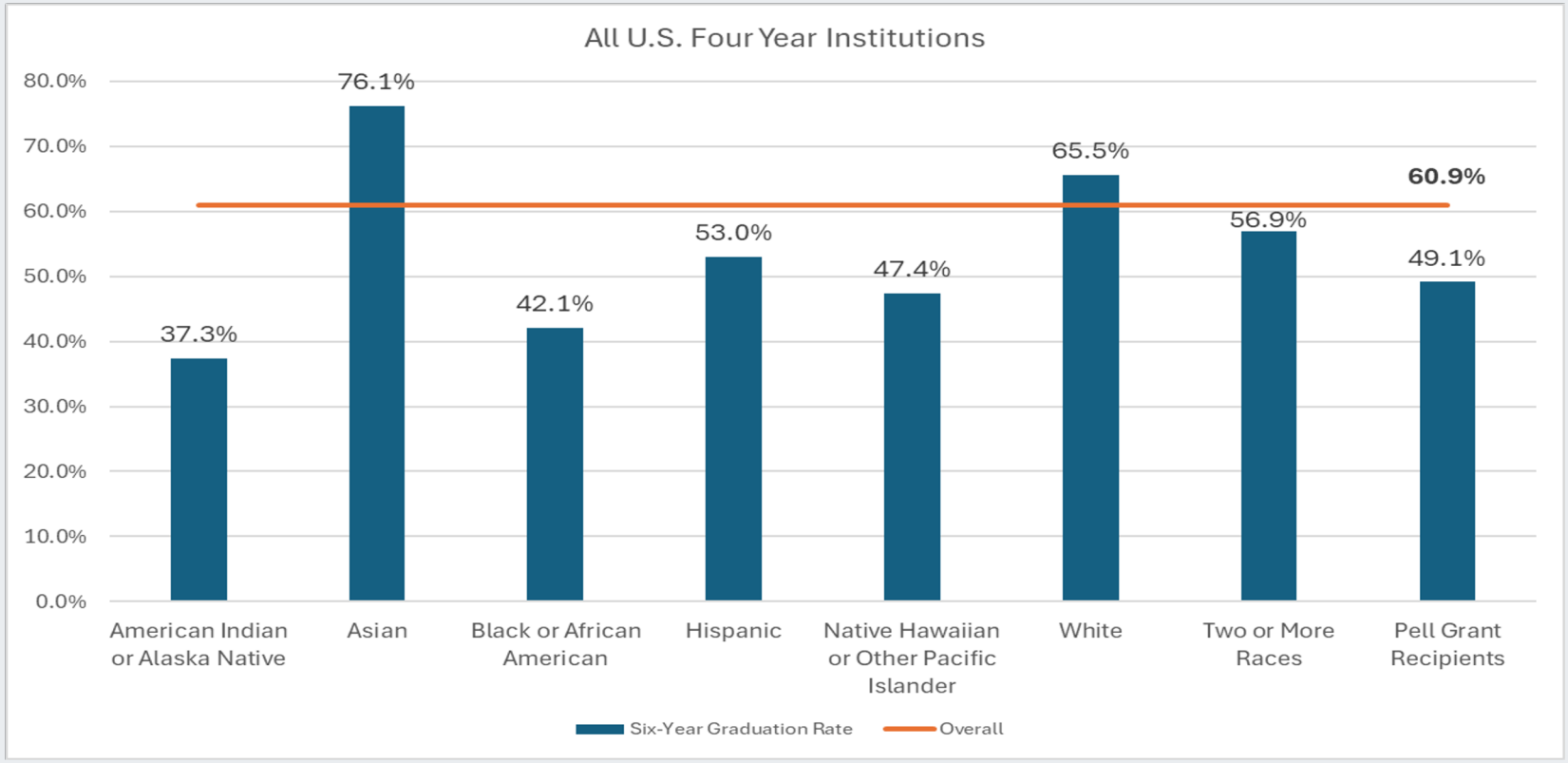
Six Year Graduation Rates (2018 Cohort)

IPEDS Data Center



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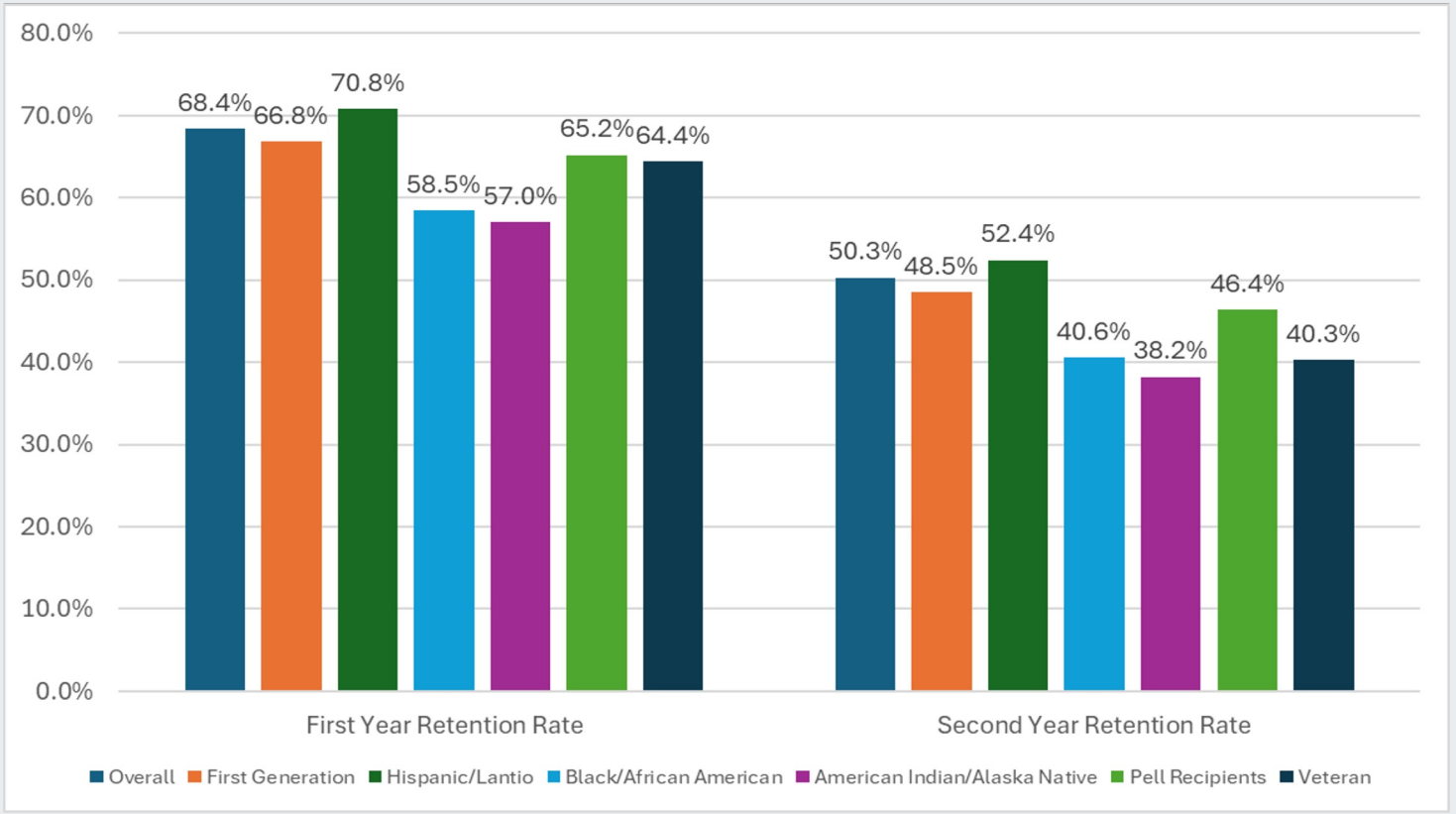
First and Second Year Retention



Source: Drake (2025) Intersectionality of First-Generation Students

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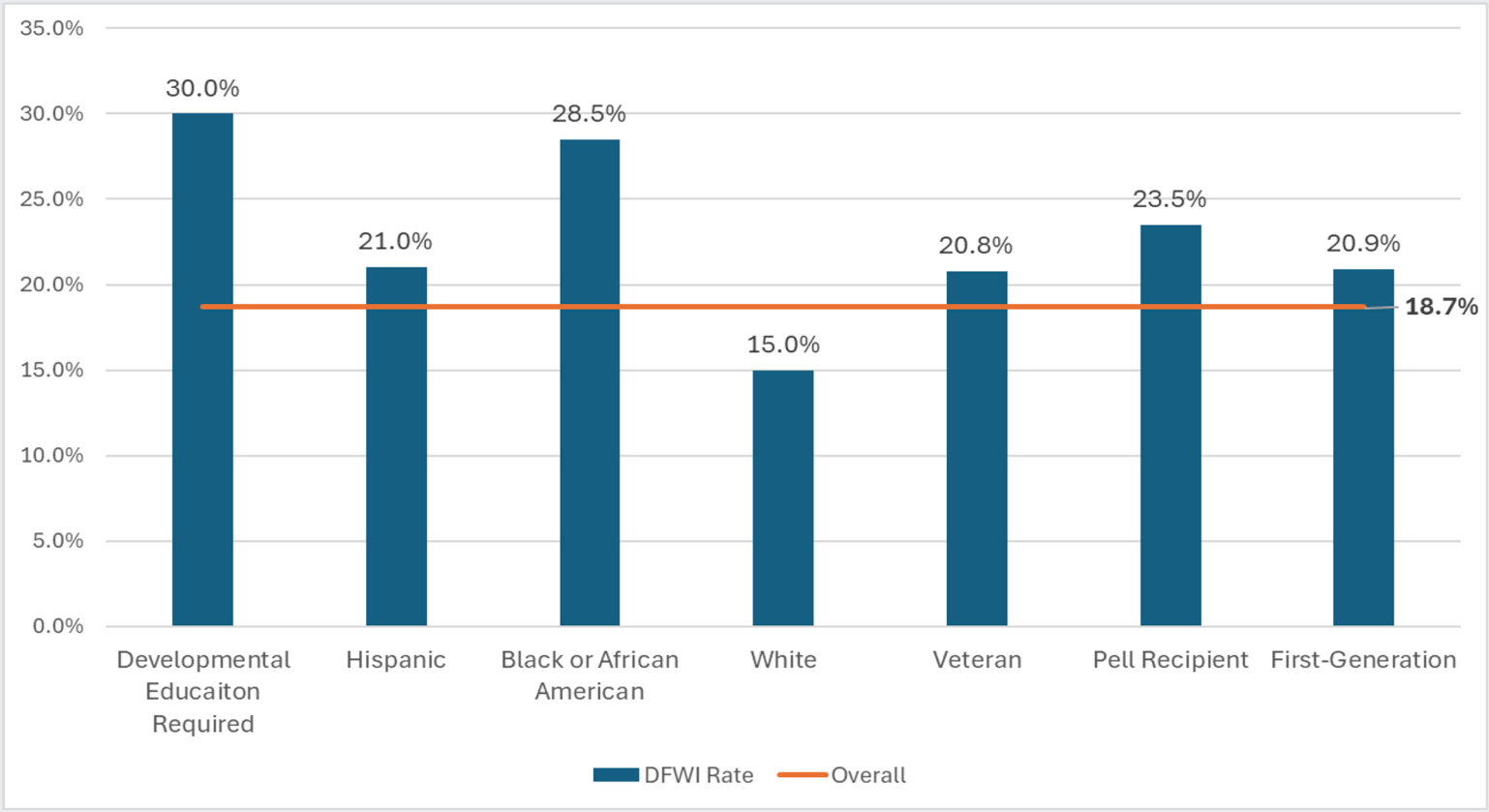
Undergraduate Courses DFWI Rate



Source: Drake (2025) Intersectionality of First-Generation Students

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The Problem with Problems

Persistence and Graduation rates are the outputs... not the problems.

Higher Ed is FULL of Multi-Variate Systems

Lagging Measures

Complexity Makes it Difficult for Teams to Focus on Measuring What Matters

What would it look like to understand student need sooner?

The Problem with Problems

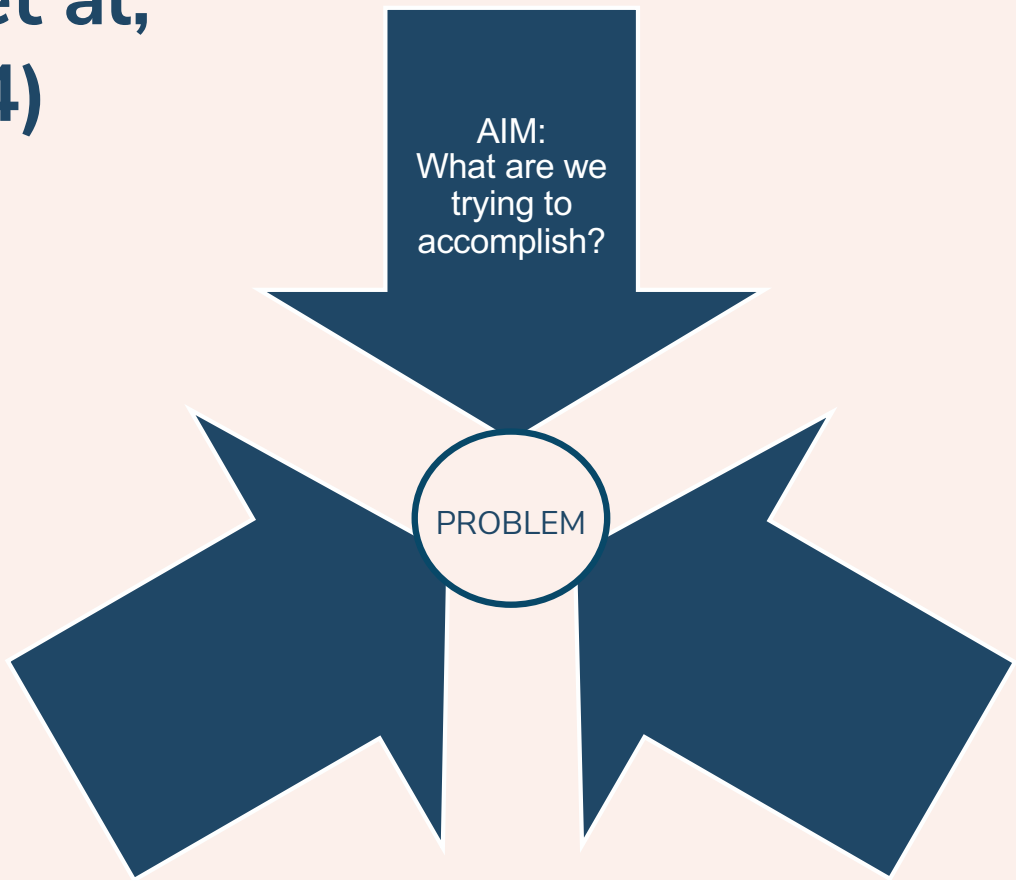
Start with a output problem…

Do you want to impact:

Catapult course success?
Persistence?
Engagement?

Something else?

What's your Problem? Three Guiding Questions (Langley et al, 2009, p.24)



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The Problem with Problems

Turn that problem it inside out...

What is the AIM associated with that problem?

What is the ideal outcome?

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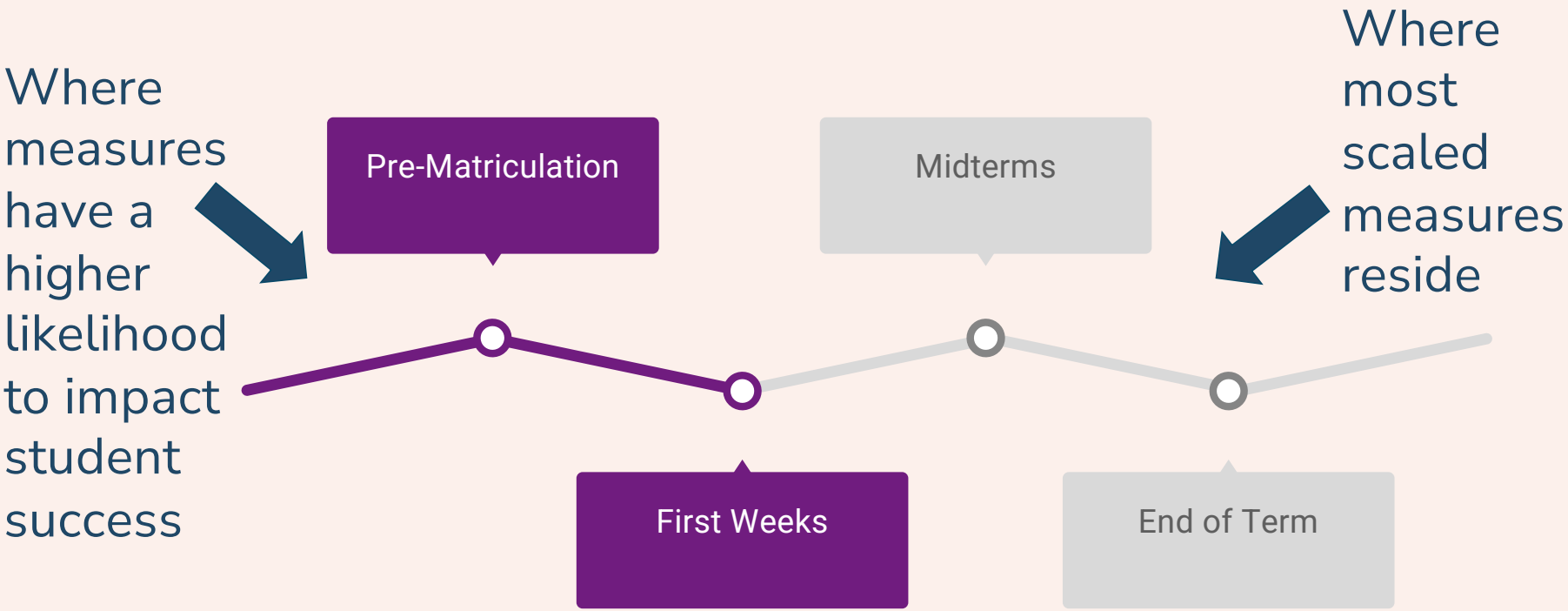
Timing

- Student Success is typically a term for a group of key **LAGGING** measures at your institution.
- Once we have many of these data, **it's too late for our students** for whom the institutional systems were not well designed.

The Window of Opportunity



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Measure What Matters

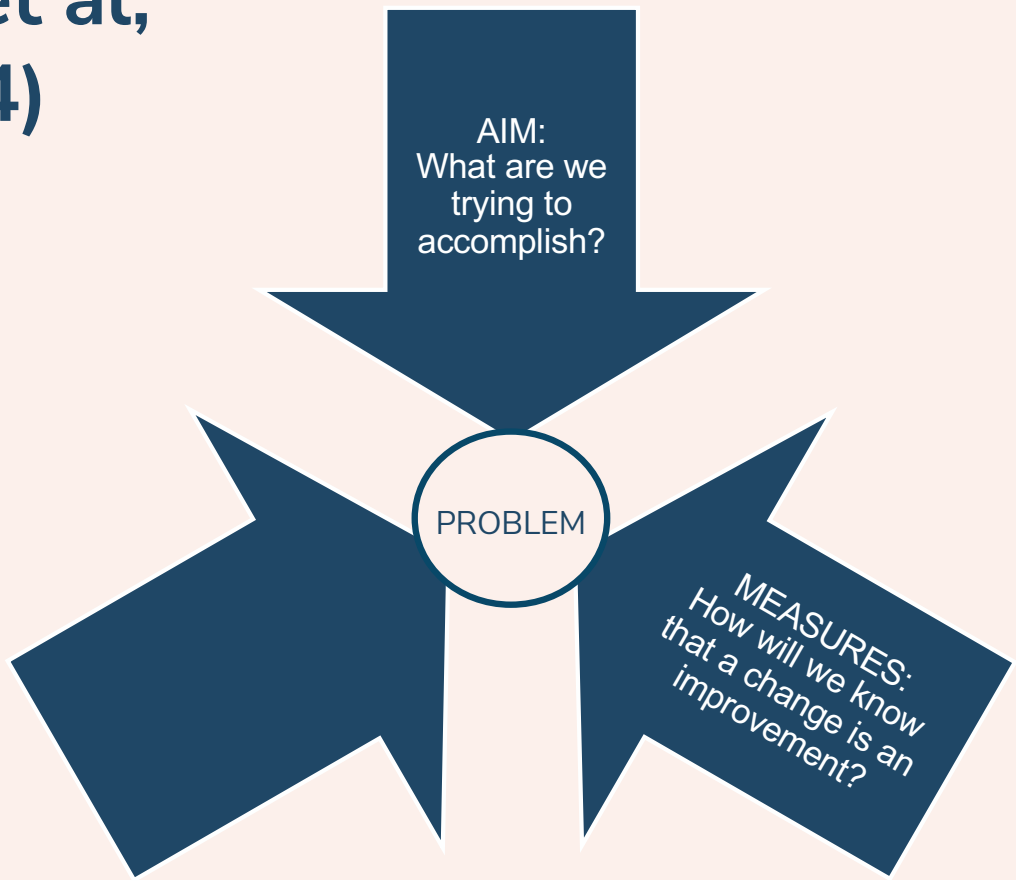
Identifying Measures of Effectiveness

Process Measures (often internal): The parts of the process that your team will do or not do that you believe will drive change – form a committee, use a rubric, secure a position, a student will complete a degree plan, etc.

Leading Measures: Early indicators of student success – use of tools, early grades, student engagement in meetings, etc.

Lagging Measures: In education, typically after 90 days (or longer) – persistence, graduation, success in 200+ level course work, etc.

What's your Problem? Three Guiding Questions (Langley et al, 2009, p.24)



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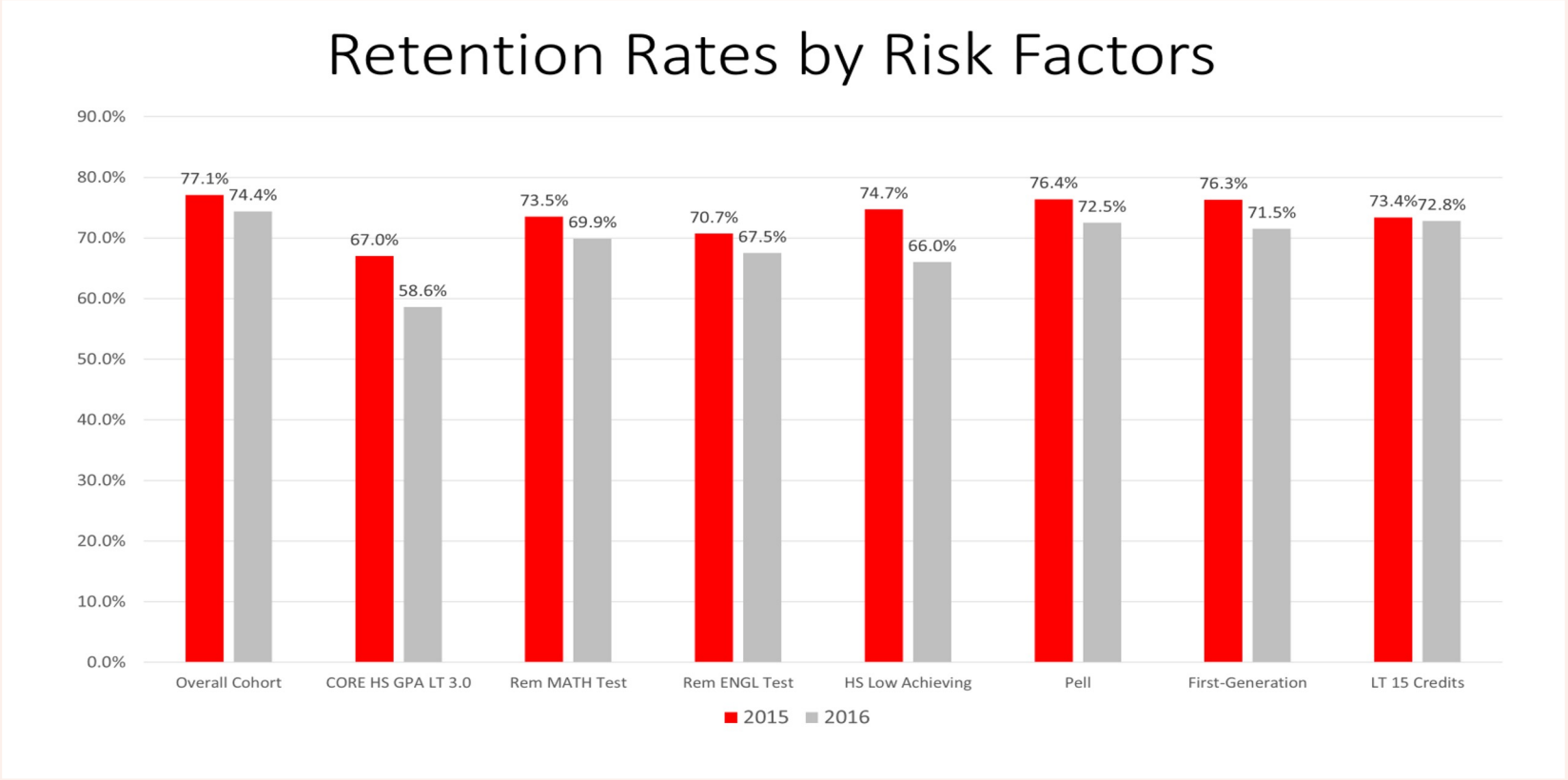
Knowing Your Students to Drive Success

UNLV



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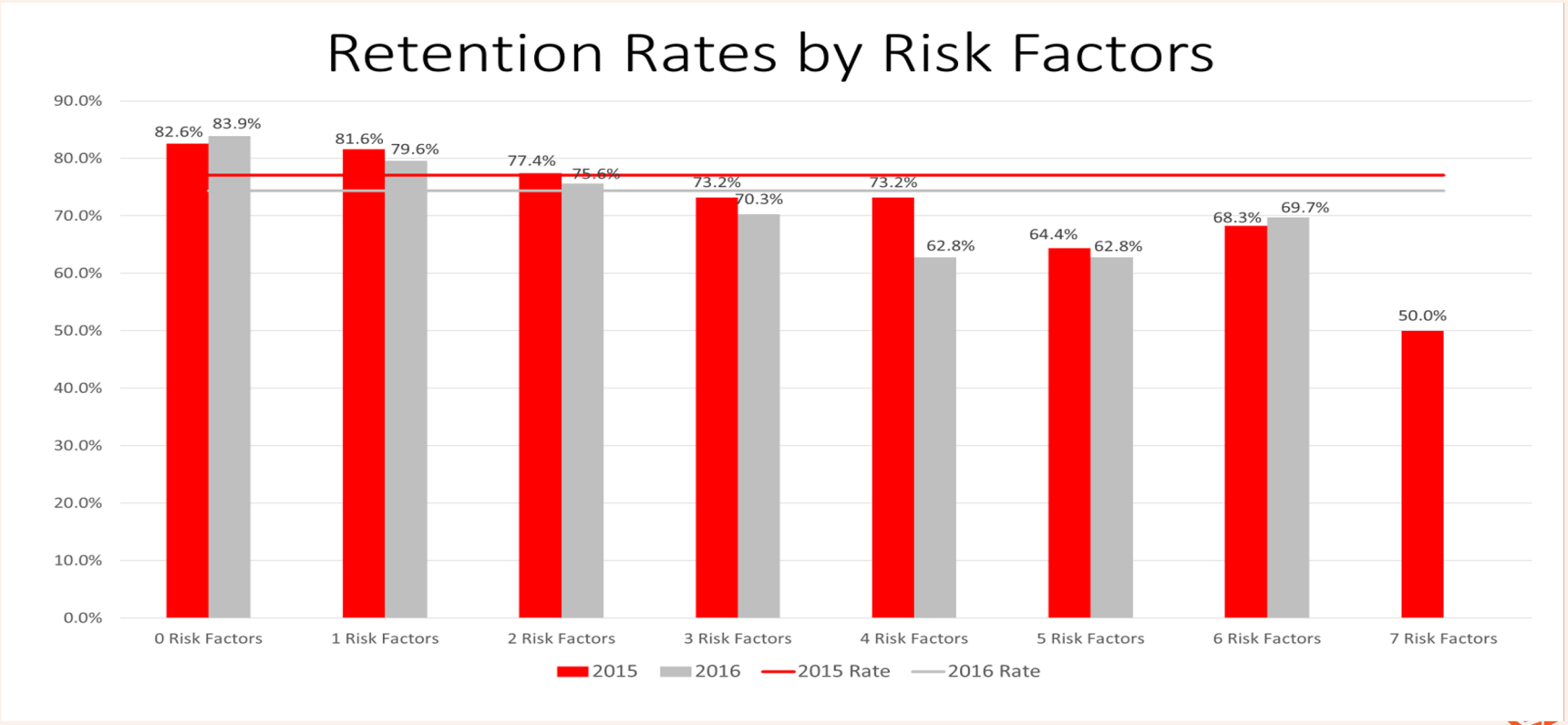
Knowing Your Students to Drive Success

UNLV



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Need for Transformation —> Retention & Completion

FTFT First-to-Second Year Retention

- Stagnant at **61.1%-65.9%** for more than a decade (2010-2023)

FTFT Completion (Fall 2017 cohort)

- 19% 4-year graduation rate
- 33% 6-year graduation rate

Other FTFT outcomes

- FTFT most at risk of departure
- FTFT Pell students transfer out at even higher rates

IEO - Inputs

- Large commuter population *(69%)*
- Working students *(80% over 30hrs)*
- Low income (54% FTFT)
- First gen (53% FTFT)
- Academically underprepared *(over 50% require co-requisite support)*

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3 Complementary LEADING Indicators used in FYE at LSUS

1. **Early Risk & Readiness Signals (CSI & MYSA)**
   - ➢ Entry- & mid-year assessments identifying motivation, risk, & support needs
   - ➢ Required meetings at pivotal progress points (e.g. 4-weeks, mid-term)
2. **Early Engagement in Core Academic Practices (Embedded FYE Work)**
   - ➢ Required coursework that makes academic behaviors & engagement visible early (e.g. active learning)
3. **Early Academic Recovery Trigger (SOAR Program)**
   - ➢ Indicators of Fall-term academic struggle used to initiate structured Spring proactive recovery before scholarship loss or stop-out

Leading Measures → Early Engagement in Embedded First-Year Work

What Embedded First-Year Work Captures

- **Intentional assignments & activities** placed within **First-Year Seminar**
- **Require** students to **practice essential academic behaviors** early

Why Embedded Work Is a Leading Indicator

- Engagement is ***observable***, not assumed
- ***Occurs early & repeatedly*** in the first semester
- Reveals whether students ***understand expectations & academic norms***

Institutional Use

- Embedded work allows FYE team to:
  - ***Identify*** early disengagement
  - ***Adjust*** instruction or support in real time
  - ***Improve*** consistency across first-year sections

Relationship to Other Indicators

- Embedded engagement patterns ***often align with CSI-identified risk***
- Weak engagement frequently ***precedes later academic failure***
- ***Gaps observed*** here predict later participation in SOAR ***academic recovery***

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Leading Measures → Early Academic Recovery Trigger (SOAR)

SOAR Captures FTFT students who:

- Experienced either **academic challenges or failures** in the fall term
- **At risk** of **academic probation & financial aid loss** (TOPS or other scholarships)
- Remain **enrolled in spring** & eligible for intervention

The goal is not to erase failure, but to interrupt the pathway from failure to attrition.

Why SOAR Is a Leading Indicator

- **Fall failure** is treated as a **predictive signal**
  - Challenge or failure has occurred, but **irreversible consequences** have ***not*** occurred
- **The leading aspect is timing**:
  - *Before* scholarship loss
  - *Before* academic probation
  - *Before* stop-out becomes likely

Outcomes:

- **+0.70 improved average GPA** (2nd sem.)
- **30% (12/40) probation** (after first year)
- **5.7% higher retention** (vs. overall cohort)

Institutional Logic

- SOAR is a **structured response** to a **known, high-risk transition point** in the FTFT trajectory:
  - Required participation
  - Setting clear expectations
  - Targeted personalized support
- **Leveraging known student development psychology:**
  - Normalizing struggle, accountability, & resilience

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Lagging Measures → How did the early interventions create impact?

Pre-Assessment Data (CSI)

- Evaluate pre-assessment data against outcomes to determine **validity & reliability** of predicting student challenges
- *Use valid risk patterns to develop targeted prevention programming*

Post-Assessment Data (MYSA)

- Indicators of **student change & continuing needs** after first-semester
- *Use to improve/enhance FYE curriculum & develop SYE programs*

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Lagging Measures → How did the early interventions create impact?

FIRST SEMESTER GPA			
FTFT Cohort	**Fall 2023**	**Fall 2024**	**% change**
Overall	2.73	2.76	**+0.03**
First Gen	2.62	2.67	**+0.05**
Pell	2.64	2.48	**-0.16**
SERVICE UTILIZATION IMPACT			
Fall 2024	**Used**	**Not Used**	**Difference**
Overall	2.99	1.91	**+1.08**
First Gen	2.96	1.85	**+1.11**
Pell	2.79	1.75	**+1.04**

ENGAGEMENT IMPACT			
FYE Event Attendance	**GPA**	**1st-to-2nd-Year Retention**	**1st-to-3rd-Year Retention**
Fall 2023	**0.33** higher	**9.7%** higher	**11.8%** higher
Fall 2024	**0.64** higher	**18.7%** higher	**...**
Fall 2025	**0.61** higher	**...**	**...**
FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR			
	Fall 2022	**Fall 2023**	**Fall 2024**
A grades	**58%**	**64%**	**65%**

7% increase in A grades

'A' benchmark grade → 54% more likely to complete college

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Lagging Measures → How did the early interventions create impact?

RETENTION RATES		
Fall 2023 ***Total Cohort***	**First-to-Second-Year**	**First-to-Third-Year**
Overall	**11.3% increase** *(from **61.0%** to **72.3%**)*	**19.6% increase** *(from **45.3%** to **64.9%**)*
Fall 2024 ***F2F Cohort***	**First-to-Second-Year**	**…**
Overall	**3.5% increase** *(from **67.3%** to **70.8%**)*	
First Gen	**7.7% increase** *(from **64.8%** to **72.5%**)*	***⇐ 1.7% higher*** *than overall cohort*
Pell	**7.0% increase** *(from **63.4%** to **70.4%**)*	***⇐ Closed the gap***

PROBATION (after 1st year)			
FTFT F2F Cohort	**Fall 2023**	**Fall 2024**	**% change**
Overall	**16.0%**	**14.2%**	**-1.8%**
First Gen	**15.4%**	**12.8%**	**-2.6%**
Pell	**19.7%**	**22.7%**	**+3.0%**

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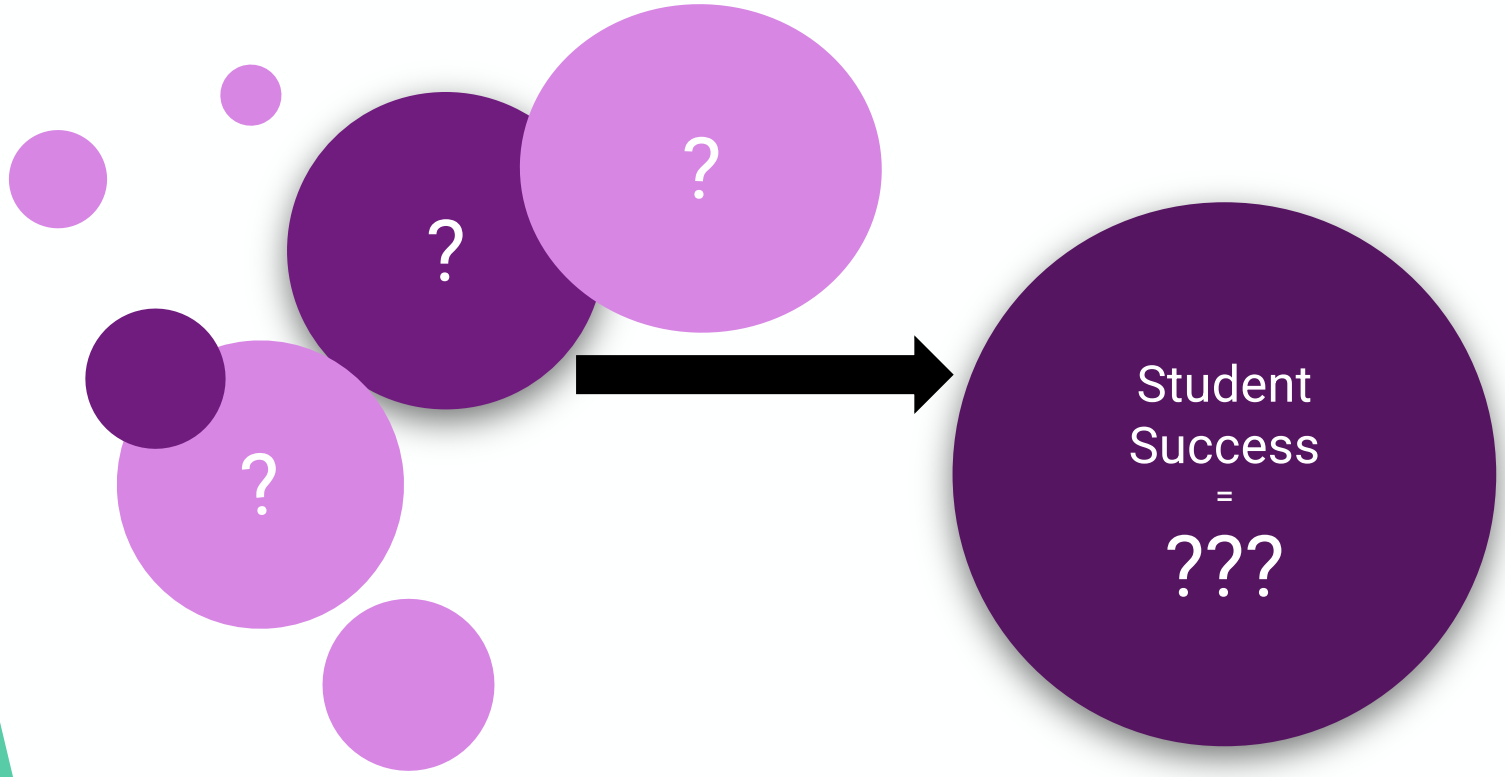
Breakout #1: 12 Minutes

Most people name the outputs of the system as their problem...not the actual **root causes** of the issues.

- **Do you know why students are not retaining in the first two years?**
- **How do you know? What are your measures?**
- **What measures are missing?**

Your team may not know where to focus.

So, What's Your Theoretical Model for Student Success



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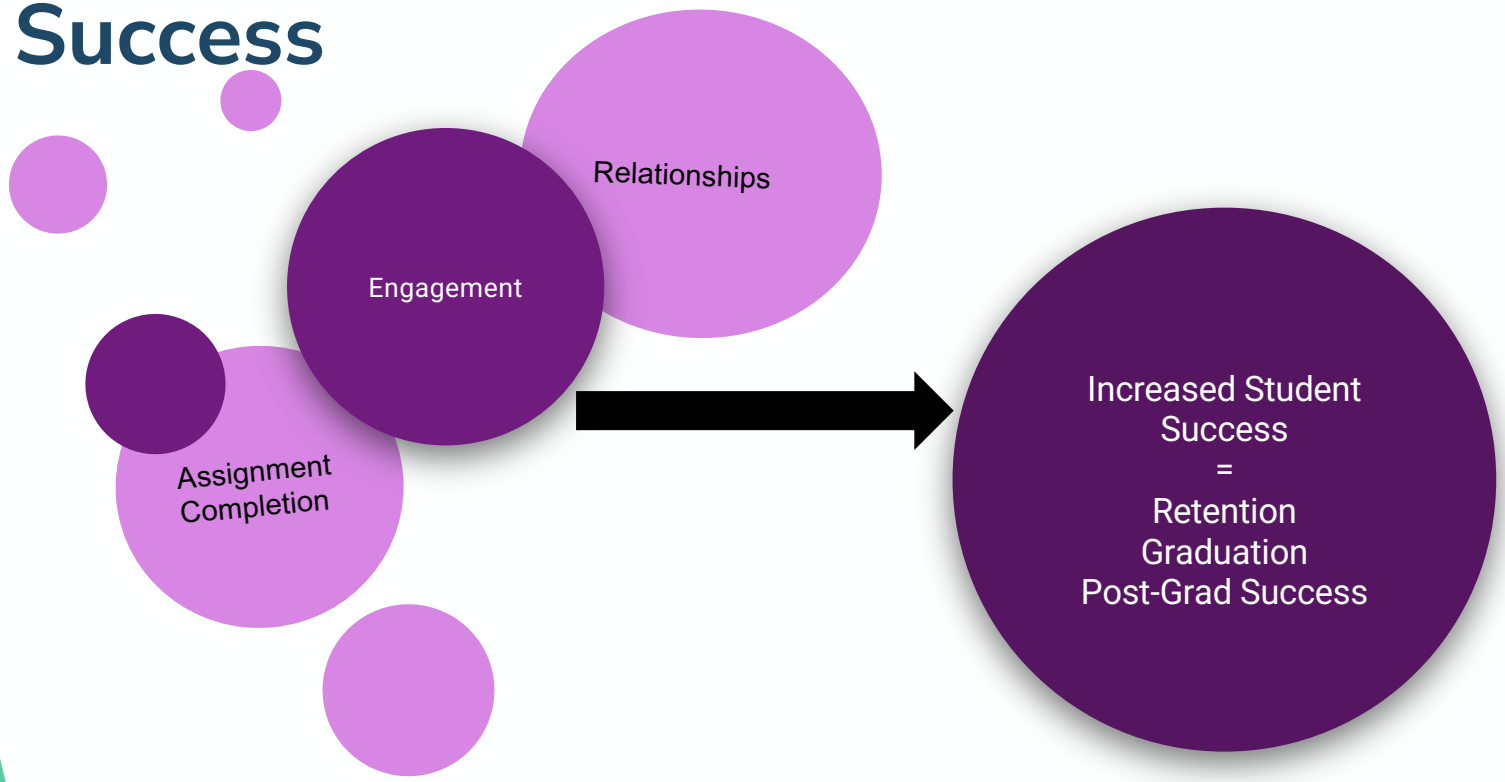
Section 3

Theoretical Model for Student Success



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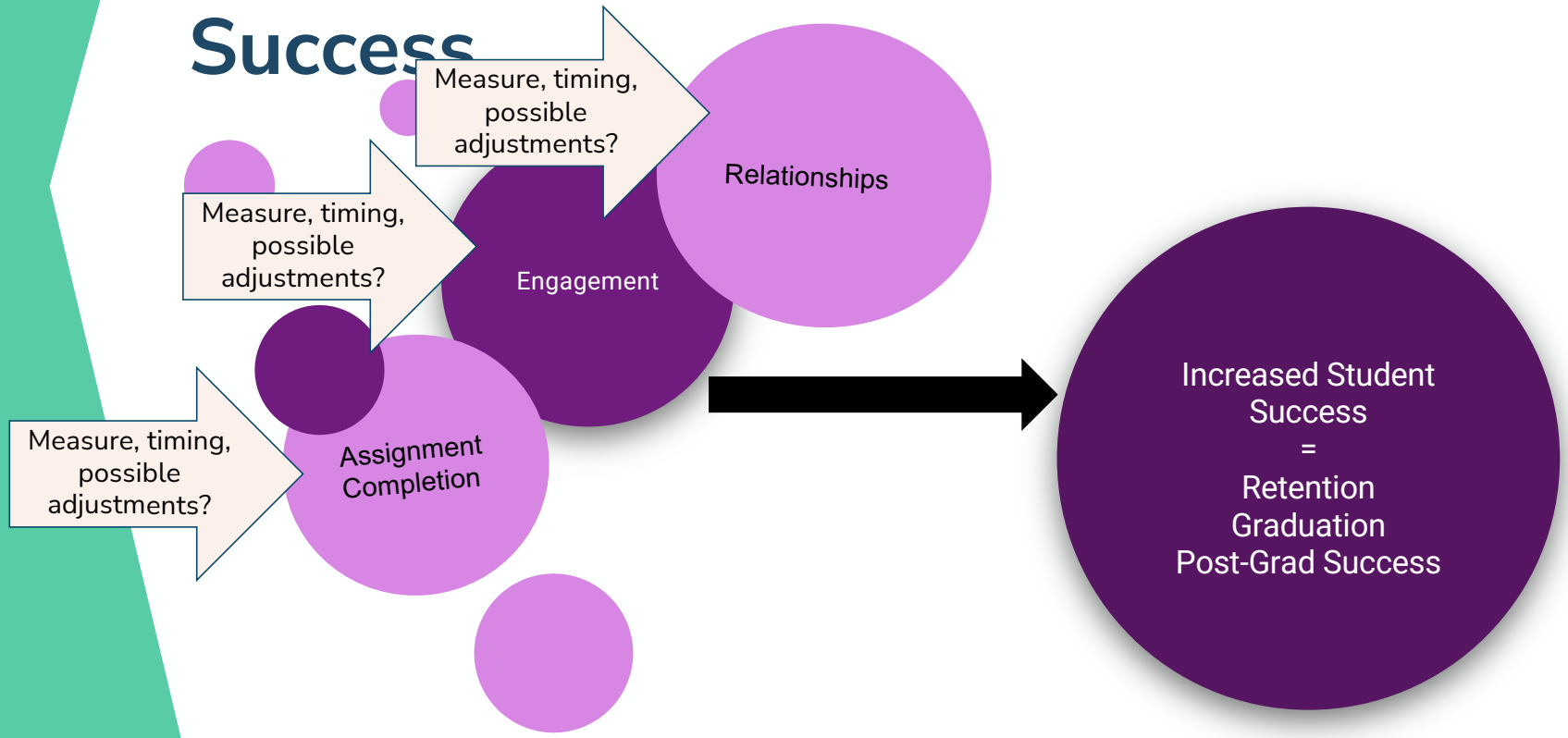
Section 3

Theoretical Model for Student Success



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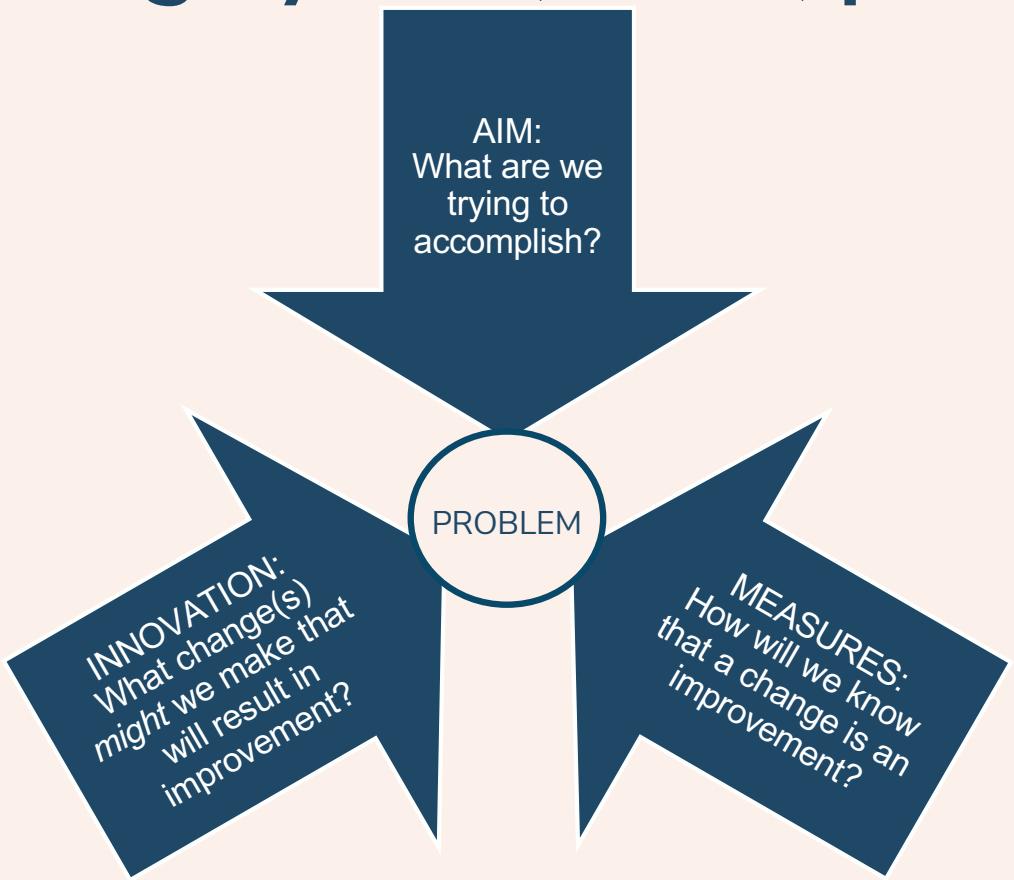
Three Guiding Questions (Langley et al, 2009, p.24)



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Driving Improvement

Breakout #2: 15 Minutes

- What factors **under the institution's control** do you believe will lead to more students succeeding related to your AIM?
- **What existing data** might you use to identify areas of improvement sooner?
- **What additional data** might you need to develop?

Reflection, Discussion & Questions

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Contact Us

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