



CALS Undergraduate Student Success Strategy

Office of Career and Academic Services

January 26, 2023

CALS Academic Mission

We are in the business of expanding economic opportunity for our students, their families and the entire state. We offer degrees and academic programs that prepare students to be nationally competitive and sufficiently prepared to do jobs that do not yet exist, as well as create new jobs. CALS graduates will fuel economic development for the state of Arizona.

Objective of CALS Student Success and Support Programs

Our goal is for 100% of our entering students to complete their degree. To accomplish this we offer support to all students, tailored to match their needs, recognizing that students arrive from different backgrounds, with different levels of preparation, financial and home-life challenges. Tailored support (i.e., precision retention) is what we do to level the playing field and facilitate **equal opportunity**. Ideally, each student would receive a level of support that equalizes the probability of graduation across all members of an entering cohort.

Our objective of **equal outcomes** (expressed as 100% graduation for all students – or even identical but less than 100% graduation rates across all student groupings) is clearly aspirational. There will always be some impediments that individuals face that exceed our capacity to neutralize. And even when graduation is achieved, it may take some students longer to graduate than others, depending upon initial preparation, life circumstances and changing interests.

Nevertheless, our goal is that each student will complete their degree. This is the equitable outcome that our student support programs are scaffolded to achieve. Toward that end, we will monitor success rates, watch for disparities in outcomes across student groups, and modify our support levels/programs to try and reduce those disparities. We are dedicated to leveling the playing field as best we can to reduce or neutralize the specific obstacles to graduation that confront so many of our students. This is the mission of a land-grant university, and we take it seriously.

The Role of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

A diverse and inclusive learning environment is a critical part of our strategy. A large part – perhaps the majority of – the value in higher education is in learning how to respectfully and productively engage with new ideas, a challenge that confronts each of us in our adult lives. The ability to do so is the primary advantage we confer on our graduates if we've done our job well, and perhaps the largest source of value an employer sees in a new graduate. Consequently, to deliver on our mission we must create spaces that encourage and prepare our students to understand and collaborate with people who have different perspectives than their own. And, we must bring together people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences to facilitate that idea exchange, and subsequent learning.

Looking at our job in this way, **diversity** is a necessary ingredient. **Inclusion** is something different, but an equally necessary ingredient. A classroom and campus climate that is positive and welcoming encourages student engagement by creating a comfortable space for students from all backgrounds to share questions, observations, and feelings, which in turn facilitates mutual understanding of viewpoints and collaborative interactions. Elevated participation leads to improved learning, motivation, satisfaction and achievement. Failure to build a welcoming and inclusive environment reduces a program's ability to harness diversity as a learning experience.

To summarize, the components of our Student Success Strategy combine to improve equity by investing in programs that embrace each student for who they are and the individual experiences they bring to their academic journey.

Components of CALS Strategy to Increase Retention and Graduation

CALS strategy for increasing undergraduate student retention and graduation rates rests on three pillars:

- **Nurture a welcoming and inclusive culture:** Our core retention programs foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for students across the college, by building a culture of “CALS is Family.” The reference to “family” is meant to convey our commitment to always be supportive, to help students bounce back when things go awry, to celebrate successes, and to maintain ties long after graduation. This phrase is the centerpiece of our student messaging and branding activities related to recruiting, retention and progress toward graduation.
- **Reinforce a focus on careers:** Beginning with recruiting messages and continuing through matriculation all the way to graduation, we communicate with students about a primary reason why they are here: to obtain the knowledge and skills to elevate their lifetime income trajectory, post-graduation. We aim to continuously help them visualize career paths so they will stay focused on the end goal despite academic and personal bumps in their journey. The continual career focus encourages retention by reinforcing students' enthusiasm to persevere to degree completion.
- **Apply precision intervention initiatives to offer specific help to students in need:** No two students are identical, and the challenges faced by each student vary widely. We offer personalized support that anticipates the needs of students and evolves as their challenges evolve.

Below are specific examples of programs and initiatives under each of our retention pillars. Many of these were initially crafted for CALS students pursuing their degrees in person on the UA Main Campus in Tucson. However, we are mindful that CALS has a rapidly growing number of students pursuing degrees away from Tucson through UA Distance campuses (Near You Network), AZ Online and Arizona International. For these students we continue to diversify our retention initiatives toward the goal of building bridges to students across all campuses through hybrid experiences, and providing relevant and accessible opportunities within their unique campus community.

Programs that foster inclusion and belonging through a culture of CALS is Family

- *Student Orientation Leaders (SOLs)*: Level One of the CALS peer mentor strategy - The first peer support connection for incoming CALS Main Campus students. SOLs are CALS upperclassmen who are hired, trained, and matched with an incoming cohort of about 100 students each. SOLs meet their students at each Orientation session. Throughout the summer, SOLs stay in touch with their cohort – sharing tips and suggestions for a successful transition. SOLs also host virtual gatherings and activities that bring together their entire cohort of incoming students.
- *New Student Welcome*: Held annually for Main Campus students, the goal is to connect all new students with their new CALS community to meet current students and learn about CALS clubs. All new students receive welcome gifts (class T-shirt, sling bag, notebook, etc). Welcome gifts are also distributed to UA Yuma students and mailed to AZ Online students.
- *Class Crawl*: Held each August so that new Main Campus students become familiar with walking their class schedule the day prior to the first day of class. Also, a great initial recruitment event for CALS Clubs (club members are volunteer campus guides).
- *CALS Connections*: Level two of the CALS peer mentor strategy – over the summer prior to starting their classes, incoming new students are matched with a current student based on shared interests and experiences. The mentorship goal is to ensure students successfully transition to campus and university life. Through text and in-person exchanges, mentor connections support new students throughout their entire first year in CALS.
- *CALS 195C*: A 1-unit success course for Main Campus first-year and transfer students to help them identify, understand, and apply best strategies for college success, as well as further orient themselves to campus and college resources. CALS PALS Peer mentors assist.
- *CALS 195A*: A 1-unit success course and academic eligibility intervention for full-time, Main Campus students who are struggling academically. The course teaches students academic strategies and skills for college preparedness. CALS PALS Peer mentors assist.
- *CALS PALS*: Level three of the CALS peer mentor strategy – our CALS PALS (Peers Assistance for Leadership and Student Success) student members serve as mentors for students enrolled in CALS 195 success courses and in D2L Academic Support playspaces. They also support workshop facilitation with CALS Learning Lab academic coaches. For our CALS PALS students, structured internship units are embedded in the program with transcript notation of engagement competency and activity.
- *CALS First Cats*: In alliance with the UA First Cats, the goal is to support and engage CALS first-generation students and connect them with each other, as well as current CALS faculty, staff and administrators who were also first-generation students themselves or are advocates and supporters of first-generation students. The program fosters a sense of community, builds student relationships and networks, and connects them to key resources.
- *CALS ASEMS (Arizona Science, Engineering and Math Scholars)*: A program for CALS STEM majors on Main Campus who have one or more of the following characteristics: first generation college attendees; from low-income households and/or under-represented populations; community college transfers. It builds community, provides academic support (e.g., success courses and tutoring) and faculty mentorship for each individual student.

- *MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences)* club program in CALS is the UA chapter of a national professional development and networking organization that promotes academic & professional advancement of minorities in agriculture & natural resources.
- *AgriLife Council/CALS Club Support:* All CALS clubs are invited to participate in the AgriLife Council, a group made up of (ideally) one officer from all CALS student clubs and organizations. Meetings are held monthly to foster club collaborations; to surface club issues, challenges, or needs; and to get student input on CALS student support services. Membership is optional but highly encouraged. CALS pays annual ASUA dues for clubs that commit to participating on the AgriLife Council.
- *College-Wide Events:* In person, college-wide events held regularly throughout fall and spring semesters, often in the Forbes Lobby, to build community and connection between students, faculty, and staff. Virtual/hybrid community-building events are also offered each semester, generally hosted by CALS PALS peer mentors. Annual and signature events include Student Appreciation Week, CALS Leadership Spotlight, Graduation Convocations, Fall Harvest Festival, CALS Club Fairs, and Honors Convocation.
- *College-Wide Communications:* CALS Connect, our weekly eNewsletter sent to all active undergraduate majors and minors, highlights all student success related events, supports, resources, opportunities, and career info. Additional eNewsletters are distributed based on target audience – e.g. New Student News and CALS Graduation News. CALS’ social media channels – Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn – are also an important part of our overall approach to multi-channel communications.

Programs that reinforce a career focus to encourage progress toward graduation

- *Career pathways* are the focal point of our recruiting messaging. CALS student recruiting efforts feature Meet the Major pages on college and departmental websites that highlight career opportunities for every degree program.
- *Student workshops and presentations geared toward professional development* are hosted by the CALS Pasquinelli Career Center. In addition, the Career Center offers 1:1 appointments and hybrid workshops focused on resume building, interviewing techniques, maximizing LinkedIn and employer networking events.
- *Career development courses:* All CALS academic Schools/departments offer some type of 1-credit career intro course for new students.
- *The CALS Career Center Faculty Champions* lead the college-wide effort to identify and map CALS Career Competencies in existing CALS undergraduate courses. Highlighting competencies within existing courses signals to students the key career-skills they will develop in the course, thus retaining a focus on career throughout their degree program. Faculty Champions also encourage students to connect with them regarding career options and key career skill development.
- *Career Talks* held weekly each fall and spring semester are a targeted opportunity for employers to connect with CALS students to share an industry overview, discuss internship and/or job opportunities, and to meet 1:1 with interested students. In addition to reaching more students

(as opposed to a single-day career fair), the Career Talk format delivers a personalized, custom experience for both students and employers.

- *CALS Virtual Career Center*, powered by UConnect, provides robust, just-in-time career resources including jobs and internships; labor market trends; training and how-to guides; and resume, cover letter, and personal statement support.
- *CALS Etiquette Dinner*: Held annually, goal is to give upper-division students an opportunity to learn about, and then immediately practice, professional and dining etiquette in live social settings.
- *CALS Leadership Launch* – a pilot program in Spring 2023 with the goal of launching in Fall 2023 – connects juniors and seniors with one of CALS more than 30,000 alumni members – many of whom are industry executives, entrepreneurs, and leaders in their fields. Through the program, mentees connect with established professionals and develop supportive relationships and meaningful connections with the goal of elevating their leadership skills. In partnership with CALS Alumni Office.

Precision Retention initiatives that offer specific help to students in need

- *Professional, developmental and holistic academic advising for all majors*: Since 2017, every CALS degree program has a full-time professional academic advisor who focuses on developmental (as opposed to transactional) advising for students within their respective degree program. Advisors are located within CALS academic units as well as in the CALS Office of Career and Academic Services. Professional advisors across the college collaborate as a team to share insights and coordinate student messaging. In addition to this professional advising team, faculty provide mentorship and career advice to students within their academic units.
- *CALS Pulse* is a rapid-response intervention package that aims to connect students with the resources and support that they need in a timely manner. Students are encouraged to complete a survey of no more than five questions each month. Responses provide valuable insights to the professional advising team and are used by subject matter experts to design and implement interventions. The interventions are highly personalized based on student responses. They link students to university, college, and community resources in ways that utilize growth mindset and research-based micro-messaging to promote a sense of belonging and persistence.
- *Pro-active advisor outreach to students during registration periods*. The CALS advising team engages in a data-informed precision outreach program during both Fall and Spring registration periods (the latter of which extends throughout the summer preceding the August start of classes). The advising team mines multiple data sources to weave together a deeper understanding of each student's experience (e.g., using Advisor Notes, CALS Connections flags, event attendance, surveys, Handshake activations, Bursar account balances) and send targeted communications and invitations to meet with students who haven't registered for the subsequent semester. This is an intensive, one-by-one retention effort that scrutinizes every student who has yet to register to assess their challenges and determine how we may be able to assist.

- *CALS Learning Lab*: Launched in 2021, this partnership with the UA SALT Center supports students who face learning challenges that pose impediments to graduation. All students who take our 195A and 195C success courses benefit from an infusion of SALT Center alternative learning strategies. Additionally, CALS academic advisors have been trained through this initiative to recognize learning challenges and refer students to Learning Lab learning coaches, located in the Forbes Career and Advising Center suite. Students who need more intensive assistance are referred to the UA SALT Center, with associated fees covered by Learning Lab scholarships.
- *CALS Scholarships*: CALS annually awards over \$1.1 million in scholarships to our students (separate from UA Financial Aid). These scholarships are entirely funded by CALS donors. Moreover, CALS leads all colleges on campus in the percent of our available scholarship dollars that we actually award each year. For CALS, we hit an all-time high of 98% in 2021-2022, compared to a UA average of 77%. These awards are critical supplements to the financial assistance that students receive from the UA's Office of Student Financial Aid. Our scholarships also contribute to the diversity of our student body: Every single CALS major is eligible for scholarships, no matter their campus, academic year and academic career.
- *CALS retention support funding*: In addition to traditional scholarships, in 2022 we launched an additional retention support fund campaign to supplement the UA Student Emergency Fund, titled the *CALS Finish Line Fund*. CALS donors contribute to a renewable pool of one-time grant funds that are intended to smooth over financial impediments to retention for current students, especially those in the final semester(s) of their degree programs. Grants of up to \$3,500 can be used to cover outstanding bursar account balances and a variety of other short-term financial obstacles to degree continuation or completion.
- *Life Management Counseling*: In early 2020 (just prior to the pandemic shutdown), CALS implemented a life management counseling program, which now employs two Licensed Mental Health Clinicians. The Life Management team provides a variety of mental wellness services to CALS students who are facing personal challenges impacting their academic journey. Life Management counseling fosters a stronger culture of student well-being and belonging within CALS. It overcomes traditional barriers to getting care by providing students with timely, anonymous, no-cost services that are easily accessible inside the college, either in-person or online. Our counselors also develop innovative strategies to better equip faculty, staff and others in CALS to partner with Life Management in our efforts to prevent, respond and refer students in distress.