POLICY DISCUSSION
LEVERAGING DATA TO IMPROVE POSTSECONDARY STUDENT COMPLETION

SPEAKERS
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Demographic Trends
- Over the last 50 years nationwide, there have been significant increases in the overall number of people who attain a bachelor’s degree by age 24, from 40 percent to 82 percent.
  - However, when that information is broken down by income quartile you see that there has been little bachelor’s degree attainment growth in the bottom three income quartiles – particularly in the lowest quartile.
- There have also been increases in the number of K-12 students who qualify as low-income – particularly in Southern states, where a majority of K-12 students are low-income.
  - In Tennessee, 58 percent of K-12 students qualify as low-income.
- Taken together, these trends lead to a troubling conclusion: we haven’t figured out how to help low-income students graduate from higher education, but the incoming pipeline of K-12 students is comprised mostly of low-income students.

Changes at Georgia State University
- GSU experienced the following changes starting in Fall 2007:
  - The percentage of minority students attending GSU rose from 53 percent to 74 percent;
  - The percentage of low-income students (as measured by eligibility for the Pell Grant program) rose from 31 percent to 59 percent;
  - The average SAT score of incoming students fell by 33 points; and
  - Public appropriations to the university fell by $40 million.
- In response to these changes, GSU leaders realized that they did not need to create a specialized program for minority and low-income students – they needed to change the structure and design of the entire institution to better serve these students.

THREE EXAMPLES OF PROBLEM-SOLVING AT GSU

PROBLEM #1
Summer Melt: 19 percent of confirmed freshmen did not actually enroll in the Fall semester.

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<th>Solution: a user-friendly online portal to automatically guide students through the steps required to enroll successfully.</th>
<th>Solution: an automated Artificial Intelligence chatbot application that provides rapid responses to students by drawing on a knowledge base of responses.</th>
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<td>Outcome: summer melt dropped by 37 percent over three years.</td>
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PROBLEM #2
Over 1,000 fully registered GSU students were being dropped each semester for non-payment – mostly seniors who were on track for graduation.

Solution: Panther Retention Grants, a program to cover the remaining balance of tuition and fees by providing grants that are directly deposited into student accounts.

Outcome: over 17,000 grants awarded since 2011.

Outcome: 86.5 percent of grant recipients graduated.

Outcome: the program is now generating revenue (after an initial philanthropic investment).

PROBLEM #3
5,760 students dropped out of GSU in 2010.

Solution: the GPS Advising system, which uses predictive analytics to provide over 800 specific alerts that tell advisors when students are at risk of falling off track.

Solution: investments in transitioning to a centralized, professional advising model and reducing the advisor to student ratio.

Outcome: first semester retention increased by six percent over three years.

Outcome: average time-to-degree dropped by a semester’s worth of credit hours.

Outcome: $18 million in total student savings realized based on lower tuition and fees.

Outcome: students continue to pursue challenging programs of study – sharp increases in the number of STEM degrees conferred to students of color.

Impacts
- Race and income are no longer predictors of whether students will succeed at GSU.
- Student-focused reforms have raised the national profile of GSU and received praise from across the political spectrum.
- GSU places highly in national rankings of institutions that provide social mobility to its graduates.
- These strategies can be replicated in other institutional contexts – similar reforms were implemented at Perimeter College, a system of community colleges in the Atlanta area, and graduation rates have increased significantly.

Summary
- Keep it simple and recognize we live in a new age where we need to be better at delivering services to students by leveraging technology. We also need to be better at identifying and correcting problems students are having early on. This is applicable at almost all system levels.

RESOURCES
