



Understanding the path to graduation

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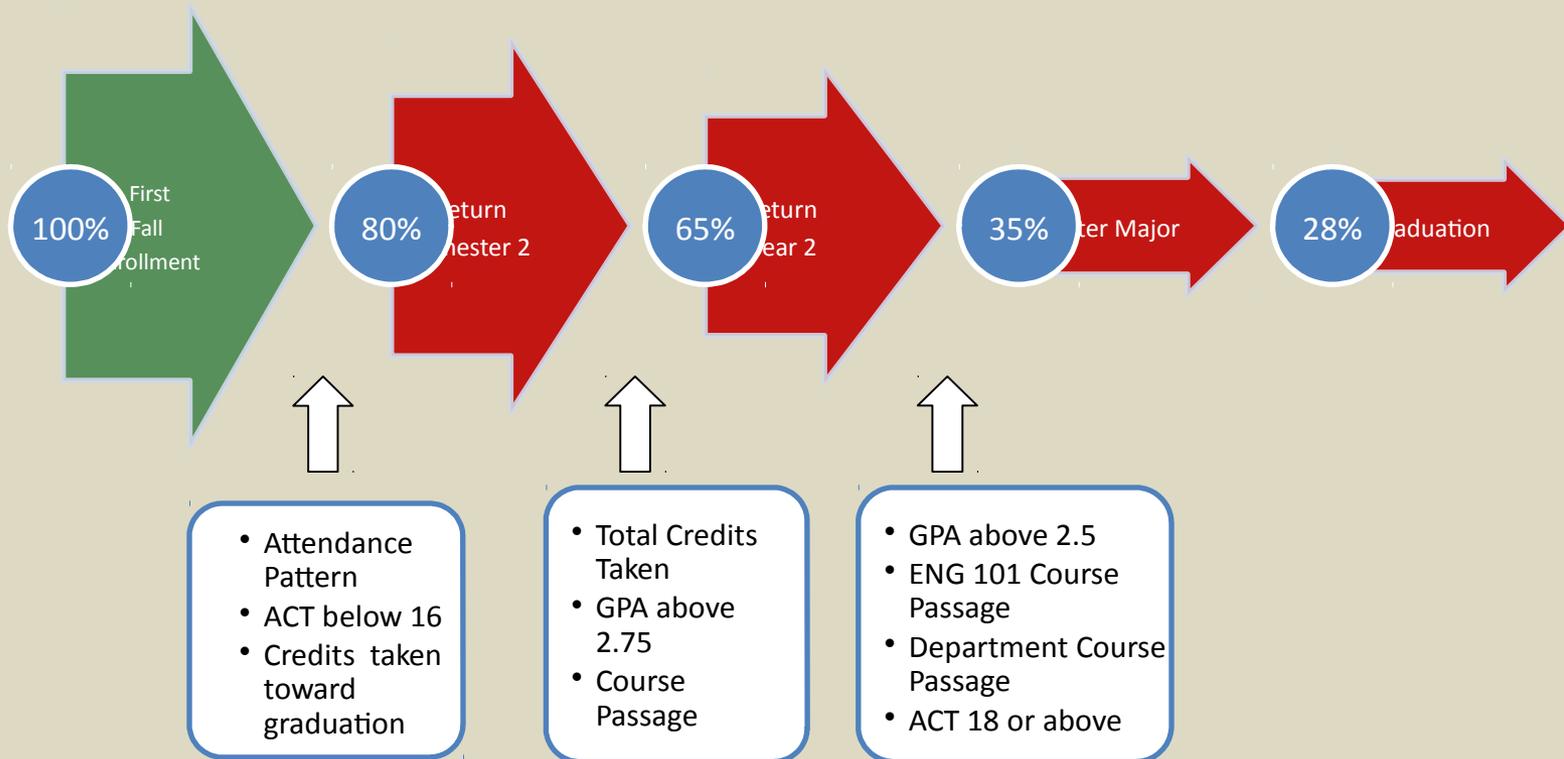
Understanding the “Path to graduation”

- This presentation covers
 - Need for a unifying concept for retention to graduation
 - Concept of a path
 - Defining the turning points on the path
 - Uses of assessment to monitor the path



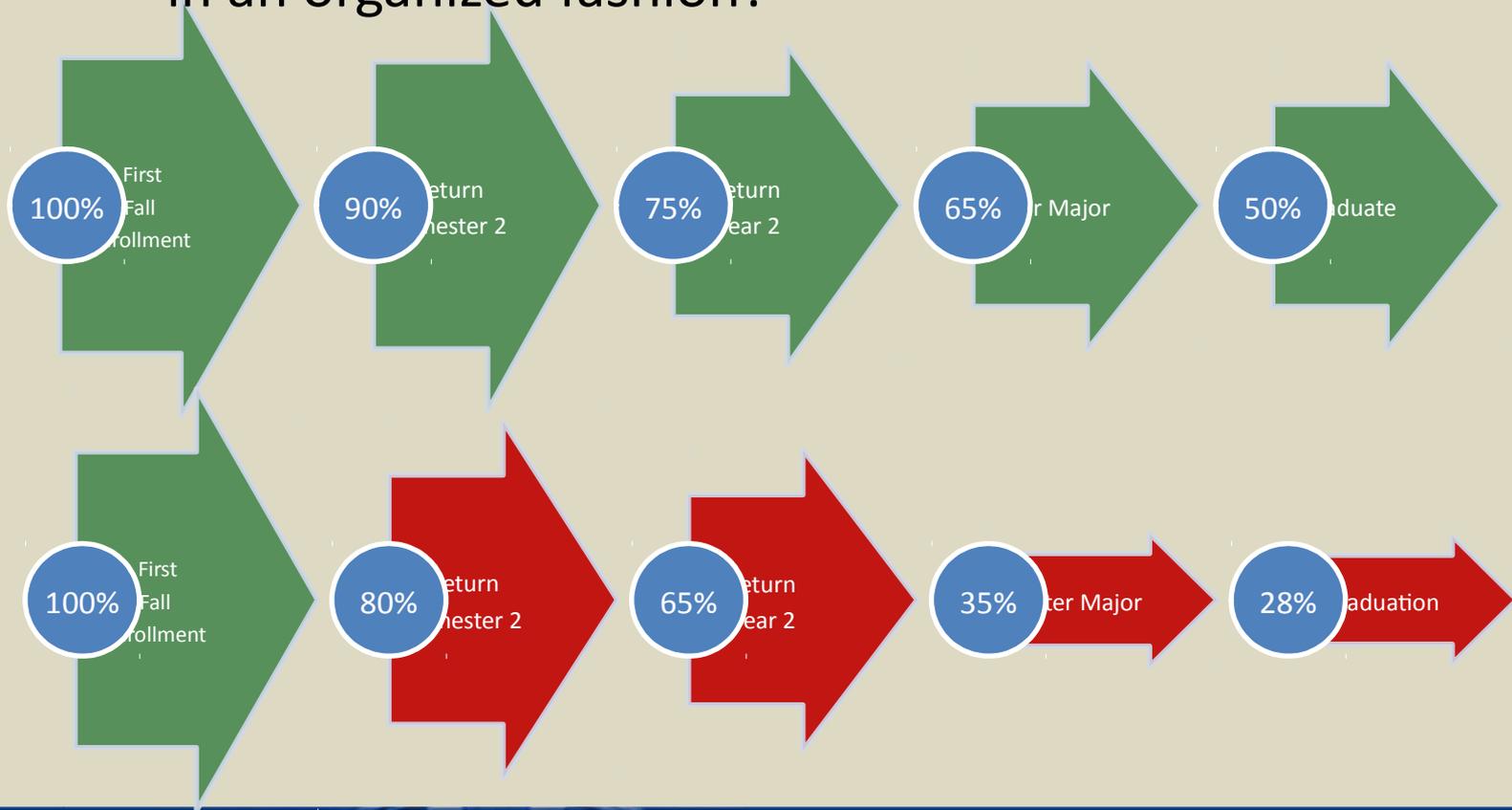
Need for a unifying concept:
Improve retention and six year graduation rates

Gallaudet University's situation in 2007



Need for a unifying concept: Aspirational goal for 2015

How do we get to Gallaudet's long term goals
in an organized fashion?



Need for a unifying concept: Focus on the student

Any student moves along a path
defined by overlapping demands



We need to wed our operations to
the reality of the student's experience.

What is a path?

- Path has
 - Goal, therefore direction
 - Turning points
 - Guideposts or markers
- Path to graduation should include
 - Life goal
 - Key transition points
 - Assessments for monitoring progress



What is a path?:

A path is NOT a laundry list

- Most universities take a direct but disorganized approach to improving retention to graduation
- Some of Western Michigan's response

(<http://www.wmich.edu/provost/icss/plans/retention.html>; downloaded 4/9/2010)

- College will appoint a recruitment and retention facilitator
 - Efforts will be made to improve advising through the office of the Director of Advising.
 - The College will endeavor to eliminate bottleneck courses with initial efforts directed at Chemistry and Math courses with particular focus on Engineering students and issues.
 - Senior professors will be invited to teach first and second year courses-logic being that these professors are among our best teachers and researchers.
 - The College will endeavor to be more student-friendly. Chairs and directors will be encouraged to regularly communicate to all personnel the importance of conveying a positive attitude.
 - Efforts will be made to communicate the good news about student achievement
 - The College will expand student research opportunities with faculty.
 - College will sponsor events targeted at student retention. For example, an event entitled "Major Excitement" will occur during Homecoming week and is designed as an academic fair and information session with faculty members.
 - Faculty and staff will engage in "Walkouts" or visits with students in informal sessions-get better acquainted and promote programs.
 - Faculty will go the "extra mile" to improve student classroom success."
- Bland generalities or wishful thinking do not produce results



What is a path?: Roadmap versus Path

- Many institutions offer some degree of specific direction at the level of the individual student
 - [Fresno Pacific University charts earned credits to keep undergraduates on track to graduation](#)
 - [CSUN offers specific roadmaps for students.](#)
 - [Cazenovia College has a system halfway between personal roadmaps and traditional requirement lists.](#)
 - [UC Santa Barbara has a “faux” path in that they have re-packaged traditional lists of requirements.](#)
- A roadmap is just one aid on the path to graduation



Why a path?

- Previous research argues for more than one critical juncture in an undergraduate's journey towards a completed degree
 - (Desjardins et al., 2002; Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2003; Glynn & Miller, 2002)
- ACT recommends a “integrated” approach based on its extensive research efforts.
 - *“Take an integrated approach in their retention efforts that incorporates both academic and non-academic factors into the design and development of programs to create a socially inclusive and supportive academic environment that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.”* (www.act.org/research/policy/index.html, downloaded 4/10/2010)
- The path concept is a rallying point for disconnected campus efforts while re-focusing an institutional commitment to better student services
 - Faculty remember why they are here in the first place
 - Staff have an important and specific role
 - Administrators have a clear roadmap for making decisions such as allocating resources.

Research basis for points along a path: College students' needs change over time

Predictors of retention and graduation

Semester 1	Semester 2	Year 2	Enter major
Expectancy for success (Hu & Kuh, 2002)	Academic self-efficacy (Dennis et al., 2008)	Expectancy for success (Antonio, 2004; Robertson & Taylor, 2009)	Career motivation (Conrad et al., 2009; Li et al., 2008)
Personal/career motivation for attending college (Dennis et al., 2008)	Attachment to college friends (Antonio, 2004; Swenson et al., 2008)	Sense of school belonging (Fruge & Ropers-Hamilton, 2008; Pittman & Richmond, 2007)	Career knowledge (Legutko, 2007; Walstrom et al., 2008)
Intrinsic goal orientation (Hu & Kuh, 2002)	Current friendship quality (Antonio, 2004; Swenson et al., 2008)		Stabilization of a career choice (Gohn et al., 2000)
High school friendship quality (Antonio, 2004; Swenson et al., 2008)	Emotional stability (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003)		
Work drive (Ridgell & Lounsbury, 2004)	Student plans and intentions (Polinsky, 2002)		

Research basis for points along a path

- Institutional inputs have differential impacts
 - No one trait or point on the path predicts success
 - (Desjardins et al., 2002; Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2003; Glynn & Miller, 2002)
 - A high quality first year experience improves GPA's and the likelihood of graduating.
 - (Bureau & Romrey, 1994; Conner & Colton, 1999; Jacobs & Archie, 2008; Noble et al., 2007)
 - Academic support such as supplemental instruction and guidance can impact GPA, retention, and graduation rates
 - (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2003; Turner & Berry, 2000)
 - Undergraduates can recruit other students into majors as well as support them to graduation
 - (Koch & Kayworth, 2009).

A college career has necessary requirements

- Without the path, necessary academic requirements become hoops, hurdles, or worse barriers to graduation
- Thinking along the path, necessary academic requirements become turning points where we can guide students toward their final goal.



Turning points are not all the same

- Predictive points
 - If a student or an entire cohort of students is at this point in their career where will they be in 2 or 3 years?
- Formative points
 - Is the student or an entire cohort of students moving along the path according to plan?
- Summative points
 - Did we succeed in moving students along the path.



Predictive turning points

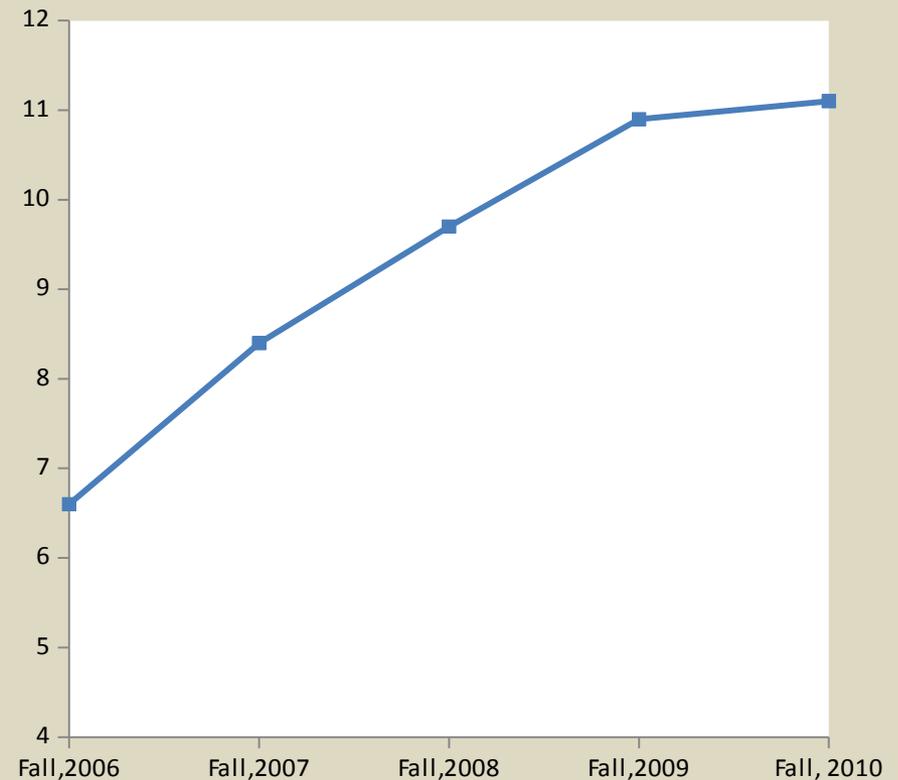
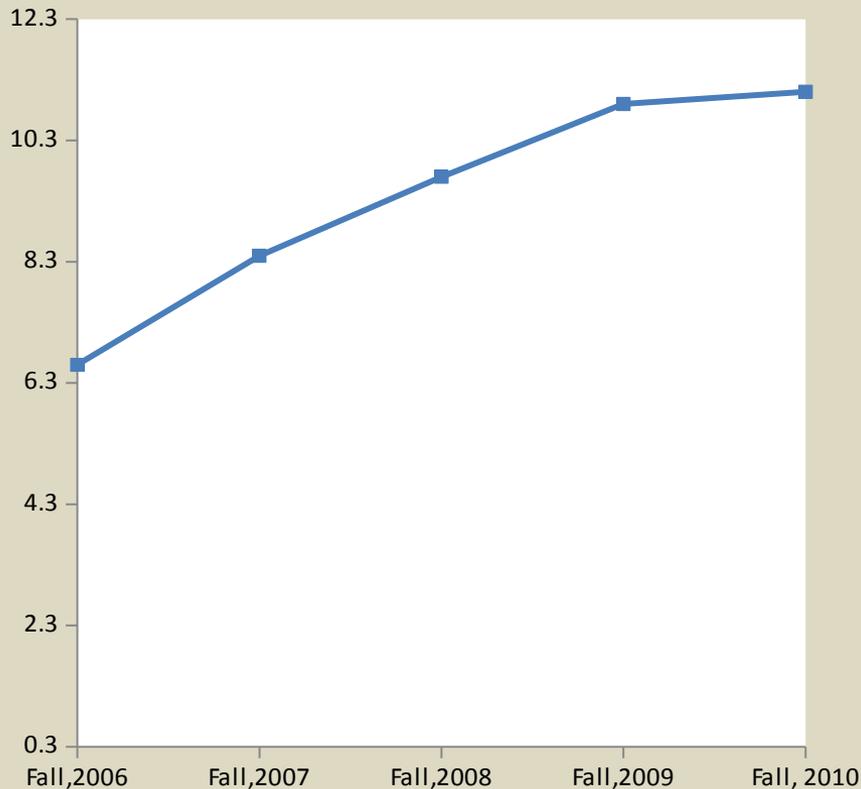
- Currently at Gallaudet, we have some useful predictive points
 - If 90% to 95% of first time freshmen return for a second semester, 70% to 75% will return for a second year.
 - The number of chronologically and credit defined sixth semester juniors in a cohort in a major times .9 gives us an estimate of our 6 year graduation rate 3 years out.

Formative Turning Points: Early Alert data

- Better class attendance
 - Second semester retained first time freshmen average 3 instructor reported course cuts versus 5 for leavers
- Less often referred for problems
 - Second semester retained first time freshmen average 5 Starfish referrals versus 7 for leavers
 - Second semester retained first time freshmen half as likely to be recommended for tutoring



Summative turning points: Mid-year indicators for First Time Freshmen (FTF)



The path clarifies staff responsibility

- Service & support unit mission statements are re-formulated in terms of student learning
- Service & support units are assessed on the basis of
 - Student learning outcomes
 - New Gallaudet Academic Advising SLO
 - “Students will identify and utilize resources independently to evaluate their progress toward degree completion. “
 - Measured by frequency of "hits" on career builder software
 - Effectiveness of moving students along path
 - Academic Advising effectiveness goal
 - “Academic Advising supports and facilitates undergraduate students’ transition and integration into college “
 - Indicator is percent of cohort movement to major by sixth semester at Gallaudet
 - Efficiency of unit operations
 - Academic Advising
 - “Academic Advising makes optimal use of available resources “
 - One indicator is raised classroom instructional issues by resolution rate and time to resolve



The path provides a focus for faculty action

- We address problem points
 - Largest barrier to retention is passing math requirement
 - Up front we provide supplemental instruction
 - Ongoing we monitor progress through Early Alert system
 - Afterwards, we identify problem sections and instructors
 - Consequently, clear direction for the future is
 - Handbook for temporary instructors
 - Better training and support for temporary instructors



The path to graduation is a step by step process for administrative actions

- We improve undergraduate enrollment and graduation rates over time by addressing each issue in succession
 - Improve mid-year freshman retention
 - Involuntary intervention through Early Alert*
 - Improve second year retention
 - Increase number of credits earned*
 - Improve rate of entrance to majors
 - Improve quality of undeclareds*
 - Rationalize department standards*
 - Emphasize utility of majors to undeclareds*
 - » Improve graduation rates
- Over time indicators improve

The Path Works

2007

2010

2015

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