The University of Louisiana System’s commitment to improving student access and success began with a 2004 pact among the eight university presidents to reach the national graduation rate by 2012. That was followed by a commitment to generate 2,400 additional graduates each year in targeted areas such as education, business, engineering and healthcare.

With unprecedented funding for higher education in fiscal years 2007-08 and 2008-09, our universities targeted new resources towards visionary programs such as:

- redesigning barrier courses,
- providing financial incentives for students and faculty for better performance,
- infusing technology,
- providing hands-on and peer assistance, and
- giving more personalized attention.

I invite you to read about some of these inventive programs that have made real positive change on our university campuses.

Progress has been made towards improving graduation rates. As a system we are close to 37.4 percent, up from 33.5 percent in 2004. That might not seem significant, but as graduation rates are calculated using a six-year progression of students, programs initiated with funding in 2007 will not be realized in graduation rates until 2013.

The bottom line is we are committed to improving access and success, one student at a time.
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About the UL System

Established in 1974, the University of Louisiana System is the largest postsecondary education system in the state, enrolling over 82,000 students and employing approximately 9,000 people at eight universities. The UL System produces the majority of the state’s public four-year graduates in education, business, engineering, nursing and pharmacy. UL System institutions are Grambling State University, Louisiana Tech University, McNeese State University, Nicholls State University, Northwestern State University, Southeastern Louisiana University, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

About Student Access and Success

The University of Louisiana System’s commitment to improving student access and success began in 2004 when all eight university presidents signed a pact to exceed the national graduation rate by 2012. In the spring of 2007, the UL System hosted a statewide higher education forum and officially joined the National Association of System Heads (NASH) initiative called Access to Success. Specifically, the national initiative focuses on halving the gaps in college entry and graduation rates that separate low-income and/or underrepresented minority students from others.

Special thanks to campus communications directors and their staffs for contributing to this publication.
Southeastern Scholarship Rewards Student Progress Toward Degree

Tech’s Living/Learning Communities Provide Keys to Success for First-Year Students

FlightPath Helps ULM Students Soar Toward Graduation

Write to Excellence Center Enhances Student Success at McNeese

UL Lafayette Rewards Faculty for Outstanding Student Advising

Nicholls Succeeds with Mathematics Enrichment Workplace

Minority Leaders Program Part of Grambling’s Success in Reaching Minority and Low-Income Students

Northwestern’s Freshman Year Experience Gives Students a Jump Start

In This Issue:
HAMMOND — As an incoming freshman at Southeastern Louisiana University in fall 2007, Darielle Avant of Independence heard about a new scholarship designed to help students complete their degree in four years.

That caught her attention and made her determined to complete her degree in communication sciences and disorders in that time frame.

Since she entered Southeastern, she has earned the scholarship twice, giving her a 10 percent break on tuition and fees as a sophomore and a 30 percent savings as a junior. If she continues her progress as she expects, next year she will see an award equivalent to half her tuition and fees.

“We’re all affected by the recession, so a scholarship is an excellent thing to receive,” Darielle said. “It’s automatically applied if you meet the requirements of maintaining a 2.0 GPA and completing 30 hours each academic year. Knowing you’ll receive that award for staying on track is very motivating,” she added.

“The first year, I did not receive the scholarship because I was shy of one class,” said Brittany Lynn Sanchez, a junior elementary education major from Gonzales. “I was very disappointed, but the next semester I got caught up. It truly is a big help. Now I am very cautious and make sure I take the right number of courses in order to get the scholarship and graduate on time.”

That’s the precise motivation Southeastern anticipated when it instituted its Progression Scholarship three years ago.

“Our degrees are four-year programs,” explained President John L. Crain. “We are focused on helping our students succeed and that includes taking steps to enable them to stay in college and obtain their degrees in a timely fashion.”

For some students, the Progression Scholarship may allow them to work a little less and perhaps take an extra course that keeps them focused on earning a degree in four years, said Steve Soutullo, assistant vice president for enrollment management.

The approach seems to be working. In fall 2008, about 850 students qualified for the scholarship for advancing to sophomore status. This year, more than 900 students qualified for progressing from freshman to sophomore status, while more than 600 received the award for moving from sophomore to junior or senior status by the end of their second year.

“We emphasize to students the importance of enrolling in the right classes, successfully completing those courses, and moving toward completion of degrees in the four-
“Improving Student Access and Success—Page 5

Knowing you’ll receive that award for staying on track is very motivating,” said Southeastern Junior Darielle Avant.

year time frame,” Soutullo said. “We’re pleased students see the value of making academic progress.”

According to an analysis by the University of Louisiana System, the scholarship has the benefit of financial savings for both the student and the state, Soutullo said.

“If a student graduates in four years rather than six, the student would save approximately $20,500, while the state would save more than $10,000 per student,” he said. “For the 1,400 students currently receiving the scholarship and presumably on track to graduate in four years, the state could see a savings of approximately $12 million. That is very significant.”

The Progression Scholarship is one of several initiatives implemented by Southeastern in the last several years as part of a University of Louisiana System initiative called Access and Success. Southeastern also instituted a mandatory freshman course, Southeastern 101, which covers academic and career planning and includes regularly scheduled meetings with advisers; a redesign of freshman math courses that involves using computer technology to provide students with instant feedback on their work; and an enhanced system of faculty advising and mentoring of students.

“All these efforts are helping us retain a greater number of students and enabling them to progress toward the goal of getting their undergraduate degree,” Soutullo added.
Louisiana Tech’s Living/Learning Communities, or LLCs, are residentially-based programs that link academics and residential life through a common theme.
“Whatever I needed to know about being a student at Tech, I found out in the Living/Learning Community. The teachers are more than teachers, they are friends.”

- Alayshia Knighten
Freshman
Louisiana Tech University

The basic premise of the Living/Learning Communities is that students who connect to the University early and begin immediately to develop relationships with their peers are more likely to persist with their education,” said Dr. Linda Griffin, dean of student development.

Knighten recalled her first experience with the LLC.

“Because I didn’t know much about the biomedical major, Dr. Griffin and Mrs. [Stacy] Gilbert took it upon themselves to take me over to Tech’s Biomedical Engineering building where we received an awesome tour and all three of us ended up learning more about the major together.”

Knighten says that Griffin and Gilbert helped her confirm her degree choice as she learned about all of the research opportunities that the biomedical engineering program afforded its undergraduate students.

The LLC is a component of Louisiana Tech’s highly successful First-Year Experience program. The FYE is designed to support and advance efforts to improve academic and co-curricular resources into and through the first-year student’s higher education experience.

“The FYE gives students a chance to get to know the campus, their professors, and fellow neighbors,” says Stacy Gilbert, director of co-curricular programs and disability services. “Being a part of the LLC offers unique programming and resources to help students transition to college life and to become part of the Tech Family.”

According to Gilbert, Louisiana Tech has a long history of providing focused services to first-year students. However, new initiatives such as the LLCs, the Common Read, First-Year Convocation and the Tenet Medallion have been formalized and now reside under the umbrella of the First-Year Experience program.

“It’s our goal to provide special events and activities to help these new students excel academically, find friends, adjust to college life and to balance in their academic and social schedules.”

Living/Learning Communities have been established in engineering, honors, professional aviation and, most recently, a first-year experience LLC.

According to Knighten, they have also garnered the interest of prospective Tech students.

“When asked, I tell anyone considering an LLC to go for it. The LLC program teaches you so much and I feel that I have transitioned better because of it. You’ll meet so many people and have an opportunity to do things that other students do not.”

Louisiana Tech continues to serve as a model for enhancing the college experience for first-year students and providing them with the tools and resources needed to become successful college students.

For Knighten, the LLC is not just a place to live at college or a place to study at college...it is the place to experience college.

“Whatever I needed to know about being a student at Tech, I found out in the Living/Learning Community. The teachers are more than teachers, they are friends.”

“The program has been more than I could have ever expected.”

For More Information Visit:
www.latech.edu
MONROE — FlightPath, the University of Louisiana at Monroe’s uniquely “homegrown” online advising and degree audit system, has provided students a quick and easy snapshot of their path to graduation since its 2007 takeoff.

“When Louisiana students transfer to ULM, they can readily see where their courses are filling in for the degree in which they are interested. If the course does not have an equivalent in the system, there is a function for advisors to make special provisions for credits.”

- Barbara Michaelides
ULM Director of Student Retention

The program also has an automatic fill-in function for transfer courses that have equivalencies in the system, according to Barbara Michaelides, ULM director of student retention.

“When Louisiana students transfer to ULM, they can readily see where their courses are filling in for the degree in which they are interested,” said Michaelides. “If the course does not have an equivalent in the system, there is a function for advisors to make special provisions for credits when there are no exact matches for specific transfer courses.”

Michaelides added that the system’s “What-If” feature is a unique option that is also widely used by students. The feature enables a student to inquire into the effect that a change of major would have on his/her path to graduation.

“As you can imagine, this feature stimulates students to be their own best advocate because it provides information students use as ‘owners’ of their degree requirements,” she said.

The feature is useful for advisors too, according to Michaelides, who...
may log into FlightPath and advise students electronically. Advisors can also leave text comments discussing their advising sessions.

Benjamin Young of Rayville, a sophomore business management major, frequently uses FlightPath.

“Usually, before I get advised, I use the system to predict my next set of classes that I’ll be taking. That way I know what is happening and can sometimes contribute to the conversation with my advisor about my new schedule,” he said.

Young, a 3.86 GPA student, said the system has worked extremely well for him.

“Let’s just say that I’ve had the ‘traditional’ college experience and have changed my major quite a few times,” he laughed. “With FlightPath’s help, I’ve been able to see all my classes that do and don’t transfer to each major. I can also easily view my cumulative grade point average at any time.”

Young’s favorite features include the ability to view course descriptions and the “What-If” component. “It allows me to try out another major, without actually changing majors through the registrar’s office,” he said.

FlightPath is an advancement that has made campus life even better for Young, who concluded that the system is one of several great opportunities ULM provides.

“Students appreciate the ability to easily monitor the progress of their degree programs. FlightPath is a powerful tool that helps us visualize the goal of graduation from day one,” he concluded.
Write to Excellence Center Enhances Student Success at McNeese

LAKE CHARLES — The Write to Excellence Center at McNeese State University, created as a support unit for the university’s Quality Enhancement Plan that focuses on the writing skills of all students, opened its doors in January 2008. The writing center offers tutoring to students, services and support to faculty and support for mutually beneficial university-community collaborations, according to Dr. Delma McLeod-Porter, director of the center. “McNeese is committed to fostering an environment that values and promotes writing skills,” said McLeod-Porter.

During its first semester of operation, the center logged more than 1,000 30-minute tutorial sessions. “At first, students using the center were predominantly from the uni-
“As the semester progressed, so, too, did Silver’s writing,” said McLeod-Porter. “She eliminated grammatical errors and now writes papers that are better organized and sentences that are clearer.” McMahon credits her academic success to the tutoring she received in the center.

McMahon’s plans for the spring 2010 semester include making the Write to Excellence Center an even larger part of her life. She has applied for a position as a tutor and will begin training in January so that she can pass along what she has learned to other students. McMahon is certain that working in the McNeese center is something that she will enjoy doing. “The writing center is my favorite place on campus. I like to come here and study and spend as much time as I can. Some day I want to write a book, and I know that writing will always be an important part of my life. I want to share this with others.”

-Silver McMahon
Freshman
McNeese State University

McMahon said she found her first academic writing assignment to be very confusing. She wasn’t sure what she was supposed to write about or how she was supposed to write for an English class. Most of her writing had been journaling. At her first tutoring session, McMahon discovered that the tutors could help her “understand assignments better.” The tutors guided her in ways to organize and shape her ideas so that they made sense to the reader. She began to bring work from other classes to the center and learned that tutors were able to assist her with writing assignments in other disciplines.
LAFAYETTE — University of Louisiana at Lafayette senior Megan Butler is on track to become a pediatric dentist. The Bossier City native is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in biology with a minor in chemistry.

Her academic advisor, Dr. Bruce Felgenhauer, guides students as they compete for entry into medical, dental and optometry schools, as well as physician’s assistant, physical therapy and occupational therapy programs.

Over the last 20 years, Felgenhauer has helped hundreds of students enter professional programs. He has developed valuable relationships with program administrators. The university’s Pre-Professional Committee, composed of biology and chemistry faculty, reviews students’ applications. Its members write letters of recommendation that accompany those applications.

Felgenhauer, the committee’s chairman, says honest assessments are crucial, because professional schools have come to rely on the committee’s appraisals. Butler said she appreciates Felgenhauer’s candor and support.

“He’s very straightforward with me. He’s never sugar-coated anything. But, he’s definitely never discouraged me from going to dentistry school.”

In the spring of 2009, Butler applied to a summer study program at the LSU School of Dentistry in New Orleans and asked him to write a letter of support. “One of my friends who attends another Louisiana university was applying to physical therapy school at the same time. Her advisor printed out a form letter and stamped a signature on it. Dr. Felgenhauer took three days to write my letter.”

Although Butler did not qualify for the program, the application process led to an invitation. A top administrator reviewed her academic transcript, gave her a tour of the campus and encouraged her to continue her studies.

Felgenhauer said the level of competition in professional study “is greater than ever.” Schools demand higher grade point averages and better scores on standardized admission tests.

He maximizes students’ chances of success by closely monitoring their academic progress, recommending specific courses and encouraging them to participate in volunteer activities and job shadowing programs. “Those are the things professional schools are looking for – they want to know that students are engaged in the community and developing an interest in their chosen career,” he said.

Butler has followed that advice, joining UL Lafayette’s Student Orientation Staff and Alpha Omicron Pi, an international women’s fraternity. She also serves as volunteer coordinator for the Pre-Professional Society, which includes about 400 UL Lafayette students and was established by Felgenhauer in the 1990s.

Felgenhauer has earned the university’s Outstanding Advising Award five times. Established in 1995, the award was originally given to two faculty members who served as academic advisors to students, recalled Dr. Carolyn Bruder, associate vice president for Academic Affairs.

In 2005, university administrators increased the number of annual awards to 55 and added a financial reward. Forty-five faculty with more than three years of service each receive a $1,000 stipend with
Felgenhauer said he’s pleased that UL Lafayette rewards hard-working academic advisors. He devotes so much of his time and attention to advising because he enjoys seeing students succeed. “My greatest joy, my greatest reward, is to see students living out their dreams.”

UL Lafayette senior Megan Butler (right) is pictured with her academic advisor, Dr. Bruce Felgenhauer, who has earned the university’s Outstanding Advising Award five times. The annual award, established in 1995, includes a stipend: senior faculty receive $1,000, junior faculty receive $500.

To be eligible for the award, an advisor must advise at least 20 students, write an advising philosophy statement, and be recommended by a dean or department head.

Bruder said the incentives have worked. Before stipends were included, about 100 faculty attended noncompulsory advisor training sessions, which are offered about 12 times a year. Now, some 600 attend.

The quality of advising seems to have improved, as well. Each semester, students rate advisors on a scale 1 to 10, via an online survey. “On average, those evaluations are a ‘nine’ for the whole campus,” Bruder said.
Nicholls Succeeds with Mathematics Enrichment Workplace

THIBODAUX — Paying attention in a lecture-only class can be difficult. Paying attention in a lecture-only college algebra class can be especially challenging.

To increase students’ engagement in learning mathematics, faculty members at Nicholls State University established the Mathematics Enrichment Workplace (MEW) in 2008. The facility’s sea of computers, situated on the first floor of Ellender Memorial Library, can accommodate as many as 100 students at a time, with instructors standing by to provide one-on-one assistance when students have difficulty understanding concepts.

Attendance in MEW is mandatory for college algebra students. They must report to a “focus group” class in a traditional lecture room, once or twice per week – then spend a minimum of three flexible hours per week in MEW, where they work on mathematics problems with the help of software such as MyMathLab.

The software gives students immediate assistance and feedback on their mathematics skills – and when they hit a mental roadblock, they can call upon a tutor or instructor for additional assistance.

Nicholls students have voiced enthusiastic approval of the program.
Ellen Calhoun, freshman education major from Houma, said that even though she would probably earn the same grades in a traditional lecture course that she earns in the new course, her ability to manage time would be much more difficult.

“Three hours is a long time to be in class, but you definitely get your work done,” Calhoun said. “It helps because you are required to be there - and I especially appreciate the one-on-one attention.”

Damon Paul Scanlan, freshman business major from Gonzalez, concurred - only he said his grades would probably drop in a traditional class. The new system, pairing traditional lecture and individually tutored practice, is more student-friendly, he said.

“In math, you need to practice problems. You have to actually do it. If the attendance and the work weren’t mandatory, I wouldn’t be making the grades I am making now. I like the way the class is set up.”

Senior Carlos Segura said he appreciated the discipline as well, when he was enrolled in the new college algebra class. Originally from Managua, Nicaragua, Segura earned an “A” in the course - and he said the course’s structure helped him to do so.

“The discipline forces you to succeed,” the multinational business administration major said. “In a traditional class, it is optional to attend and optional to do the work. In this class, neither is optional.”

Homework (which can be attempted ad infinitum) and quizzes (which can be taken multiple times, up to a pre-set limit) are available through algorithmically generated exercises. Exams are taken electronically as well.

Dr. Scott Beslin, department head and professor of mathematics, said the MEW model at Nicholls is part of a growing trend among American colleges and universities - the objective of which is to improve student learning and success.

“At Nicholls, our goal was to enhance students’ access to mathematics and thereby increase their achievement,” Beslin said. “This objective has been achieved and exceeded. I want to thank everyone who helped to create and direct the new program, especially mathematics instructors Sherill Dupree and Don Lasseigne, Nicholls’ MEW co-coordinators.”

Partially funded via a $90,600 grant from the Board of Regents’ Louisiana Educational Quality Support Fund (LEQSF) - plus an institutional match of $54,800 - the MEW idea gained traction in 2007 when faculty members decided to craft a new college algebra curriculum for the Nicholls campus. The model builds upon the preexisting systems and ideas generated by the Roadmap to Redesign program, National Center for Academic Transformation, Louisiana State University Course Redesign Workshop and various department heads from throughout the University of Louisiana System.

For More Information Visit: www.nicholls.edu
Minority Leaders Program Part of Grambling’s Success in Reaching Minority and Low Income Students

By Vanessa Littleton

GRAMBLING – Michael Terrell, a junior computer science major from Mansfield, Louisiana, has already completed an internship at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base, has co-authored a research paper and is slated to present at an international conference later this year. He credits these unique undergraduate opportunities to his participation in the Minority Leaders Program (MLP) at Grambling State University.

“The MLP has been an advocate for me in my leadership, personal growth, and work ethic. It has strengthened my research abilities, provided me with opportunities to increase my knowledge for graduate studies, as well as allowed me to share my academic knowledge with others. This experience has truly heightened my interest in a career field of science and technology,” said Terrell.

Started on the Grambling campus in 2007, the Minority Leaders Program is a partnership between the United States Air Force Research Labs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Institutions to develop minority leaders in aerospace sensors technologies. Grambling’s program encompasses research projects and participation among K-12 teachers, college professors and students from elementary through post graduate levels.

Terrell is working on radio frequency projects, specifically on signal receiving and transferring using a USRP chip, finding a way to create optimal signal strength and learning the Python programming language in order to program software defined radios.

Students such as Terrell benefit from partnering with faculty members to conduct cutting-edge research. Of the 40 research papers published by computer science professor Yenumula Reddy since 2005, 13 were coauthored by GSU students and more than 40 project papers have been presented at national and regional conferences.

“Student involvement in project work leads to presentations in Regional and International conferences and brings current technology to the classroom,” said Reddy when he received Grambling’s faculty award for research in 2008.

The Minority Leaders Program is just one component of Grambling’s emphasis on creating access and success for minority and low income students through mathematics and science. In 2005, Grambling’s Center for Mathematical Achievement in Science and Technology (CMAST) was established with a $2.4 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

CMAST’s work is divided among three components: restructuring of introductory mathematic courses, faculty professional development programs and the institution of a scholars program. The goals are to
improve student performance in mathematics; increase the number and grade point averages of science technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) majors; increase STEM majors engaging in undergraduate research projects; and increase STEM graduates enrolling in STEM graduate programs.

Efforts to restructure mathematics courses have already paid dividends. Pass rates for introductory math courses climbed from 14 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2008.

Targeting programs for minority and low-income students is an especially important mission for a university that serves an overwhelmingly large proportion of low-income students. In 2007-08, 83 percent of Grambling students were categorized as low income as compared to a 58 percent average for HBCUs, 37 percent for the region and 29 percent statewide.

“The Minority Leaders Program is an excellent example of another academic success story at Grambling State University. On behalf of the Grambling State University Family, I offer congratulations to students who have benefited from participating in the program. I also encourage other students to take advantage of this splendid opportunity,” said Grambling Interim President Frank Pogue.

“The MLP has been an advocate for me in my leadership, personal growth, and work ethic. It has strengthened my research abilities, provided me with opportunities to increase my knowledge for graduate studies, as well as allowed me to share my academic knowledge with others. This experience has truly heightened my interest in a career field of science and technology,” said Grambling junior Michael Terrell.
NATCHITOCHES — Starting college can be pretty hectic and even a little intimidating for first-time students, but Northwestern State University’s Freshman Year Experience can make the initial year of college go much smoother.

The Freshman Year Experience is a series of programs, many of them led by fellow students, to introduce first-year students to Northwestern.

“Going through the Freshman Year Experience made me a lot more confident and at ease because I knew what was ahead of me,” said Ron’eeka Hill, a sophomore English/political science major from LaPlace. “I was able to understand a lot of things I needed to do and why I had to do them. It gave me knowledge I used to help other students find their way around.”

The Freshman Year Experience begins with Freshman Connection, Parent Connection and Kid Connection in the summer. These programs ensure that new students and their families have the personal support and guidance needed to make a successful transition to the university. Students participate in small group sessions, learn their way around campus, meet their advisor and learn about campus life and traditions.

“Freshman Connection was my first college experience. I got to talk to an adviser who helped me understand what to expect. I wanted to take 21 hours because I had taken eight classes in high school. She explained why that was not a good idea.”

- Mariah Courville
Sophomore Northwestern State University

Freshman Connection has been successful in retaining students at Northwestern. Incoming freshmen who attended Freshman Connection had an average higher retention rate of 14 percent over the past three years than those who did not attend.

“Freshman Connection was my first college experience,” said Mariah Courville, sophomore elementary education major from Basile. “I got to make out my first schedule and at the time that was the most exciting thing. I got to talk to an adviser who helped me understand what to expect. I wanted to take 21 hours because I had taken eight classes in high school. She explained why that was not a good idea.”

Once new students begin the fall semester, they take part in a New Student Convocation and picnic with NSU President Dr. Randall J. Webb. They can attend Welcome Week, which gives them a further introduction to campus life. The First Year Involvement (FYI) Challenge is a one evening simulation letting new students set goals, deal with the demands of college, explore resources and face and overcome obstacles. Upper class students lead group discussions and challenge new students to set appropriate goals and utilize resources on campus.

“You are a little overwhelmed but it is fun. You learn to work with people to get the resources you need and this helps you learn where offices are on campus and how they can help you,” said Courville.

Freshmen take Orientation 1010, a core course that teaches them university policies, academic procedures and requirements, basic study skills and the development of a sound philosophy of life. Students are placed in “Freshman Interest Groups” as determined by their college or major. Topics include North-
western traditions, extracurricular resources, personal finances, health and wellness, goal setting and academic success.

“In orientation, you learn about a lot of the traditions of Northwestern which make you feel more like a part of the university,” said Hill. “The class helps you stay on track by explaining why you need to take core courses. You also learn so many other things that will help you in college and in life.”

Freshmen who took Orientation 1010 had an average retention rate 15 percent higher over the last three years than those who did not take the class.

Northwestern freshmen also take part in a Freshman Family Reunion which brings the families of students back to campus. MyStudentBody.com promotes healthy behaviors and responsible decision making at the individual and student body level. The Academic and Career Engagement (ACE) initiative provides freshmen with academic support and career exploration opportunities through Orientation 1010 and the Freshman Career Exploration Center.

“The Freshman Year Experience helped me so much,” said Courville. “All the activities meant that there was always something to do. It was an easy way to meet other freshmen and learn about the campus.”

Northwestern State University students Ron’eeka Hill of LaPlace (left) and Mariah Courville of Basile explain Northwestern’s Freshman Connection program to fellow students including basics such as the fact that NSU’s athletic mascot is the Demons.