



CASE STUDY

Commitment to Student Academic Success Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University

Background

[Founded in 1887](#), Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU) is the third largest historically black college/university (HBCU) in the United States by enrollment and a land-grant university—an institution of higher education designated by a state to receive the benefits of the [Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890](#). This university has been recognized for its commitment to providing pathways for social and economic opportunities for its students.

FAMU is a public university offering associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. According to the [U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES), FAMU has a student enrollment of more than 10,000. Of its 8,500 undergraduate students:

- 60 percent are female;
- 90 percent are African-American; and
- 75 percent receive financial aid.

Many institutions of higher education strive to increase the number of students who graduate, and this is especially true for HBCUs. In 2017, NCES [reported](#) that the national college graduation rate for African-American students is 34.7 percent, compared to 77.1 percent for Asian students, 59.1 percent for white students, and 49.9 percent for Hispanic or Latino students.

Although FAMU’s 40 percent rate of graduation exceeds the national average for African-American students, the university is working to increase its graduation rate with campus-wide student support policies, programs, and practices.

Undergraduate Student Success

FAMU is committed to student retention, progression, and graduation as a way to increase its graduation rate. The [Undergraduate Student Success Center](#), for instance, has various academic supports, such as academic advisement, tutorial services, workshops, and other support services such as time management, study skills, and goal-setting for first- and second-year students and transfer students.

Living-Learning Communities

To further support student achievement, FAMU has developed a new student housing plan called [living-learning communities \(LLCs\)](#). As described on FAMU’s Housing website, “LLCs provide a holistic and diverse style to student growth and education. Our residents live in housing facilities which support these ideals through academic partnerships, service-learning opportunities, and education in residence halls.”

The goals of the LLCs are improving campus housing and enhancing undergraduates' critical thinking skills—which [research](#) shows is an important goal for undergraduate education. Ultimately, these activities are expected to contribute to student success by improving student retention, academic progression, and graduation rates.

Health and Safety

FAMU's commitment to student success extends to fostering a safe and healthy campus community. Campus-wide policies and programs aim to promote a safe, supportive learning environment. Such policies and programs include those that address [alcohol](#) and other drugs through [wellness](#) and counseling services, as well as those that focus on [discrimination and harassment](#), [nonconsensual sexual relationships](#), and [hazing](#).

The [Office of Counseling Services](#) supports those same health- and safety-promotion policies through its programming, including the following:

- Individual, group, and couples' counseling, as well as outreach via [workshops](#) on alcohol awareness, anger management, and sexual assault and victim advocacy services;
- Classroom workshops on time management, stress management, healthy relationships, psychological wellness, and the dangers of alcohol and other drug use;
- Screening for depression and anxiety along with sharing information to encourage students to seek service and prevent symptoms from escalating during Suicide Awareness Week and ongoing mental health services, including [psychiatric clinical services](#);
- Encouraging safe activities during university Spring Break, including alternative Spring Break service-learning opportunities through its [Office of International Education and Development](#); and
- Programs such as the [Men of Strength](#) group to engage men in preventing sexual assault on campus, and [My Pledge](#), an anti-hazing strategy.

Likewise, enhancing safety on campus and defending human dignity are values at the heart of the mission for FAMU's [Department of Campus Safety and Security](#). To promote the well-being of the community, this department supplements its basic law enforcement services with educational initiatives to inform students, faculty, and staff about campus security procedures and to encourage responsibility for their own safety and that of others, such as:

- Ongoing presentations on police services, property safety, hazing, and personal safety;
- Ongoing [Crime Prevention Programs](#) and [Sexual Assault Prevention Programs](#) that focus on topics such as robbery, identity theft, relationship and domestic violence, sexual assault, as well as areas of personal safety such as cyberstalking;
- A [Student Escort Team](#) that provides escort services for students and staff during evening hours, along with [monitoring and warning technologies](#), such as the campus-wide Blue Light system for reporting emergencies; and
- In compliance with federal [Clery Act Campus Safety and Security](#) provision, publishing an [annual campus security report](#) to raise awareness on campus about the programs and activities available to ensure safety.

Campus-Wide and Community Collaboration

FAMU is committed to collaboration among staff from various campus offices and departments to support student recruitment, retention, progression, and graduation. "By working together, we are

able to support our students more efficiently and ensure their needs are being met,” states Quantina Washington, assistant director for Clinical Programs.

An ongoing example of FAMU collaboration supporting student success is the [Innovative Academic Instruction Project](#), which promotes best practices to engage students in the classroom.

Collaboration is also a guiding principle for the Department of Campus Safety and Security. “Our personnel work closely with local, state, and federal police agencies and have direct radio communication with the Tallahassee Police Department and the Leon County Sheriff’s Department on the police radio network,” Department Chief Terence Calloway says. “We are also a part of the Leon County 911 Emergency System.”

Campus officials point to anti-hazing efforts as a specific and notable example of recent collaboration in the aftermath of a [2011 hazing-related student death](#). “FAMU brought the entire campus community to the table to make sure that everyone was clear and on board as it relates to the various policies and procedures,” recounts Brenda Spencer, PhD, director of FAMU’s Academic Integration and Student Transitional Services. “We convened mandatory meetings and workshops for students, faculty, staff, and administrators to come together to address this particular issue. I think that was really a major, major effort.”

Washington agrees with Spencer. “The anti-hazing initiative required the entire University to get involved in and actively participate in order for it to be successful so the University could move forward,” she says.

As a result of these efforts, the University has recommitted to [ending hazing](#) through multiple avenues, including providing regulation, reporting, and resources for student organizations, leadership, athletics, and parents. For instance, FAMU is following recommendations from a [2012 Florida State University Board of Governors report](#) to strengthen its Student Code of Conduct and ensure more effective monitoring of hazing allegations, including creation of new oversight committee.

Finally, as illustrated in the following examples, FAMU fosters external relationships to strengthen capacities and increase service provision to students:

- Student affairs officials participate in [NASPA – Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education](#).
- The Counseling Center works with [Refuge House](#), Tallahassee's Certified Rape Crisis Center and Domestic Violence Shelter.
- Members of the counseling staff participate in Tallahassee’ Community Action, Fatality Review, and Sexual Assault Response Teams; the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council; [DISC Village Inc.](#), an alcohol and other drug prevention and intervention provider for Leon County; [Big Bend Cares](#), an HIV/AIDS services agency for North Central Florida; the [Florida Department of Health](#); and the National Men Can Stop Rape Organization.
- FAMU officials collaborate on joint committees with representatives of the other area postsecondary institutions: Florida State University, Barry University, and Tallahassee Community College to increase the chances of success for their recent graduates. One recent example of such collaboration is the [Tallahassee Innovation Partnership](#), which promotes entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for area graduates.

Communication and Student Feedback

The University employs the following channels for communicating with the campus community and has feedback channels to gauge how policies are perceived and implemented:

- The [Title IX Committee](#)—with representation from the Counseling Center, Health Services, and Campus Safety—enacts an annual campus climate survey of students, faculty, and administration.
- Students address concerns through the elected [Student Government Association](#).
- The annual satisfaction survey conducted by the [Office of University Assessment](#) (OUA) is used to inform goals and programming for specific departments, such as Student Success Center workshops.
- [Annual exit surveys](#) capture graduating students' perceptions of their collegiate experience, which are used to strengthen the quality of both academic programs and educational support services, while facilitating implementation of assessment practices set forth by Florida's Board of Governors, FAMU's Board of Trustees, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and other external accountability bodies.

An additional measure for student success accountability is the forthcoming [Blackboard Analytics](#), a Web-based data analysis tool to increase student retention and academic achievement. Spencer says that FAMU faculty and staff will use the tool as “an early alert system, so that will give us more clues into how our students are progressing academically and, if they're not progressing, asking questions as to what's going on.”

As measures of success for FAMU's programming and supports for student success, FAMU was recognized as an [HBCU All-Star](#) in 2014 and in 2015, and [EDSmart](#) recognized FAMU as one of the 10 best HBCUs for student retention.

HBCU Resources

The [resource page](#) of the website for the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities provides links to organizations supporting the Nation's 105 HBCUs.

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