



GARDNER-WEBB  
UNIVERSITY

## Degree Completion Program Strategic Plan 2020-2025

### I. ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND STUDENT SUCCESS

**Commitment 1.** We will make our University a destination of first choice for an increasing number of students from around the state, from across the region, and beyond.

**Objective 1.** In collaboration with Degree Completion Council and General Education Committee, the Degree Completion Program will design and market a General Education Curriculum that serves to attract new online students to Gardner-Webb to complement their major studies, support their professional aspirations, and allow for timely graduation.

**Metric 1.1.** The Degree Completion Program will review the traditional undergraduate Motto Model general education curriculum for additional opportunities to align with the Degree Completion Program general education requirements. Recommendations will be presented to the Degree Completion Council for proposal to the General Education Committee for consideration.

**Metric 1.2.** In tandem with updates to the General Education Curriculum, the Degree Completion program will support the University's measure of reductions in the total number of hours required of undergraduates to obtain a degree. The Degree Completion Program will measure time-to-degree, with expectations that the average for students should move closer to 2.0 years (for students who transfer 60 or more hours of prior college credit) across the span of this planning period.

**Metric 1.3.** The Degree Completion Program will also measure the success of an updated general education curriculum by tracking retention and graduation rates. We should expect that the updated general education curriculum, particularly as it may align with the traditional Motto Model, will not penalize degree completion students and will not slow their path to a timely graduation.

**Objective 2.** In collaboration with Enrollment Management and Academic Departments, the Degree Completion Program will minimize, halt, and then reverse declines in enrollment in undergraduate degree completion programs.

**Metric 2.1.** The Degree Completion Program will monitor enrollment in all majors. The Degree Completion will join the University in the low productivity analysis of all programs of study averaging no more than three graduates over a five-year period. Findings from the review will result in recommendations to Administration and Academic Departments to invest, maintain, or reduce institutional resources in identified low-productivity majors.

**Metric 2.2.** The Degree Completion Program will increase the number of agreements (e.g. Nursing Bridge and A.A.S. Pathways) with community colleges and expand recently launched Bulldog Bound, a co-admissions program, with more visibility on the website and other promotional strategies such as email campaigns, marketing collateral and virtual events with community colleges. The Degree Completion Program will work with community colleges to review and update agreements annually. The Degree Completion Program will measure increases in enrollment from community colleges in relation to these agreements.

**Objective 3.** In collaboration with Enrollment Management and Academic Departments, the Degree Completion Program will work to better align programs of study with the evolving needs of our region and with the interests of prospective students.

**Metric 3.1.** The Degree Completion program will request inclusion in measuring the potential viability of new online majors via the University's use of professional, third-party feasibility studies.

**Metric 3.2.** The Degree Completion Program will conduct an analysis of Associate Degree programs from community colleges in order to identify emerging programs and student demands for baccalaureate degree completion.

**Metric 3.3.** Once properly resourced and marketed, The Degree Completion Program will work with Enrollment Management and Marketing to track success and return on investment by annual enrollment, tuition and fee revenues, retention rates, time-to-degree, and the six-month plan post-graduation data collected from student exit surveys.

**Objective 4.** In addition to having competitive online programs, the Degree Completion Program will improve the quality of design and delivery of online classes and programs through faculty development.

**Metric 4.1.** In collaboration with Digital Learning, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and the Gayle Bolt Price School of Graduate Studies, the Degree Completion Program will plan and host an annual learning day to enhance and support teaching and learning in online course delivery. The Degree Completion Program will track success by documenting attendance patterns and analyzing feedback to ensure content continues to align with faculty and student needs.

**Objective 5.** The Degree Completion Program will attract and retain students through the expansion and improvement of onboarding processes, student support, and extracurricular programs to connect online students to their University.

**Metric 5.1.** In coordination with Enrollment Management, The Degree Completion Program will streamline onboarding processes of new students and deliver an enhanced new student orientation experience via the Online Degree Completion tab in Blackboard. The Degree Completion Program will measure increases in the number of new students participating in Orientation. The Degree Completion Program will monitor melt data from Enrollment Management and track first term retention rates.

**Metric 5.2.** The Degree Completion Program will monitor targeted course attendance data through Qwickly Pro to further track new student retention.

**Metric 5.3.** The Degree Completion Program will analyze student access of content and resources (e.g. Smarthinking, Writing Center) in the Online Degree Completion tab in Blackboard and the positive movement in retention rates of continuing students.

**Metric 5.4.** The Degree Completion Program will measure the number extracurricular programs available to online undergraduate students and the percentage of students who participate annually.

## **II. STRENGTHENING GWU'S FINANCIAL BASE**

**Commitment 2.** We will increase and diversify the sources of revenue needed to sustain the growth and strengthening of our vibrant, comprehensive University.

**Objective 6.** The Degree Completion Program will collaborate with the Office of Advancement to secure scholarship funding for students and additional support for Degree Completion Program faculty.

**Metric 6.1.** The Degree Completion Program will seek training and guidance from the Office of Advancement to apply for and secure one new grant proposal across the span of this planning period.

**Metric 6.2.** The Degree Completion Program will partner with the Office of Advancement to identify and target Degree Completion alumni to raise new endowed scholarship funds for Degree Completion students.

**Objective 7.** While working to generate extramural funds to support the unit, The Degree Completion Program will be increasingly efficient stewards of the resources we already have.

**Metric 7.1.** In collaboration with Academic Departments and Enrollment Management, the Degree Completion Program will reduce the number of low-enrolled course sections taught by restructuring course rotations and other measures to mitigate the need for additional adjuncts or faculty overloads.

### **III. BECOME AND INDISPENSABLE PARTNER TO THE TOWN, COUNTY, AND REGION**

**Commitment 3.** Gardner-Webb University is a private university with a very public mission. We will increase our positive impact in the broader community and in the region by partnering with those who share our interest in improving the quality of life in Cleveland County and beyond.

**Objective 8.** In support of this University commitment, the Degree Completion Program will enhance and expand partnerships with community colleges that advance the institutional mission. The Degree Completion Program will raise the public profile of Gardner-Webb University.

**Metric 8.1.** The Degree Completion Program will establish new partnerships by providing representative service on community college advisory boards. The Degree Completion Program will select community colleges that represent the strongest pipeline of students to maximize the mutual benefit of each institution.

**Objective 9.** Additionally, to raise the public profile of Gardner-Webb across the state of North Carolina, The Degree Completion Program will explore opportunities for students to connect with and engage in community service programs as representatives of Gardner-Webb.

**Metric 9.1.** The Degree Completion Program will identify at least one established Gardner-Webb service program (e.g., Little Bulldog Backpack) for possible expansion into the communities of the online student

population. The Degree Completion Program will document volume of student engagement and increases of number of communities served in identified program.

#### **IV. RESPECT OUR HERITAGE, EXTEND OUR BRAND, AND SHARPEN OUR IDENTITY**

**Commitment 4.** We will achieve and sustain a reputation as North Carolina's leader in Christian higher education.

**Objective 10.** The Degree Completion Program will collaborate with campus stakeholders to explore and develop avenues for integrating content into courses and the Online Degree Completion tab in Blackboard to provide a more visible articulation of the University's Christian mission and identity. Components of this content might also be included in the Office of Christian Life and Service web page for external audiences to access.

**Metric 10.1.** Adult and Distance Education will track program success through analysis of student access of provided content.

**Metric 10.2.** Adult and Distance Education will monitor impact on core values as measured by student exit survey data.