

Ten years ago, San Diego State University set out to tackle one of education's biggest problems — the achievement gap. Students from underrepresented minority groups were graduating or continuing their progress toward graduation at a significantly lower rate than other students. So university leaders took action.

Through a university-wide effort, SDSU is now being acknowledged as a model. The Education Trust's report on public higher education systems in its Access to Success Initiative recognizes SDSU for its success in raising graduation rates and closing the achievement gap among underrepresented minority students.

So how did SDSU achieve these lofty goals in such a relatively short timeframe? Starting from the top leadership and filtering down through every division, dozens of programs have been developed or enhanced to foster student success. There are ten programs or initiatives that have played an important part:

1 Raising Expectations: changing students' mindsets to complete at least 15 units per semester. This has been accomplished by increased academic advising and consistent key messaging that students are expected to complete at least 15 units per semester.

2 Major Academic Plans: During New Student Orientation, each student receives a detailed four-year plan giving them a clear road map to graduation.

3 Educational Opportunity Program: SDSU's EOP program is the largest in California. It provides programs and services to more than 3,200 low-income, first-generation students.

10 WAYS SDSU is Closing the Achievement GAP

4 Data-Driven Action: Every program is evaluated extensively, and data analysis allows the university to focus on what works best.

5 Study Abroad: provides real-world experiences for students, and studies show that these students are more successful.

6 Undergraduate Research: With SDSU faculty leading research from heart disease to construction engineering, all students are offered the opportunity for research.

7 Pre-College Outreach: SDSU is engaged in a number of initiatives aimed at creating a college-going culture in local middle schools and high schools, such as the Compact for Success and the Price Community Scholars.

8 Early Start Program: New freshmen with remediation needs are required to take remedial courses during the summer so when they begin classes in the fall, they have a firm foundation in math, reading and writing.

9 Bounce Back: Positive psychology and building on students' strengths are the cornerstone of this very successful program which helps students on academic probation succeed. Students learn time management, test-taking and study skills, among other strategies.

10 Casa Azteca: Research has confirmed that commuter students do not fare as well as students who live on campus. The Casa Azteca program provides the same type of student services found in the residence halls for commuter students. It has proven to increase the success rates of commuter students.

Although these are all university-wide efforts, the Division of Student Affairs and many of its departments play a pivotal role in each initiative. From New Student and Parent Programs' constantly evolving orientation programs, to the Compact for Success and its outreach activities... to Student Life & Leadership spearheading Casa Azteca, and of course, EOP providing proven results, the departments within Student Affairs have been instrumental in closing the achievement gap that existed 10 years ago. Today, that gap is disappearing at SDSU.