



# CSU Student Success Network

## Middle Leadership Academy Primer

California State University (CSU) makes a daily effort to ensure the timely completion of a rigorous, quality degree in preparation for a lifetime of achievements.

The CSU defines Student Success as:

- Improving graduation rates and ensuring more students get a degree sooner.
- Reducing the number of students who drop out of college before graduating.
- Making college more affordable to more Californians.
- Helping more prospective students understand what it takes to earn their degree.

Resource: <https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success>

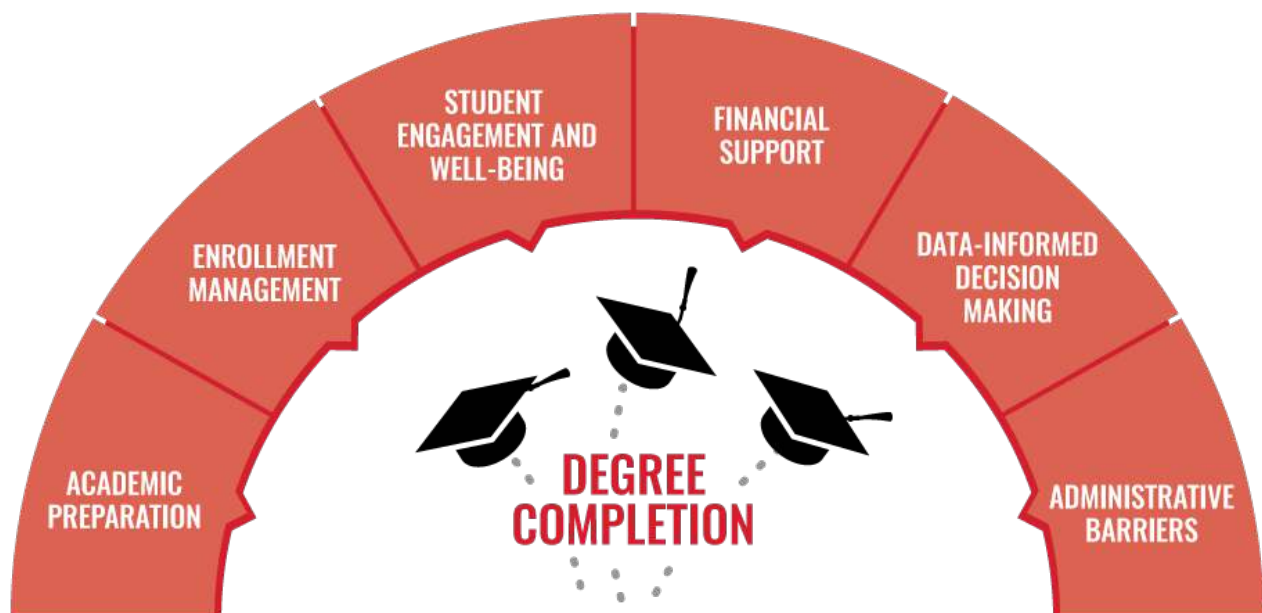
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## CSU Student Success Priority Initiatives

Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI 2025)

- Goal 1: Increase Graduation Rates
- Goal 2: Eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps.

To accomplish these goals, the CSU is focused on improving student success through innovation, barrier removal, and strategic thinking. The CSU has identified [six operational priorities](#) for effective implementation.





**Academic Preparation:** Creating a new approach to academic preparation through a series of academic and student support programs.

**Enrollment Management:** Enhancing the quality of the student experience and the alignment of course availability with student need.

**Student Engagement and Well-being:** Supporting CSU Campuses in the development of wrap-around services to address students' comprehensive care needs.

**Financial Support:** Investing in the expansion of financial support structures beyond traditional financial aid to ensure economic status does not stall students' success.

**Data-Informed Decision Making:** Using data at both the system and campus level to inform the development and advancement of effective student support programs.

**Administrative Barriers:** Modernizing administrative processes by discontinuing policies and procedures identified as impediments to student success.

## Closing the Equity Gap

With the COVID-19 pandemic and inequitable impacts across communities of color and moderate-income families, the CSU seeks to urgently close the gaps that exist between underserved students and their peers across the system. Therefore, in addition to the initial goals of GI 2025, the CSU has identified [five equity goals and priorities](#) to address the gap.

**Re-engage and Re-enroll Underserved Students:** Focusing on re-engaging with students of color, Pell-grant recipients, and first-generation students to support their re-enrollment to the CSU and meet their academic goals.

**Expand Credit Opportunities:** Funding to support students falling behind in academic credits and facilitating timely degree completion (i.e., summer session and intersession).

**Access to a Digital Degree Planner:** Ensuring that a digital degree planner is accessible and available to all students.

**Eliminate Barriers to Graduation:** Reviewing campus practices to eliminate barriers to timely graduation.

**Promote Equitable Learning and Reduce DFW Rates:** Addressing equitable learning practices for classes with persistently high DFW rates (Drop, Fail, or Withdrawal) and providing opportunities for additional learning when needed.

Resource: <https://www.calstate.edu/csu-system/why-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025>



## The CSU Student Success Network (Network)

In support of the various student success efforts at every level within the CSU, the CSU Student Success Network (Network) complements the many ongoing efforts offering forums for sustained, cross-campus, cross-role, evidence-based, and professional learning opportunities. Additionally, the Network strives to support meaningful connections across and within campuses that help bridge professional roles and responsibilities.

Under the support and direction of its Advisory Board and the [Education Insights Center \(EdInsights\)](#), the Network provides oversight and direction for all of its activities and program strands for Applied Research, Convenings, the Student Success Conference, the Middle Leadership Academy, and the Equity in Action Grant Program.

**The Network's mission** is to support faculty, staff, and administrators as they embrace their power to imagine, plan for, and implement systems and practices that center equitable student learning, engagement, progression, and completion. This is accomplished through the Network's efforts to **Prioritize Equity** and **Support Middle Leaders**.

**Middle Leaders**, as defined by the Network, are any colleagues in educational settings that are central to change management. They serve as key stakeholders for change who are, or have the potential to be, well-informed about and engaged in the change process. Lastly, Middle Leaders can encourage colleagues to join efforts to improve equitable student learning and success.

In the CSU, these Middle Leader positions can include faculty, department chairs, deans and associate/assistant deans, directors and associate/assistant directors, student services staff, and institutional researchers, among others.

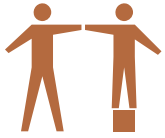
Resource: <https://www.csustudentsuccess.net/about/our-mission-and-vision/>

## Middle Leadership Academy (MLA or Academy)

The Middle Leadership Academy (MLA or Academy) is an academic, year-long, professional development opportunity for evidence-based projects, collaborative learning, and leadership development. Teams from various CSUs, consisting of faculty, staff, researchers, administrators, and students, are provided a collaborative and supportive environment to work on common equity issues related to student learning, engagement, progression, and completion; specifically focused on improving student success and opportunities for historically under-served student populations at the CSU. The MLA motivates participants to “lead from the middle” as they explore and apply new strategies that focus on closing equity gaps.



## MLA Core Values



**Equity**



**Knowledge**



**Assessment**



**Relationships**



**Leadership**

This program offers a professional development opportunity that was created by middle leaders, for middle leaders. The Academy's core values and pedagogical approach guide our learning outcomes and objectives.

Its pedagogical approach to participant learning, engagement, and development is grounded in [Problem-based Learning \(PBL\)](#). PBL uses a participant-centered approach where participants learn skills, practices, and strategies for working in groups to problem solve divisional, campus, or system-based problems. The MLA utilizes a problem-based learning project that involves participants pitching ideas and creating a plan to solve a common equity issue.

Overall, the Middle Leadership Academy is a program developed by leaders for leaders acquiring the **Knowledge** to operationalize and **Assess** change for the advancement of **Equity** through campus **Engagement** efforts and collaborative **Relationships**.

Resources: (1) <https://www.csstudentsuccess.net/activities/middle-leadership-academy/>  
(2) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8059994/>