APLU Announces Winners of Inaugural Project Degree Completion MVP Award

Georgia State University, Florida International University, and San Francisco State University Honored for Taking Great Strides Toward Increased Graduation Rates as Part of 'Project Degree Completion'

November 12, 2013—As part of its ongoing effort to increase degree completion rates, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) today announced Georgia State University, Florida International University and San Francisco State University as the inaugural winners of the Most Visible Progress (MVP) National Degree Completion Awards during a ceremony at the organization’s 126th annual meeting. The honors are designed to both reward the efforts of those universities for successfully retaining and graduating students while promoting those schools as models for other institutions to follow. The new awards also serve to further enhance APLU’s ‘Project Degree Completion’ -- a joint effort with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to achieve a national goal of having 60 percent of U.S. adults possess a bachelor’s degree by 2025.

“Our member institutions recognize the need to identify the best ways to increase degree completion in order to truly make a difference in the lives of students and the country overall. Georgia State University, Florida International University and San Francisco State University, and many other public institutions are making great strides in educating our future generations and will publicly detail how they are achieving their strong retention and degree completion success,” said APLU President Peter McPherson.

“Universities are undertaking this degree completion initiative from different starting points, which is why it is important to acknowledge both schools that are leading the way toward higher completion rates for all students as well as institutions that are showing progress toward higher retention and completion rates for targeted groups of students, especially those students who come from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds. The forthcoming web database and printed publication accompanying the awards will allow universities to work as a community and learn best practices from one another in order to reach the goals of the ‘Project Degree Completion’ initiative.”

Georgia State University won the MVP Trailblazer Award for its exceptional progress with increasing retention toward or completion of a bachelor's degree during the last three years. Eighty percent of Georgia State’s total undergraduate population are first generation, Pell eligible, non-white, or have unmet financial need. Ten years ago, Georgia State’s institutional graduation rate stood at 30.5 percent, and underserved populations were floundering. One by one, the university mined the data to locate the most significant obstructions to student success and then piloted interventions, ran data, refined the programs, and scaled them up. Programs implemented by Georgia State include retention grants; an overhauled academic advising system, expanded supplemental instruction, and a summer program for at-risk freshman. Georgia State’s institutional graduation rate has risen 22.6 points in the past 10 years (to 53 percent in 2013). Rates are up 28 points for African Americans (to 55 percent), 41 points for African American males (to 59 percent), and 41 points for Latinos (to 66 percent). Pell students are as successful as non-Pell students. The total number of degrees conferred annually has increased by 65 percent, and...