

The University of Akron

Executive Summary of Institutional Strategic Completion Plan 2024-2026

The University of Akron (UA) is a public metropolitan institution that offers comprehensive programs from associate to doctoral levels, pursues research and innovation in various fields, and serves the community. Our vision is to become a leading public research university, dedicated to community engagement, lifelong learning, innovation, and diversity. We are proud to be recognized as a Princeton Review Best Regional College and to host the world's top polymer science and plastics engineering program. Additionally, 35 of our faculty members rank among the top two percent of scientists worldwide. We also offer the world's first accredited emergency management and homeland security program and house the National Museum of Psychology, a Smithsonian-affiliate, and the only museum of its kind in the country.

The University of Akron (UA) serves nearly 15,000 students, encompassing undergraduate, graduate, and law students. Approximately 67% of our students attend full-time, and about 29% are from ethnically underrepresented groups. Among our undergraduates, 14% are adult learners, and 27% are first-generation college students. Additionally, around 37% of undergraduates are Pell-eligible. Our first-year retention rate for fall 2022 was 72.43%, and the six-year graduation rate was 45.59%.

Our Strategic Plan articulates five core promises and aspirations that will shape our future and identity: well-being and stewardship, academic opportunity, inclusive excellence and belonging, research and innovation, and community and connections. We strive to foster a culture of growth and responsibility, position ourselves as a lifelong learning partner, enhance our dedication to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, support research and innovation as a public urban research university, and engage with our communities as a responsive and reliable partner.

During the 2022-2024 period, several barriers impacting student success were identified, including Pell eligibility, first-generation status, academic preparedness, and the effects of COVID-19. To address these challenges, four key goals were developed, and strategies were implemented. As a result, UA saw significant increases in retention, with the First Time, Full-Time (FTFT) Freshmen Rate rising from 68% in fall 2021 to 72.5% in fall 2022. Additionally, retention increased across all demographics, including Pell-eligible, first-generation, and African American students. An overview of our progress from the previous Retention and Completion Plan is reflected in the Table below:

Progress Towards Goals Established in the Previous 2022-2024 Plan

2022-2024 Goals	Progress on Goal	Strategies toward Completion
<p>Goal 1: Increase first year student retention by 2% annually.</p>	<p>The first-year retention rate has rebounded after drops corresponding with the pandemic. First Time, Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for fall 2022 increased by nearly 5% from fall 2021, with increases across all demographics (First Generation, Pell-eligible and African American).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Akron Rises Program • Mentoring Services • Zips Affordability Scholarships
<p>Goal 2: Increase levels of completion and retention for first generation students, Pell-eligible students, and traditionally underrepresented students by 3% annually.</p>	<p>Cohort achievement gaps, particularly in first-year retention have also rebounded since the pandemic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Communities • Developmental Academic Advising • First Year Seminar • Learning Assistant Program or Supplemental Instruction
<p>Goal 3: Maintain four-year graduation rates at 2017 level and six-year at 2015 level, respectively.</p>	<p>Four and six-year graduation rates have demonstrated continued improvement. The current six-year graduation rate is improving with the 2017 six-year rate at 47.85% and the 2019 four-year graduation rate increasing to 29.31% (first-time, full-time Akron Campus bachelor's degree seeking).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Persistence and Retention Efforts • Persistence Grants • Alternate Forms of Credit • Retention Analytics • Decrease in the number of credit hours to Degree Completion
<p>Goal 4: Maintain current levels of graduating student placement. Increase by 1% annually in colleges below institutional average. Continue to align career placement with focus on Ohio Workforce Development priorities.</p>	<p>The Career Outcome rate maintained its current rate of 87% to 95% over the last three years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Services for Students and Graduates

Current Completion Strategies in progress-2024-2026

We can expect the following current strategies to have an impact on our previously stated goals as we move into the 2024-2026 reporting period:

1. Financial Aid Leveraging

- Transitioning from a primarily merit-based scholarship model, UA implemented a significant transition that now prioritizes student affordability in the creation of an initial financial aid package. This strategy expands the number of students who would have received scholarship awards from roughly 45% of the incoming FTFY cohort to essentially 100% of the cohort in the new formula who will now receive some form of scholarship assistance.
- By more strategically leveraging aid up front, the students who have historically received little-to-no financial assistance will now start to receive more aid up front to make the university inherently more afford to a much larger proportion of the incoming cohort.

2. Scholarship Merit Blocks

- The Scholarship Merit blocks change the way the university distributes scholarships, which can have a direct impact on retention. Students who struggle to afford tuition may also experience difficulty securing scholarships.
- The scholarship merit block appropriately positions scholarships where they need to be and with students who need them, allowing them to afford UA. These blocks help create a comfortable affordability position, with the understanding that frozen annual tuition, typically flat family financials year-to-year, plus these predictable scholarship blocks should keep that affordability position intact far longer than previously possible.

3. Advising Redesign

- Centralized model, where professional advising staff remain in the degree-granting colleges under coordination and oversight of Vice Provost for Student Pathways, creating consistency in services, trainings, and a high-quality experience for students.

4. Credit for Prior Learning

- UA's credit for prior learning initiative aligns with the state's workforce development priorities by recognizing learning as a reciprocal process between higher education and employers. Articulating noncredit training and duties associated with specific job roles with college credit will allow UA and employers to plan more intentional paths for upskilling employees.

5. Retention Analytics

- Early warning progress milestones within the Stellic platform provide indicators for students who may not persist at the institution or who may benefit from exploring alternative majors. Potential risks can also be scaled to identify difficult courses and use student performance in critical courses for prediction of student career outcomes.

Additional or Updated Completion Strategies

- ✚ **Participation in Complete College America (CCA)**, a national advocacy organization dedicated to improving college completion rates. As part of the Accelerator Initiative, UA has focused on four transformative areas: Developmental Education Reform with Co-Requisite Remediation, Guided Pathways and Finish in Time, Digital Learning, and Institutional Research.
- ✚ **First-Year Experience (FYE) Taskforce**-Through the efforts of the FYE Taskforce, we have concentrated on High Impact Practices (HIPs), especially during the first year. Although many of our programs have seen success over the years, they have not reached a sufficient number of students, limiting the benefits of participation. Research shows that underrepresented and first-generation students significantly benefit from HIPs. To ensure these experiences are accessible to all entering first-year students rather than just a select few, we aim to increase participation in our learning communities' program from 30% in fall 2023 to 60% in fall 2024 and continue to increase participation throughout the reporting period.
- ✚ **Tutoring and Learning Assistants**-For fall 2024, learning assistants will be embedded in all Pre-Calculus Courses to aid students in successful course completion.

In conclusion, The University of Akron's Retention and Completion Plan outlines a robust strategy for enhancing student success and institutional excellence. Our commitment to increasing engagement through High Impact Practices, particularly for first-year students, underscores our dedication to equitable and inclusive education. By implementing targeted strategies such as financial aid leveraging, scholarship merit blocks, and a redesigned advising model, we aim to support all students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds. With a clear vision of becoming a leading public research university, we continue to prioritize community engagement, innovation, and diversity. Our progress towards increasing retention and completion rates, along with ongoing efforts to support academic achievement and career readiness, reflects our resolve to provide a transformative educational experience for every student.



Ohio Revised Code

Section 3345.81 Strategic completion plan.

Effective: March 2, 2021

Legislation: Senate Bill 89 - 133rd General Assembly

(A) As used in this section, "institution of higher education" has the same meaning as in section 3345.12 of the Revised Code.

(B) The board of trustees of each institution of higher education shall adopt an institution-specific strategic completion plan designed to increase the number of degrees and certificates awarded to students. The plan shall be consistent with the mission and strategic priorities of the institution, include measurable student completion goals, and align with the state's workforce development priorities. Upon adoption by the board of trustees, each institution of higher education shall provide a copy of its plan to the chancellor of higher education.

(C) The board of trustees of each institution of higher education shall update its plan at least once every two years and provide a copy of their updated plan to the chancellor upon adoption.

(D) Each updated plan shall contain a report prepared by the institution of higher education regarding the institution's collaboration with other institutions of higher education through an initiative of the chancellor to assist students who have some college experience, but no degree, in earning an associate degree, certificate, or credential. The report shall include information about the institution's efforts to assist students in attaining an associate degree, certificate, or credential while earning a bachelor's degree or using college credit transferred between institutions of higher education.

THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

Institutional Strategic Completion Plan 2024-2026

Institutional Overview

University Mission

The University of Akron (UA) is a publicly assisted metropolitan institution which strives to develop enlightened members of society, offers comprehensive programs of instruction from associate through doctoral levels; pursues a vigorous agenda of research in the arts, sciences, and professions; and provides service to the community. The university pursues excellence in undergraduate education and distinction in selected areas of graduate instruction, inquiry, and creative activity.

University Vision

The University of Akron will be a leading public research university with an unsurpassed commitment to community engagement with a great American legacy city, Akron. We will:

- Be an opportunity university for all types of learners
- Be known as a willing and constructive partner for business, government and non-profit sector
- Be an institution of innovation willing to invest in unique approaches that increase opportunity for students and reduce cost
- Be a diverse, equitable and inclusive university
- Sponsor an array of superb academic programs relevant to the future
- Make and keep promises to our students, ourselves, and this community

Brief Overview of Institution

The University of Akron (UA) is one of the highest ranked public urban research universities in Ohio and the Midwest. Founded in 1870, UA is a Princeton Review Best Regional College and has the top polymer science and plastics engineering program in North America, according to EduRank. The University meets the needs of its nearly 15,000 students with in-demand associate, bachelor's, master's, doctoral and professional degree programs and more than 200 undergraduate majors, minors and certificates, and top-ranked online and adult education programs for nontraditional students.

UA's metropolitan campus in Ohio's fifth-largest city is surrounded by thousands of businesses, including Fortune 500 companies, offering students access to internships, co-ops, and career pathways. Additional campus locations serve the Northeast Ohio region. UA offers around 300 extracurricular opportunities and 17 NCAA Division I sports teams, as well as a nationally recognized student success and support program, an award-winning student recreation center and a Smithsonian-affiliate Museum. The institution celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2020.

EMPLOYEE HEADCOUNTS (AS OF NOV. 2023)

EMPLOYEES

	#
Full-time faculty/professional staff/staff/graduate assistants	524 / 657 / 399 / 1
Part-time faculty/professional staff/staff/graduate assistants	629 / 6 / 481 / 338
Total	3,035

FACULTY

	%
Tenure	26.53%
Female/male	49.18% / 49.96%
Terminal degree	44.23%

INSTITUTIONAL FINANCES

- **ENDOWMENT: \$290.4 million** (value on June 30, 2023)
- **FY23 OPERATING BUDGET: \$301,516,000**

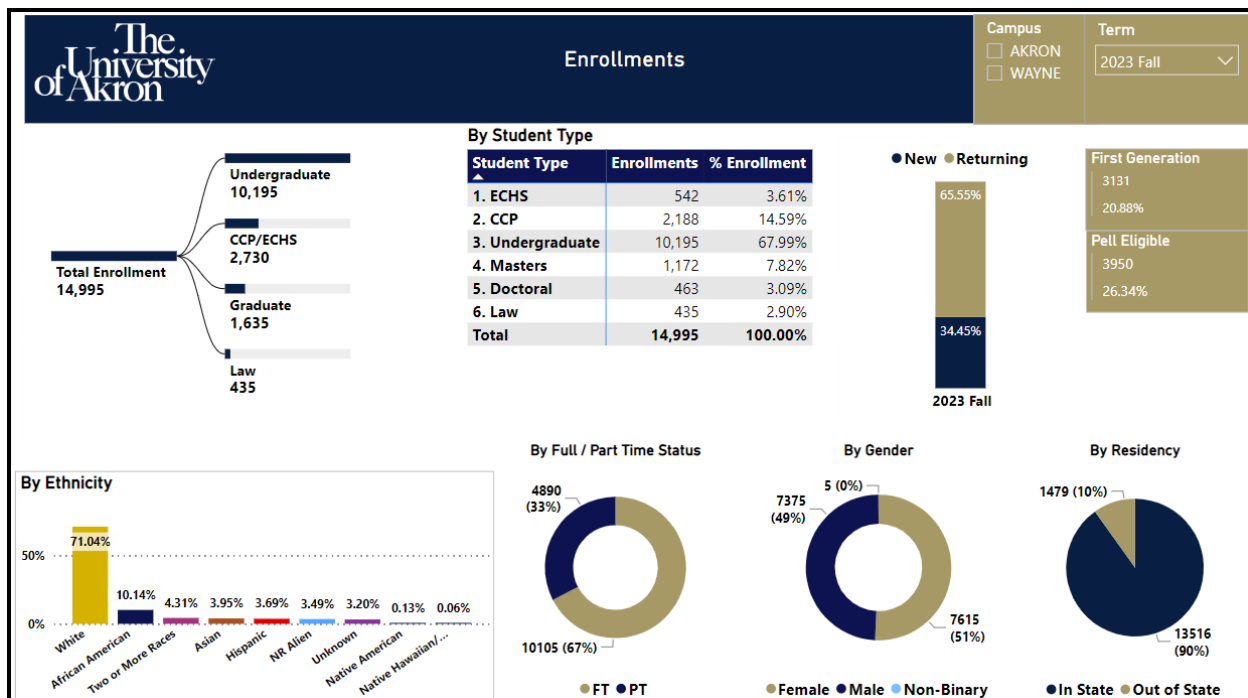
TOP RANKINGS AND POINTS OF PRIDE

- Princeton Review Best Regional Colleges (Midwest)
- Top 10 best colleges and universities in Ohio (academicinfluence.com)
- No. 1 university in the world for polymer science and plastics engineering (edurank.org)
- 2023 Best Value College in Ohio Award (research.com)
- No. 1 undergraduate business school in Northeast Ohio (Poets and Quants), No. 5 online MBA program in the U.S. (onlinemastersdegree.org)
- 35 current UA faculty in top two percent of scientists worldwide within their specialty areas (Stanford University)
- Only aerospace engineering bachelor's degree program of its kind in the U.S. outside the Air Force
- College of Business is in the 1% of schools worldwide offering business degrees that are doubly accredited in business and accounting, according to AACSB International
- World's first accredited emergency management and homeland security bachelor's degree program
- Home to the National Museum of Psychology, the only museum of its kind in the country
- No. 2 esports college program in the U.S. (dailygame.net)
- Three-time National School of the Year awarded by the National Association of College and University Residence Halls for the outstanding achievements of UA residence hall organizations and affiliated groups
- Top 100 U.S. universities granted utility patents (National Academy of Inventors)

Student Body Profile

The University of Akron offers many academic programs from certificates to doctoral degrees, to world-ranked graduate programs. Total UA enrollment for fall 2023 was 14,995: 12,925 undergraduates, 1,635 graduate students and 435 law (2,070 combined graduate and professional).

- Full-time students made up 67.39% of the student body; part-time students, 32.61%.
- Ethnically underrepresented (African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian, two or more races, and non-resident alien) students made up 28.96% of the student body.
- Adults (25 years and older) made up 14% of the undergraduate population.
- First generation students represented approximately:
 - First Generation undergraduates (excluding CCP/ECHS): 2,750 out of 10,195 (26.97%)
 - First Generation first-time freshmen: 670 out of 2208 (30.33%)
- 3,793 (37.20%) of our undergraduate (excluding CCP/ECHS) students were Pell eligible.
 - 953 (43%) of first-time freshman
- Fall 2022 New Freshmen Retention Rate (Fall 2022 to Fall 2023) was 72.43%.
- Students who graduated in four years comprised 24.17%, with five-year enrollment at 41.8%- and six-year graduation rates at 45.59 percent.



Institutional Priorities

UA outlines five promises and aspirations to aid in guiding its future and shaping its identity.

I. Well-Being & Stewardship

Promise I: To cultivate a culture and community where everyone can flourish and be responsible stewards of the University's resources and infrastructure.

- Strategically grow and invest the University's financial resources and enhance our operational capabilities and infrastructure.
- Empower University employees and students to support one another

II. Academic Opportunity

Promise II: To establish The University of Akron as a lifelong learning partner, recognizing and valuing diverse learning experiences and combining classroom experiences with innovative approaches.

- Focus on pathways that enhance lifelong learning.
 - Leverage Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) to reward world experience.
 - Implement a comprehensive adult learner strategy.
 - Offer flexibility and programming in course delivery via optimized pathways.
- Use skills-based stacking credentials to strengthen the connections between the classroom, the community and industry.
 - Offer students the chance to earn a degree alongside an in-demand industry certificate through the Plus+ Path.
 - Explore the viability of creating stackable certificates as a pathway to degree completion and micro-credentialing within courses and programs to help students create a "skills wallet" to increase employability.
- Become the primary provider of corporate, professional, and traditional higher education to businesses in our region, creating new revenue opportunities.

III. Inclusive Excellence & Belonging

Promise III: To increase our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

- Enhance student's sense of belonging and their ability to work and live in a complex global environment.
 - Establish baseline data on student engagement and belonging via administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
 - Expand opportunities for student engagement, including evaluating and enhancing the mentoring process and increasing the percentage of first-year students participating in learning communities.
- Foster an inclusive and equitable educational and work environment.
 - Revise academic policies to support student success
 - Leverage participation with Complete College America to further close institutional performance gaps with a focus on corequisite remediation, online learning, institutional research, and four-year guided pathways.

IV. Research and Innovation

Promise IV: To nurture research and innovation as the anchor public urban research university in Northeast Ohio.

- Promote and empower faculty research across the University.
- Be a leader in the region's innovation economy.

V. Community & Connections

Promise V: To proactively collaborate with our communities as a responsive and reliable partner to identify and meet the needs of the region and intentionally contribute to help economic and workforce development, and civic life flourish.

- Map and grow community engagement across the institution.
- Grow our cultural corridor in the surrounding region through the arts and by connecting with downtown Akron.

Barriers to Student Success

1. Pell Eligibility

For fall 2023, approximately 26.34% of our study body were Pell-eligible. UA understands the needs of this population as many of them intersect with populations deemed at-risk that can result in challenges with student persistence. Therefore, the goals and strategies identified in the Institutional Strategic Completion Plan provide opportunities to eliminate barriers and provide enhanced academic support services.

2. First Generation

First generation college students face many challenges navigating the academic landscape and with issues of belonging and engagement. Consequently, many struggle after their first year. Approximately 27.03% of all undergraduate students at UA were first generation in fall 2023, with 29.88% of our incoming first year students reporting as first generation. Throughout this plan, specific strategies and programs have been identified to target the needs of first-generation students.

3. Academic Preparedness

Since 2020, The University of Akron has adopted a test optional admissions policy. Appropriate course placement is determined by multiple measures including high school GPA, placement scores and standardized test scores if available. For fall 2022 and 2023, more than two-thirds of incoming students required placement testing. However, math placement testing remained the highest area of need for incoming students. Of the students who required placement testing in 2022, 92.1 % required math placement testing, with 92.5% of students requiring math

placement in 2023. Also, there has been a continued increase in the number of students taking two or more placement tests from 63.2 percent in 2021 to 71.3% in 2023.

Placement Testing Evaluations for Incoming Freshman by Year:

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Students Evaluated for Testing	2,874	2,487	2,320	2,266
No Testing Required	1,165 (40.5%)	776 (31.2%)	777 (33.5%)	739 (32.6%)
Testing Required	1,709 (59.5%)	1,711 (68.8%)	1,543 (66.5%)	1,527 (67.4%)
<i>Math Testing</i>	1,571 (91.9%)	1,615 (94.4%)	1,421 (61.3% of students evaluated with 92.1% requiring testing)	1,413 (62.4% of students evaluated with 92.5% if students requiring testing)
<i>2 or more areas</i>	834 (48.8%)	1,082 (63.2%)	1,012 (65.6%)	1,089 (71.3)

4. Mental Health (related to covid)

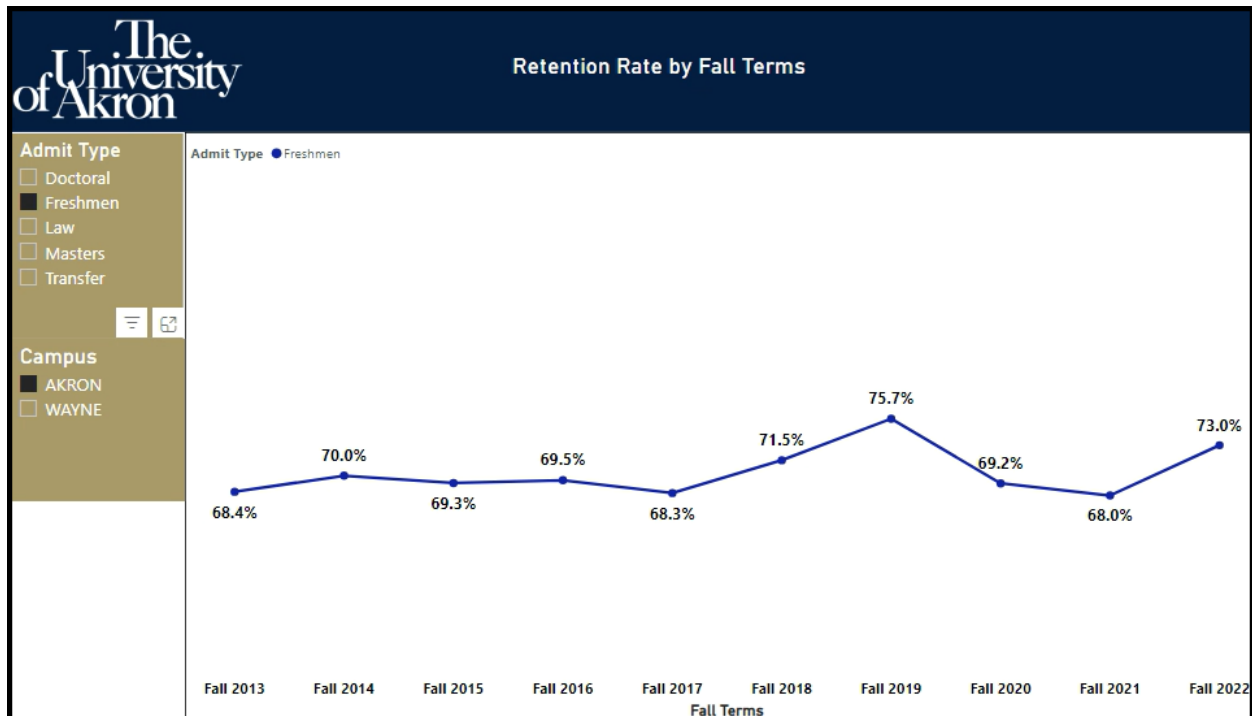
Colleges and universities have reported a surge in demand for mental health services since the onset of the pandemic. Consequently, students have faced heightened levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues as they navigate the challenges of the post-COVID-era. This increased demand has put pressure on campus counseling centers and other support services, highlighting the need for additional resources and support. Overall, the implications of COVID on mental health on college campuses underscore the importance of providing comprehensive support services, promoting resilience, and fostering a sense of community and connection among students.

PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS ESTABLISHED IN THE PREVIOUS COMPLETION PLAN

Our retention and completion goals were directly and adversely impacted by the COVID pandemic.

Goal 1: Increase first year student retention by 2% annually.

The first-year retention rate is rebounding after the drops corresponding with the pandemic. The table below reflects this increase.



Retention- The visual provides the retention rates for each fall term separated by campus. Retention Count is calculated fall to fall. If a student is enrolled in the next fall term, they are counted in the retention count for that year.

The retention rates are calculated as-

(Retention Count for x year)/(Count of enrolled for that fall semester)

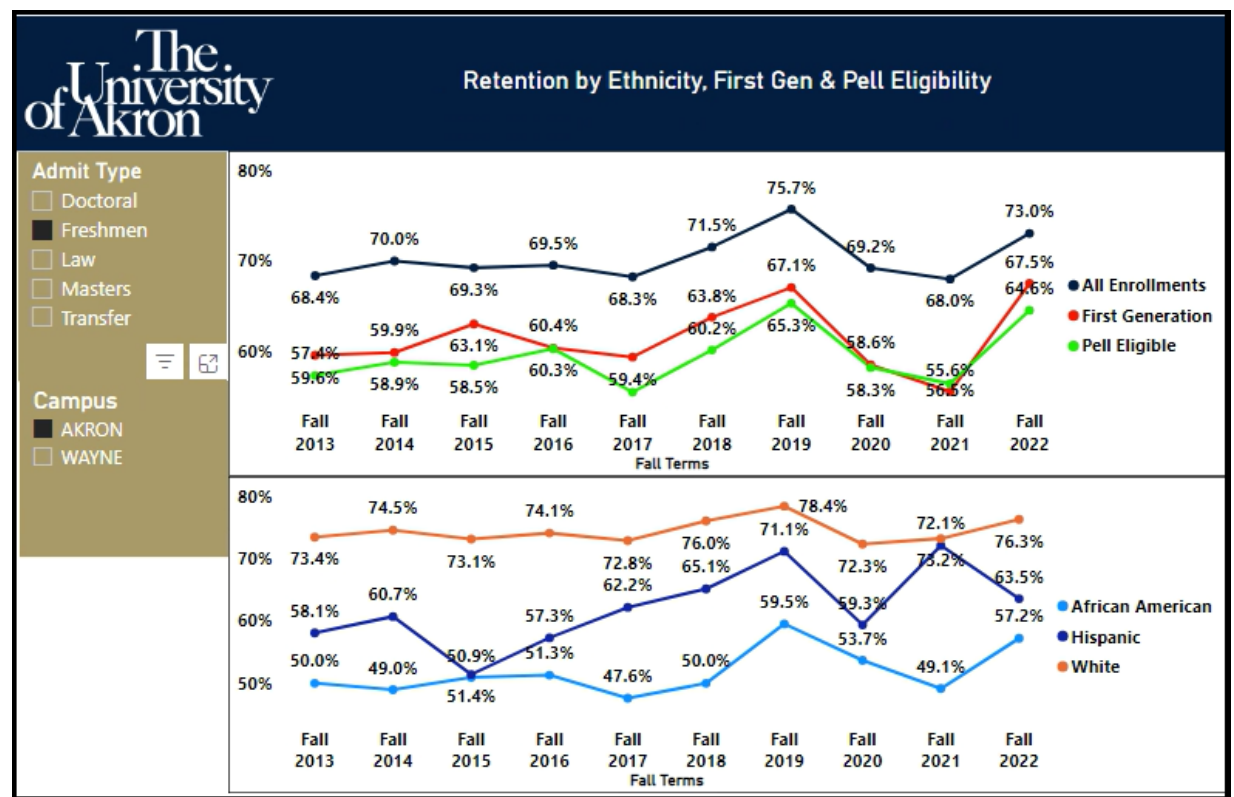
For e.g. If Fall 2013 retention count for year 1 =2453 and count of enrolled students for Fall 2013= 3589

Retention % for year 1 for Fall 2013= (2453/3589)%=68.3%

Goal 2: Increase levels of completion and retention for first generation students, Pell-eligible students, and traditionally underrepresented students by 3% annually.

Cohort achievement gaps, particularly in first-year retention, have also rebounded since the pandemic.

Retention Rates Graph- This page represents the retention rates visually in a line chart. The X-axis shows the year 1 to year 8 for each fall semester. The Y-axis shows the scale for percentages. Each fall semester is a legend and is represented by different color to show the difference.



Goal 3: Maintain four-year graduation rates at 2017 level and six-year at 2015 level respectively.

Progress toward degrees increased across all years until the pandemic, showing decline for the incoming class. We are beginning to trend towards some of our pre-pandemic levels.

Four and six-year graduation rates have demonstrated continued improvement. The current six-year graduation rate is improving with the 2017 six-year rate at 47.85% and the 2019 four-year

graduation rate increasing to 29.31%. (first-time, full-time Akron Campus bachelor’s degree seeking).

Graduation-The visual provides the graduation rates for each fall term separated by campus. Year 1 for Fall 2013 cohort is Fall 2013, Spring 2014 and Summer 2014. Year2 for Fall 2013 cohort is Fall 2014, Spring 2015 and Summer 2015. And so on.

The graduation rates are calculated as-

(Graduation completers Count for x year)/(Count of enrolled for that fall semester)

For e.g. If Fall 2013 graduation completers count for year 1 =3 and count of enrolled students for Fall 2013= 3589

Graduation % for year 1 for Fall 2013= (3/3589)%=0.08%

Graduation Rates Graph- This page represents the graduation rates visually in a line chart. The X-axis shows the year 1 to year 8 for each fall semester. The Y-axis shows the scale for percentages. Each fall semester is a legend and is represented by different color to show the difference.

Cohort Class	Fall Term	Class Size	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Fall 2013		3460	68.4%	56.3%	48.4%
Fall 2014		3542	70.0%	57.8%	50.7%
Fall 2015		3695	69.3%	59.4%	52.2%
Fall 2016		2905	69.5%	57.3%	49.3%
Fall 2017		3304	68.3%	55.6%	49.3%
Fall 2018		2723	71.5%	62.3%	54.3%
Fall 2019		2641	75.7%	64.4%	53.9%
Fall 2020		2271	69.2%	56.4%	48.8%
Fall 2021		2113	68.0%	57.9%	
Fall 2022		2066	73.0%		
Fall 2023		2035			

Cohort Class	Fall Terms	Class Size	4 year	5 year	6 year
Fall 2013		3460	21.97%	39.57%	43.73%
Fall 2014		3542	24.42%	43.45%	47.74%
Fall 2015		3695	24.41%	45.03%	49.17%
Fall 2016		2905	24.99%	43.10%	46.88%
Fall 2017		3304	27.15%	44.55%	47.85%
Fall 2018		2723	29.23%	46.90%	
Fall 2019		2641	29.31%		

Goal 4: Maintain current levels of graduating student placement. Increase by 1% annually in colleges below institutional average. Continue to align career placement with focus on Ohio Workforce Development priorities.

Spring 2020, 2021, 2022 Career Outcomes Comparison Summary by College
Handshake First Destination Survey Results

Degree	College	Career Outcomes Rate % (previously named Overall Placement Rate)		
		2020	2021	2022
Bachelors	Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences	86%	88%	88%
	College of Applied Science and Technology	82%	n/a	n/a
	College of Business (formerly CBA)	83%	93%	94%
	College of Education	83%	n/a	n/a
	College of Engineering & Polymer Science (formerly COE)	87%	97%	99%
	College of Health & Human Sciences (formerly COHP)	87%	94%	96%
	Bachelors Total	86%	94%	95%
Associates	Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences	86%	99%	99%
	College of Applied Science and Technology	96%	n/a	n/a
	College of Engineering & Polymer Science (formerly COE)	n/a	100%	99%
	College of Health & Human Sciences (formerly COHP)	100%	0%	100%
	Wayne College	92%	n/a	n/a
	Associates Total	95%	99%	99%
Grand	Bachelors and Associates Grand Total	87%	95%	95%

Updated Completion Goals for 2022-2024

The following strategies were implemented to achieve our retention and completion goals:

1. Pathways to Student Academic Success

Our fall 2023 First-Time Full-Time (FTFT), bachelor's degree-seeking students had an average ACT of 21 and a 3.45 high school grade point average. Our student support begins at the onboarding process and remains focused on increasing first-year retention and graduation rates.

As mentioned in the 2022-2024 Retention and Completion Plan, in Fall 2020, UA implemented the Akron Rises Scholars Program to increase access to the university by providing a holistic review for students who were previously denied admission to the university. Students are assigned a retention coordinator and receive one-on-one coaching and support from their first year to graduation. To continue to build a sense of belonging and increase student retention, the program expanded in FY 23 to offer learning communities for students admitted to the program that included a First-Year Seminar, peer mentoring support and other wrap-around supports.

Akron Rises Fall 2021 Cohort:

- Confirmed incoming students: 148
- Fall 2021 Retention Rate: 35%

Akron Rises Fall 2022 Cohort:

- Confirmed incoming students: 164
- Fall 2022 Retention Rate: 40%

Many students indicated their inability to return to UA due to finances and/or academic difficulties with residual effects of the pandemic

2. Early Alert Initiatives

Help-A-Zip and ZipAssist

ZipAssist serves as the University's multifaceted student advocacy and support office. The scope of work for the office significantly expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to increased student needs for resources beyond traditional university services. Recognizing the importance of holistic well-being for student success, ZipAssist began to take a more holistic approach to early intervention, resource connection, and regular guidance or mentorship through several programs. These initiatives were expanded during the reporting period and include financial literacy education, persistence grants, and programs focused on basic needs, emergency assistance, and general well-being.

As context, the Help-A-Zip referral program was started in Fall 2015 as an outlet for faculty to connect students facing distress, looking for guidance, or are in jeopardy of leaving the University with a support services staff member. In 2017, the intent of the Help-A-Zip program was overhauled with an increased focus on student-initiated referrals and improved resources

for response and ongoing case management. The mission “Refer. Support. Retain.” was coined at the time and serves as the foundation for this early alert and intervention model.

Now, faculty, staff, parents, community members, peers, and students themselves can make a referral to ZipAssist on behalf of any enrolled student. A team of campus experts are then assigned to assist students with navigating University resources and finding needed services. Referrals are typically made for the following areas of concern: academic, personal/social, mental health, tuition/fees, emergency financial, and textbook assistance.

Prior to the redesign of the Help-A-Zip program, 200 students were referred to ZipAssist in FY17. Through intentional communication and education to campus, the Help-A-Zip referral program experienced a 300% increase in FY18. As the needs of students expanded in 2020, the referral program experienced another 30% growth in cases. Currently, the Help-A-Zip referral program yields around 1,600 cases per academic year. For example, from July 1-December 31, 2023, 920 referrals were received by the ZipAssist team through the Help-A-Zip referral form.

The success and utilization of this program is a testament to ongoing education to the campus community about help-seeking behaviors and destigmatizing accessing resources. While Help-A-Zip is intended as the University’s specified intervention program, proactive early alert and retention efforts are also a focus for units such as ZipAssist, Residence Life & Housing, Financial Aid, Bursar, Development, academic advising units, the graduation team in the Registrar, and various student support offices in Student Affairs, such as Student Life, Military Services, and Career Services. Regular communication and strategic data collection provide the University with data-driven opportunities for educational programming and messaging strategies related to Help-A-Zip and student persistence resources.

Given the increase in referrals related to emergency hardship through the Help-A-Zip referral program, ZipAssist launched the Campus Cupboard [food pantry] program in 2018 with Grab & Go cabinets in four locations across campus. Expansion of the program was warranted in 2020 and the current iteration of the program includes six Grab & Go locations, two walk-in pantries, an online grocery request process [with locker pick-up], and bi-weekly grocery giveaway events. In addition, the Cupboard oversees a robust network of basic needs support, which includes professional clothing, a campus community garden, and a housewares giveaway program. Through community partnerships, the office regularly educates students about available off-campus resources, including SNAP, WIC, HEEP, and local agencies that can provide relief and ongoing support, including childcare, mental health, basic needs, utilities, food, and case management.

In the 2023 calendar year, 7,885 total students visited Campus Cupboard (food assistance). Non-food related programs [such as the Roo-Store and professional clothing) yielded an additional 1,165 student engagement points. Since starting the Campus Community Garden in June 2022, nearly 150lbs. of food has been harvested, providing around 940 servings to UA students.

ZipAssist prioritizes student success by addressing barriers to persistence through a holistic well-being lens. The programs offered through the office deliver early intervention, connection, and guidance. Additional areas of oversight for this unit include parent and family programs and off-campus living and commuter resources. Collectively, this comprehensive approach

empowers students to thrive academically and personally, while providing wrap-around support services to guide them through their collegiate journey.

3. Student Emergency Financial Assistance (SEFA)

A local foundation supported a housing room and board scholarship during this reporting period. This grant provides under-resourced students with financial assistance toward a tuition balance prohibiting re-enrollment due to outstanding charges for housing or meal plan. These funds were intended for students who have maximized all funding options and due to a gap in aid and personal resources, find themselves faced with financial hardship. In FY23 this emergency aid program provided nearly \$100,000 in support to students who would otherwise not be able to re-enroll.

In 2017, the University was selected as a national recipient of a grant provided by the DASH Emergency Grant, supported by the Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates. The grant, now called the Student Emergency Financial Assistance (SEFA) program on campus, has been sustained through the generosity of private donors and partnerships with local organizations. In its current iteration, the SEFA program provides emergency assistance for any enrolled student facing an unexpected hardship, such as job loss, loss of wages, or an unplanned emergency financial obligation.

Through the established Help-A-Zip referral system, students work with ZipAssist staff to determine eligibility and resources available, both on campus and within the community. The program is aimed at supporting under-resourced students with an Expected Financial Contribution of \$10,000 or less. The maximum [lifetime] grant a student can receive is \$1,000 towards non-tuition related expenses and financial support is orchestrated through third-party communication between ZipAssist and the provider [no monetary exchange with students].

As a catalyst for change, the SEFA program has provided the institution with data necessary to expand programs and increase student support. Supplemental support programs, such as Campus Cupboard, financial literacy education, emergency job placement, community partnerships, and JumpStart-Powered by PNC were created because of concerns learned through student interventions with SEFA.

To date, this program has supported nearly 900 students with one-time assistance, amounting to over \$700,000 in support.

4. Persistence Grants

The University of Akron has a long-standing, emergency tuition support program for under-resourced students who are near graduation and face financial burdens. This program, known as Retention & Completion, is overseen by a committee of directors from Financial Aid, Bursar, Advising, and the Vice President for Enrollment Management. Grants, less than \$3,000, are administered to students with outstanding balances preventing re-enrollment in their final semester[s] near graduation. In FY23, over \$160,000 was provided through this emergency aid program.

5. Developmental Academic Advising

As cited in the previous report, the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) created a Taskforce on Academic Advising, fall 2021. Consequently, academic advising transitioned to a centralized process with professional advising staff residing within the academic colleges with ongoing

coordination, feedback, oversight and university-wide leadership from OAA under the direction of the Vice Provost of Student Pathways. The transition has been effective and has provided a consistent, high-quality experience for all students as they navigate between degree-granting colleges, majors, and degree completion. It has also provided consistent training practices, and overall processes by academic advisers. Also, feedback is obtained through an advising survey, administered every three to four weeks after a student meets with an academic advisor. Additionally, exploratory students reside in the Student Success Center under the Executive Director of Student Success, also reporting to the Vice Provost for Student Pathways. The OAA works with the degree granting colleges to assess various curricular and academic practices and policies such as the First-Year Seminar and Career Planning Courses.

6. Zips Affordability Scholarship

The Office of Student Financial Aid has modified one of its institutional grant programs and launched a second one starting with the Fall 2024 enrollment cohort. These second-look adjustments target student affordability with a final review of each financial package to determine if that student is optimally supported to the best of the university's financial capability. Starting with the Fall 2024 enrollment cohort, The University of Akron will provide two different institutional grant opportunities to new students that will be available to them throughout their enrollment periods while they pursue their degree.

These two new grant programs are significant players in UA's efforts to influence student retention, persistence, and graduation outcomes. Each of these grant programs is available to students each year they return, provided they remain financially eligible to receive these awards. The awards operate along with each student's financial aid offer, so students will be expected to submit a FAFSA to the University to be considered.

MAP Grant

The new need-based award represents a significant overhaul of what was once called the Zips Affordability Scholarship (ZAS) into what is now called the "MAP Grant," whose name reflects an acronym for "Making Akron Possible." The MAP Grant retains some of the structure from the former ZAS program, but there are a few significant improvements that help with overall student affordability.

Like the ZAS scholarship in the past, the MAP Grant targets students from Cuyahoga, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, and Wayne counties which comprise our primary recruitment regions. Also, the MAP Grant assures students who qualify will receive aid that covers the full cost of tuition and general fees after all other resources are applied to a student's record. The MAP Grant does not need to be repaid.

The MAP Grant is different from the ZAS in two significant ways. First, the MAP Grant is not a scholarship. Because it is an institutional grant, the MAP Grant does not require a GPA requirement to maintain the award from year to year. Therefore, even when student performance might challenge the ability to keep a scholarship over time, the MAP Grant will persist and ensure that the lost resources will be replaced with other institutional resources to keep the same full cost of tuition and general fees.

Additionally, the MAP Grant is a need-based resource that is awarded to students who show an adjusted gross income of \$50,000 or less on their documentation received from the federal government through the financial aid application. Students must file a FAFSA to be eligible for

the MAP Grant, but they do not need to do anything specific to qualify. Students whose adjusted gross income qualifies them, from one of the six targeted counties, will automatically receive the award.

UA Institutional Grant

The new UA Institutional Grant is a need-based grant program available to students who are not eligible for the MAP Grant. In other words, students who live outside the six designated counties or for those without an adjusted gross income of \$50,000 or lower are eligible to be reviewed for the UA Institutional Grant.

Students are considered for one of the UA Institutional Grants when their financial aid package is completed, but the Office of Student Financial Aid determines that the institution has not quite reached a level of affordability that the student might need to be able to enroll. Built from an understanding that at times students might need a little more support, the UA Institutional Grant helps replace some of the resources that might not be available from academic scholarship opportunities or when families experience more challenges than might have been imagined from the completion of the FAFSA process.

The total amount of grant resources available to each student is limited. Whenever the institution can identify that a little more support will be necessary for a student to make paying for the institution more possible, the Office of Student Financial Aid will try to step in and assist with this new grant program. As with the MAP Grant, the UA Institutional Grants do not need to be repaid.

7. First-Year Seminar

During the summer of 2023, a working group was tasked to conduct a complete redesign of the First-Year Seminar Course, previously the Akron Experience Course. The redesign encompassed the creation of a problem-based course with updated student learning outcomes, assessment tools, and a revamped pedagogy, which will result in a course that will aid in the successful transition of all UA first-year students, creating connections and fostering a greater sense of belonging and campus pride.

The redesign has been approved through the formal curriculum proposal process, with a new course title and learning outcomes and curriculum. Formal training for instructors on details of this redesign will be achieved throughout the summer of 2024 for implementation to occur fall 2024. Additionally, the course redesign is also a major component of the expansion of our Learning Communities Program at UA for fall 2024.

In Fall 2021, 598 students were enrolled into the Akron Experience course. As of Fall 2022, 55% of the Fall 2021 cohort who took the Akron Experience course are enrolled in courses at The University of Akron. In Fall 2022, 628 students enrolled into the Akron Experience course. As of Fall 2023, the first-year retention rate for those enrolled students was 64%.

8. Learning Communities

UA has an extensive history of success with its learning communities' program and its impact on fostering a sense of belonging and engagement among first-year students, as referenced below in the table. Retention for learning community participants increased by nearly five percent from fall 2022 to fall 2023. Students at UA who participate in learning communities have traditionally possessed higher GPAs than students who have not participated in these experiences. The

overall first-year retention rate for learning community participants for fall 2023 was 77% compared to 72.5% for the overall first-year retention rate. UA aims to increase participation from 30% of new students in fall 2023 to 60% in Fall 2024.

Faculty teaching in learning communities will work in collaboration to increase integration across the curricula and provide experiences that promote both the academic and social integration of first-year students. In addition, a more comprehensive assessment of the program will include qualitative data from participating faculty with assessment of first semester persistence, as well as first-year retention, GPAs, and overall student satisfaction for all student participants.

Fall to Fall Retention for Learning Community Students			
Semester	Retained		Total
	N	%	N
Fall 2022	338	77.0%	439
Fall 2021	375	72.7%	516
Fall 2020	566	75.1%	754
Fall 2019	608	72.74%	810
Fall 2018	563	70.46%	799

9. Alternate Forms of Credit

In March 2024, The University of Akron launched a university-wide Credit for Prior Learning initiative. The launch included the creation of an office, a website, and concierge service, which synthesized previous prior learning assessment activities, and substantially increased efforts to grant credit for prior learning.

Our concierge coordinator provides an individualized assessment of a student’s record including assessing military, work, and previous higher education. By first articulating all previous college coursework in terms of transfer credit, earned credit in the military, and articulated certificates and licenses, those with some college and no degree, may be immediately qualified for one.

10. Decrease the Number of Credit Hours to Degree Completion

The University continues to work on reducing the number of graduation requirements in bachelor’s degree programs without compromising accreditation requirements.

The Faculty in the College of Engineering and Polymer Science made a coordinated effort to reduce the number of credits in all bachelor’s degrees that require more than 120-126 credits. Curriculum changes are complete and in place for Fall 2024 for the following programs:

- 420000BS : Chemical Engineering - reduction from 131 credits to 125 credits
- 425000BS: Corrosion Engineering - reduction from 130 credits to 123 credits
- 430000BS : Civil Engineering - reduction from 131 credits to 125 credits
- 445000BS : Computer Engineering - reduction from 133 credits to 123 credits
- 440000BS : Electrical Engineering - reduction from 133 credits to 123 credits
- 460000BS : Mechanical Engineering - reduction from 133 to 129 credits (anticipating ongoing work at UA that is expected to reduce the number of required general education credits by at least three credits).

Additionally, three of our bachelor's programs remain under faculty discussion, and we expect to complete changes in next year's curriculum proposal process.

- 480001BS : Biomedical Engineering – 130 credits
- 490005BS : Aerospace Systems Engineering – 139 credits
- 292104BS : Mechanical Engineering Technology – 128 credits

In making the changes, faculty considered content of peer programs, required content to maintain accreditation for the program through ABET Engineering Accreditation Commission, www.abet.org, and knowledge expected of graduating engineers on the Fundamentals of Engineering exam that is given by the National Society of Professional Engineers and is an important early step towards licensure as a Professional Engineer.

11. Mentoring Services

Peer Mentoring

The Peer Mentoring Services at the Office of Multicultural Development (OMD) at The University of Akron has made strides in student retention, achieving an 84.03% rate from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024. This is a significant improvement from the previous year's retention rate of 57.8%. Notably, Asian and Black student cohorts have seen higher retention percentages, which speaks to the effectiveness of targeted interventions. However, within specific programs such as Akron Rises and I Promise, retention rates show considerable variation, with Akron Rises reporting a lower rate of 42.03% for students who participated in peer mentoring. This suggests that while the overall retention is on an upward trend, there are still challenges that need to be addressed at a program level.

The data also indicates disparities among different racial/ethnic groups. For instance, White students have shown a lower retention rate compared to their Asian and Black peers in the same period, signaling a need for more focused support for certain groups. Despite these gains, the retention figures still do not align with our pre-COVID achievements and fall below our target averages. The OMD has expanded its outreach efforts to include partnerships with Akron Rises and other student cohorts, including those identified as academically at risk.

Retention Overview for Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 (i.e., not a full academic year)

Total students outreached to: 238

Persistence rate: 84.03% (200 students continued at UA in Spring 2024) Note: Retention data for Fall 2023 to Fall 2024 is pending.

All Mentees

Race/Ethnicity	Total N	Total N Retained	Percent Retained
ASIAN	15	14	93.33%
BLACK	121	105	86.78%
HISPA	7	6	85.71%
NSPEC	1	1	100.00%
TWO OR MORE	32	25	78.13%
WHITE	62	49	79.03%
ALL MENTEES	238	200	84.03%

Retention Data for Fall 2022 to Fall 2023

Total students

outreached to: 173

Retention rate: 57.80% (100 students)

All Mentees

Race/Ethnicity	Total N	Total N Retained	Percent Retained
AMIND	1	1	100.00%
ASIAN	10	7	70.00%
BLACK	91	54	59.34%
HISPA	7	6	85.71%
NSPEC	2	1	50.00%
TWO OR MORE	21	11	52.38%
WHITE	41	20	48.78%
ALL MENTEES	173	100	57.80%

12. Learning Assistant Program or Supplemental Instruction

UA's Learning Assistant Program aids students enrolled in traditionally challenging gateway courses to successful degree completion. Compared with students who do not have learning assistants, students with learning assistants earn three to four more credits per semester, are less likely to drop courses, and have a greater chance of successful course completion.

Since Summer of 2022, the Learning Assistant Program has significantly increased at UA. During the 2022-2023 academic year, 2099 students had access to the Learning Assistant Program (with 45 LAs and 27 sections of courses). Additionally, during the 2023-2024 academic year, 2575 students had access to Learning Assistants (with 45 LAs and 27 sections of courses).

13. Career Services for Students and Graduates

Career Services provides career guidance and opportunities that lead to retention and persistence to graduation and fulfilling career goals upon graduation such as:

- Career advising which includes major and career exploration.

- Use of the “Connecting UA Majors to Top Jobs in Ohio” initiative to help students explore majors and in-demand occupations which provide the most job opportunities upon graduation, and to help bridge the workforce gap in Ohio.
- Preparation for and connection to experiential learning opportunities necessary for career placement to include internships, co-operative education experiences, and on-campus student employment.
- The management of the On-Campus Student Employment program by Career Services allows early and frequent connection with students to encourage on-campus jobs and other experiential learning and career development. “When academic performance variables are set aside, on-campus student employment tops the list of positive predictors of retention - the odds of retention increase by 210% for students who worked on campus between 2016 and 2019.” (source: Kennedy & Co. 2020)
- Development of career readiness skills.
- Career goal setting through “career checklists” developed specifically for freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate students.
- Participation in networking opportunities with employers which leads to experiential learning positions and job placement upon graduation.
- Graduate school planning.

In addition to these efforts, the University of Akron surveys spring graduates of undergraduate programs to determine their career outcomes. For Spring 2022, 86% of graduates earning a bachelor’s degree participated in at least one experiential learning experience before graduating. UA’s Spring 2022 Career Outcomes Rate was 95%. Career Outcomes Rate is the percentage of graduates who earned an undergraduate degree and are employed full time, part time, or continuing their education. The UA career outcomes data is based upon a survey knowledge rate of 71% of our spring 2022 graduates with bachelor’s degrees.

The most recently reported nationwide data for 2022 (source: National Association for Colleges and Employers “NACE”) reports an 85.7% Career Outcomes percentage for bachelor’s degrees and a 56.7% knowledge rate demonstrating that UA is well above the national average on both metrics.

14. Retention Analytics

In 2022, the University implemented the Stellic unified student success platform to empower students to actively participate in developing their unique pathway to success, and to allow advisors and academic leadership to quickly identify students in need of academic support, outreach, or intervention. This tool, implemented at the request of students, will be an effective tool in aiding in our student’s academic success. In this comprehensive platform students have access to the degree audit, a real-time interactive semester by semester planner, appointment scheduling functions, advisor/advisee communication tools, and an AI-enhanced course registration tool capable of generating a semester schedule in one click. By reducing frustrations typical to the course registration process, advisers can focus more thoroughly on relationship-building, transition to college skills, and short and long-term goal setting for students. Early warning progress milestones within the Stellic platform provide indicators for students who may not persist at the institution or who may benefit from exploring alternative majors. Potential risks can also be scaled to identify difficult courses and use student performance in critical courses for prediction of student career outcomes.

15. Adult Persistence and Retention Efforts

The Office of Adult Focus at UA provides support to returning and current adult learners, helping them to address barriers faced by non-traditional students. This support includes but is not limited to the following:

- Comprehensive wrap-around academic support and mentoring
- Scholarship opportunities for both full and part-time students
- Programming to secure scholarship opportunities
- Access and referral for internal and external community-based organizations

Adult Focus collaborates with College Now Greater Cleveland, and Project Learn of Summit County. College Now Greater Cleveland has a satellite office within the Adult Focus complex offering ongoing support related to external scholarships and additional educational debt resolution for adult students. Project Learn continues to collaborate with Adult Focus to ensure equal college access to high school equivalency graduates making sure they are prepared to begin college level coursework. Post pandemic, the needs of adult students have intensified, rather than decreased as the economy and job market continue to shift; they are faced with ever increasing demands to balance home, work, and their academics.

In an effort to achieve the State of Ohio's goal of 65% of its workforce having a post-secondary credential (certificate, associate or baccalaureate degree) by 2025, The University of Akron was one of eight public institutions chosen to work with Ithaka S & R, the Ohio Attorney General's office and the Ohio Department of Higher Education to pilot a program designed to remove one of the largest barriers to degree completion for returning post-secondary students – stranded credits caused by past due balances. Funded by the Lumina Foundation, the Kresge Foundation and others, the Ohio Campus Comeback Compact works with students designated eligible by their institutions and the Ohio Attorney General's office to hold students harmless for their debt provided they complete specific requirements over the course of two semesters. The program holds promise and it has been approved by the funding parties for a third year and is being expanded to other regions of Ohio and across the country.

As the emphasis and focus on adult students builds at The University of Akron, the Office of Adult Focus has collaborated with Online Programs and Workforce Development as well as the Credit for Prior Learning initiative to enhance the adult student experience and provide the necessary network of services to ensure student success.

How will the goals be assessed and evaluated?

Metrics have been developed and separated into categories: general retention and completion metrics that will be reported for various bachelor's degree-seeking student cohorts, and initiative specific metrics. The student cohort groups will include developmental, first generation, Pell eligible, ethnicity, non-traditional learners (adults 25+years, learning communities and international).

Completion Strategies

Current Completion Strategies in progress-2024-2026

We can expect these current strategies to have an impact on our previously stated goals as we move into the 2024-2026 reporting period. Several initiatives have been implemented to

strategically improve progression and completion for all students at The University of Akron that include major modifications to financial aid and scholarships, a university advising redesign, and Credit for Prior Learning.

The Office of Student Financial Aid had produced three targeted solutions that will take effect with the Fall 2024 FTFY enrollment cohort. These solutions target student affordability to directly influence enrollment decision-making as well as retention and persistence outcomes as these students progress in their academic disciplines.

Financial Aid Leveraging

Transitioning away from a primarily merit-based scholarship model, UA implemented a significant transition that now prioritizes student affordability above all else in the creation of an initial financial aid package. This strategy expands the number of students who would have received scholarship awards from roughly 45% of the incoming FTFY cohort to essentially 100% of the cohort in the new formula who will now receive some form of scholarship assistance.

UA researchers identified how those students who pay more out-of-pocket for their education than others were more likely to depart the university at every level of progress for the student. Said differently, the Net Tuition Revenue for the FTFY cohort has traditionally fallen each year through a cohort group's 4th consecutive year of enrollment, which means that those who departed the institution produce more Net Tuition Revenue than those who remained, but those who departed also received less scholarship and discounts than those who have historically stayed at the university from year to year.

By more strategically leveraging aid up front, the students who have historically received little-to-no financial assistance in our enrollment past will now start to receive more financial assistance up front to make the university inherently more affordable to a much larger proportion of the incoming cohort.

Scholarship Merit Blocks

The aid leveraging strategy is executed at the student level starting with the Fall 2024 cohort group matriculating into UA. The manner through which the university will make available the additional leveraged resources will be through the wider distribution of scholarship merit blocks in their financial aid that provide the entire academic scholarship receipts to the student up front before they enroll, which then eliminates the anxiety and uncertainty of hunting for more scholarship resources throughout the rest of the application cycle. Making the receipt of more scholarship resources easier for the student should produce a more understandable and workable financial affordability position for the students as they complete the application cycle.

These merit blocks change the way the university distributes scholarships for continuing students as well, which is where this process more directly influences student retention. The intention of the larger scholarship proportion on the initial aid leveraging strategy is to provide the student with the amount of scholarship assistance they need to achieve a comfortable place of family affordability against the institution's tuition position. Historically, scholarships were dangled for students to help them sustain their enrollment, but the availability and competitive process for these limited resources can produce challenging realizations. Students who struggle to afford the university can find themselves unable to secure one of these limited scholarships.

In addition, often these scholarships would go to the best and brightest candidates and not necessarily focus on the students who have the greatest affordability challenges.

The scholarship merit block puts the scholarships where they need to be, with the students who need to have them to afford UA. These blocks help create a comfortable affordability position with the understanding that frozen annual tuition, typically flat family financials year-to-year, plus these predictable scholarship blocks should keep that affordability position intact far longer than was previously possible.

Advising Redesign

As noted in the previous report, the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) established a Taskforce on Academic Affairs in fall 2021. This initiative led to a distributed centralized model, where professional advising staff remain in the degree-granting colleges but under the direction of the Vice Provost of Student Pathways. This process has yielded greater coordination, feedback, oversight, and university-wide leadership. This transition has been successful, offering a consistent, high-quality experience for all students as they navigate between degree-granting colleges, majors, and towards degree completion.

Credit for Prior Learning

Since our launch March 2024, over one hundred individuals have received a preliminary assessment, and twelve people have already graduated with an associate or bachelor's degree in May 2024. Certificates have also been awarded.

The University of Akron has collected data on our own population of non-degree completers and will utilize targeted marketing to re-engage them to find a completion path.

The faculty at the university also approved a portfolio review path designed to evaluate learning experiences earned through work and other activities for college credit. Portfolio review is not new, but it was limited to only a few disciplines, and it was sporadically utilized. The new process is standardized, and part of the core services offered by the Credit for Prior Learning office. The portfolio offers students substantial savings on earned credits.

UA's credit for prior learning initiative aligns with the state's workforce development priorities by recognizing learning as a reciprocal process between higher education and employers. Articulating noncredit training and duties associated with specific job roles with college credit will allow UA and employers to plan more intentional paths for upskilling employees. Planned pathways between certificates, employment, and degrees will help students work and earn credentials simultaneously, which could reduce debt and increase retention for the institution and employers.

The portfolio process also gives entrepreneurs and gig workers, individuals in either temporary positions or independent contractors, the opportunity to demonstrate their competence when learning occurred in a less structured setting. Since the pandemic, more people have moved away from the traditional economy and into the gig economy. A degree offers workers flexibility to move between entrepreneurial endeavors and structured employment. UA's credit for prior learning initiative combined with workforce development initiatives like Coursera aim to help the modern worker obtain the credentials needed to remain employed and viable in a fast-moving economy.

As a new initiative, UA will be tracking the number of inquiries received regarding CPL opportunities. Relative to those inquiries, success will be measured over time by determining the percentage of students gaining some credits via CPL, the number of students able to graduate with no further coursework, and the number of students who enroll in the university subsequent to being awarded CPL. Other metrics may include tracking the number of currently enrolled students who request CPL and determining the number of credits awarded to demonstrate that the effort “shortens time to degree.

Retention Analytics

By reducing frustrations typical to the course registration process, academic advisers can focus more thoroughly on relationship-building, transition to college skills, and short and long-term goal setting for students. Early warning progress milestones within the Stellar platform provide indicators for students who may not persist at the institution or who may benefit from exploring alternative majors. Potential risks can also be scaled to identify difficult courses and use student performance in critical courses for prediction of student career outcomes. Additional initiatives include expanding the capabilities of reporting through analytics, further application of Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence, and a shift to the Microsoft Power BI reporting platform for greater collaboration and distribution of institutional reports. This opens the way to root cause analysis, identifying vulnerable populations, and more rigorous academic assessment in the context of serving student needs.

Additional or Updated Completion Strategies

Complete College America (CCA)

1. Developmental Education Reform-Co-Requisite Remediation

Complete College America (CCA), a national advocacy organization focused on improving college completion for all students, recruited state cohorts to participate in the College Accelerator Project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Ohio is represented by two cohorts comprised of community colleges and eight public universities, including UA. There are eleven state partners, comprised of 80+ colleges and universities committed to improving student success and closing gaps in college access and completion. The project’s goals are: (1) Engage select institutions in a continuous improvement process leading to institutional transformation; (2) Provide institutions with critical insight regarding opportunities for institutional growth and (3) Partner with institutional leaders to identify and implement game changing strategies that will lead to improved equitable student outcomes. CCA emphasizes strategies to address performance gaps and recommend that postsecondary institutions design programs and strategies that allow students to see a clear pathway to a workplace credential, while also gaining momentum with initiatives such as co-requisite remediation and Finish in Time. Additionally, creating alignment to the student experience and career goals and addressing needs and removing barriers comprise the foundation of CCA’s work (Complete College America. Building on Completion Gains (Complete College America. Building on Completion Gains: Amplifying Progress and Closing Persistent Gaps. (2022). <https://completercollege.org/resource/BuildingOnCompletionGains>.

As participants in the College Accelerator initiative, UA selected four targets for its areas of transformation:

Mathematics

Through our work with CCA, UA has engaged in rigorous efforts to increase the number of students who enroll and successfully complete credit bearing courses. The Department of Mathematics has developed a preliminary plan to move students into credit-bearing mathematics courses sooner using extended (co-requisite) courses. At the end of this reporting cycle, we will conduct a comparison of credit bearing versus non-credit bearing courses to determine if students enrolled in co-requisite or credit bearing courses were successful. *With approximately 1000 students enrolling in developmental mathematics each fall, the Department of Mathematics plans to move at least 60% of the Developmental Math students into the following credit bearing math courses:*

- Math for Everyday Life-Extended (270 students-Fall 2025) for students who placed into Basic Math I
- College Algebra (110 students-Fall 2025)-Students who placed into Intermediate Algebra
- College Algebra (160 students-Fall 2025)-Students placed into Basic Math II
- Technical Algebra and Trigonometry I-Extended (80 students-Fall 2024)- Designed for STEM Majors

Statistics

Currently, students not performing adequately on the math portion of the ACT/SAT or on placement test are required to successfully complete Developmental Math 1 prior to enrolling in Statistics for Everyday Life. In place of students taking Developmental Math 1, the Statistics Department will launch a pilot, fall 2024 with a cohort of 25 to 30 students, with sequential courses, a two-credit course in the fall and a three-credit course in the spring. The two-credit course would introduce basic math skills and concepts that are specific to master for a beginning Statistics course. With the successful implementation of this pilot, the Department of Statistics will evaluate this pilot to determine if additional cohorts will be implemented for fall 2025 and 2026.

2. Guided Pathways

To aid students in timely degree completion, UA will launch Summer 2024 the Finish in Time campaign. CCA emphasizes strategies to address performance gaps and recommends postsecondary institutions design programs and strategies that allow students to see a clear pathway to a workplace credential, while also gaining momentum with initiatives such as co-requisite remediation and Finish in Time.



Students will be informed of the benefits of timely degree completion, including financial savings, an opportunity to enter the workforce earlier and not miss career-relevant opportunities. Advisers and other student success professionals will encourage students to take 15-16 credit hours per semester or 30 credit hours over the course of the academic year, including summer sessions.

Additionally, our data has shown that first-year students who complete math/statistics and English requirements during their first year have a higher retention rate than students who do not complete those courses in their first year. Therefore, through the efforts of our advising staff, students will be strongly urged to register and complete these courses during their first year at UA. We will monitor the persistence and retention rates of those who have completed these courses versus those who have not and seek to increase the number of students registered for those courses.

3. Digital Learning

The University will work with CCA to enhance our ability to deliver high-quality digital teaching and learning in all modalities and reduce inequities among all student populations. Additionally, with the recent implementation of Workday, we also aim for better integration with the Learning Management System, Brightspace and to increase the number of faculty who effectively use the gradebook tool.

4. Institutional Research

To provide timely, accurate and actionable data to be disseminated throughout the institution to all stakeholders. By enhancing the use of data at UA, this will influence the analysis of student data, further identifying factors that influence student success, retention and provide insights to improve student outcomes.

First-Year Experience (FYE) Taskforce

UA reestablished its First Year Experience (FYE) Taskforce, led by the Vice Provost for Student Pathways, and comprised of faculty and professional staff, with a focus on strengthening and scaling High Impact Practices (HIPS) in the first year and improving the overall experience for all students. The FYE Taskforce creates a seamless student experience and overall support for all students entering and completing their first year through enhanced student engagement, curricular and co-curricular experiences, as well as increasing academic success, persistence, and completion. This integrated approach to a student's first year will encompass all aspects ranging from enrollment and orientation to advising and engagement. During the 2023-24 academic year, the areas of focus included the following:

- First-Year Seminar
- Learning Communities
- Academic Support Services
- The Transfer Experience
- First-Year Programming
- Learning and Engagement

The 2024-2025 year, the FYE Taskforce will continue to focus on the aforementioned areas and provide a special emphasis on first-generation students with its acceptance into the First Scholars Network sponsored by the NASPA and the Suder Foundation. This national recognition and network will allow us to partner with peer institutions across the country to receive and share information rooted in evidence-based practices to increase first generation student success.

The University of Akron is committed to being an opportunity institution for all learners as outlined in our mission and vision. We have restructured our staffing and practices to focus on students across all pathways. Through the work of our FYE Taskforce, we have focused our work on HIPS, particularly in the first year. While we have had success with many of these programs over the years, not enough students have been enrolled in them nor have enough been able to benefit from the advantages of participation. Research has demonstrated that underrepresented and first generation students greatly benefit from participation in HIPS, and to ensure that these experiences are not afforded to a select few but scaled and offered to all entering first-year students, *we seek to increase participation in our learning communities Program from 30% participation in fall 2023 to 60% participation for fall 2024 and seek to increase participation throughout the reporting period.*

Tutoring and Learning Assistants

The University of Akron offers students virtual tutoring options that go beyond the working hours of on-campus centers and provide academic support for all learners. Tutor.com, a service of the Princeton Review, provides scheduled or on-demand one-on-one tutoring sessions with highly qualified tutors in more than 250 subjects with text, voice, and video options to accommodate all learners. Additionally, students have access to OhioLink eTutoring, a collaborative effort between Ohio's two and four-year institutions of higher learning, allowing undergraduate students to interact with trained tutors in specific academic areas. *For fall 2024, learning assistants will be embedded in all Pre-Calculus Courses to aid students in successful course completion.*

Workforce

The University of Akron has more than 30 programs that align with the eleven key industries referenced in the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation's In-Demand Jobs List. An outstanding feature of these academic programs are opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning through co-ops, internships and clinicals. UA will continue to increase opportunities for students to receive relevant work-related experience as demonstrated through our 2022 Career Outcome Rate with 99% full-time placement after 6-month graduation for the College of Engineering and Polymer Science and 96% full-time placement for graduates of the College of Health and Human Services. Below is a sampling of the degrees offered at The University of Akron that align with each industry.

Advanced Manufacturing

- Automated Manufacturing Engineering Technology
- Chemistry
- Chemical Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Technology
- Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering

Advanced Mobility

- Aerospace Systems Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Science
- Electrical Engineering
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Technology

Aerospace and Aviation

- Aerospace Systems Engineering
- Biomedical Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Science
- Electrical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering

Automotive

- Automated Manufacturing Engineering Technology
- Biomedical Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Technology

Energy and Chemicals

- Chemical Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Construction Engineering Technology
- Electrical Engineering
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Technology
- Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering
- Survey and Mapping

Financial Services

- Computer Information Systems
- Computer Science
- Financial Planning
- Financial Management
- Risk Management and Insurance
- Accounting
- Business Data Analytics
- Economics

Food and Agribusiness

- Biomedical Engineering
- Chemical Engineering

HealthCare

- Allied Healthcare Administration
- Audiology
- Biology
- Biomedical Engineering
- Chemical Engineering
- Computer Information Systems
- Computer Science
- Exercise Science
- Health Care Administration
- Health Care Leadership and Management
- Health Service Coding & Reimbursement
- Medical Assisting
- Nursing
- Respiratory Therapy
- Social Work
- Speech Language Pathology

Logistics and Distribution

- Computer Information Systems
- Computer Science
- Supply Chain and Operations Management

Military and Federal

- Aerospace Systems Engineering
- Civil Engineering
- Construction Engineering Technology
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Information Systems
- Computer Science
- Electrical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering Technology

Technology

- Automated Manufacturing Engineering Technology
- Computer Information Systems
- Construction Engineering Technology
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology
- Information Systems
- Mechanical Engineering Technology
- Surveying and Mapping

Though UA has initiated projects in a variety of the areas related to the 11 key industries over the past several years, the most recent projects have proliferated from the area of Health Care. The following programs have all been initiated over the past 2 years and will continue to be an area of growth for the University.

Bachelor's Degrees:

Health care Administration

Health care Leadership and Management

Associate degrees:

AAS in Nursing

Certificates:

Medical Assisting

Health Services Coding & Reimbursement

Requirement for ORC 3345.81 (D)

UA has 104 bilateral agreements providing a multitude of pathways for students to find success in earning a degree. These articulation agreements with other institutions of higher education (including 5 community colleges) as well as technical centers, allow students to transfer coursework on their journey to earning an associate degree, certificate, or other credential. For example, the Health Care Administration program (and soon, the Healthcare Leadership and Management) has created articulation agreements to assist students in obtaining sonography certificates, a Doctor of Chiropractic degree, and an accelerated nursing (BSN) program. The university is also speaking with local employers regarding re-activating the radiologic technology program.

The following are additional programs built to assist students with some college in earning a degree or certificate.

- The university has an approved Medical Assisting certificate. This is a stackable certificate that will allow the student to take the credits earned and work their way to earning the Health Services AAS.
- The university has approved a Nursing, AAS and has partnered with Akron Childrens Hospital to meet the needs of the nursing community. This program leads directly into the RN-BSN program, a degree which is required for most local area hospitals.
- The university also has a Health Services Coding and Reimbursement certificate that prepares the student to sit for two national certification exams. This is also a stackable certificate that allows credit for the AAS, and the two BS programs listed above.

Provide information about the institution's efforts to assist students in attaining an associate degree, certificate, or credential while earning a bachelor's degree or using college credit transferred between institutions of higher education.

There are 2 main initiatives at UA relating to these particular efforts, Credit for Prior Learning and UAx/Coursera. Both are described below.

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

The program launched in March 2024 and included the creation of an office, a website, and concierge service, which synthesized previous prior learning assessment activities, and increased efforts to grant credit for prior learning.

A concierge coordinator provides an individualized assessment of a student's record including assessing military, work, and previous higher education. By first articulating all previous college coursework in terms of transfer credit, earned credit in the military, and articulated certificates and licenses, those with some college and no degree, may be immediately qualified for one.

Since our launch in March, over one hundred people have received a preliminary assessment, and twelve people are scheduled to graduate with an associate or bachelor's degree in May. Certificates have also been awarded.

The faculty at the university also approved a portfolio review path designed to evaluate learning experiences earned through work and other activities for college credit. Portfolio review is not new, but it was limited to only a few disciplines, and it was sporadically utilized. The new

process is standardized, and part of the core services offered by the Credit for Prior Learning office. The portfolio offers students substantial savings on earned credits.

UA's credit for prior learning initiative aligns with the state's workforce development priorities by recognizing learning as a reciprocal process between higher education and employers. Articulating noncredit training and duties associated with specific job roles with college credit will allow UA and employers to plan more intentional paths for upskilling employees. Planned pathways between certificates, employment, and degrees will help students work and earn credentials simultaneously, which could reduce debt and increase retention for the institution and employers.

The portfolio process also gives entrepreneurs and gig workers the opportunity to demonstrate their competence when learning occurred in a less structured setting. Since the pandemic, more people have moved away from the traditional economy and into the gig economy. A degree offers workers flexibility to move between entrepreneurial endeavors and structured employment. UA's credit for prior learning initiative combined with workforce development initiatives like Coursera aim to help the modern worker obtain the credentials needed to remain employed and viable in a fast-moving economy.

The University of Akron's credit for prior learning program will increase degree completion and re-engage those with some college and no degree. By offering a new assessment of previous credit and prior learning experience, students will avoid redundant coursework, and be given a more affordable, quicker path to completion.

UAx and +PlusPath

UA Extended Campus (UAx) is an initiative managed by the Department of Online, Continuing, and Professional Education (OCPE) within The University of Akron. Dedicated to helping businesses, government agencies and individuals, UA Extended Campus (UAx) utilizes the resources of the University and industry experts to provide targeted training and business-specific educational offerings that will help them achieve greater success. The mission of UAx is to provide customers with a competitive advantage by encouraging them to utilize The University of Akron's expert consulting and customized training resources. With its customer-focused approach and deep knowledge of the educational requirements today's economy demands, UAx helps businesses, government and individuals develop workforce solutions that will better empower them to meet regional and global challenges.

UAx, building on Governor DeWine's recent executive order emphasizing the value of skill-based hiring practices, developed a program to meet the evolving needs of our community. Our +Plus Path program combines academic degrees with industry-recognized certificates, empowering individuals to showcase their skills and secure employment. By offering professional certificates from leading companies like Google and IBM, this unique partnership with Coursera equips our students, staff, faculty, and alumni with the skills most in demand in today's job market. This initiative aligns with the state's vision and positions our institution as a leader in skills-based education.

Requirement for ORC 3345.351

The University of Akron evaluated every disenrolled student who met the criteria for an Associate of Arts degree. **After confirming with the National Student Clearinghouse that these individuals did not earn a degree from another institution, the Office of the Registrar determined that 385 disenrolled students met the requirements for the Associate of Arts degree and will be awarded this credential.** Additionally, the 1320 disenrolled students, regarded as “close” or within 15 credits of an Associate of Arts degree will be contacted by our Credit for Prior Learning team to discuss an assessment of previous credit and prior learning and professional experiences to determine an affordable path to degree completion.