The Student Success Innovation Lab (SSIL) launched in the summer of 2018 under the Division of Strategy and Policy at the UNC System Office. The Lab leverages the UNC System platform to engage in research and development on what works to increase college completion rates. The project links two key assets: student success initiatives developed and implemented by our universities and UNC System faculty with expertise in the evaluation of education programs.

Specifically, the SSIL:
- Provides grants to university practitioners to implement promising student success strategies;
- Enlists faculty and staff from within the UNC System who have expertise in program evaluation to conduct a rigorous evaluation of each grant-funded strategy.

The grants will support innovative practices in three areas: teaching and learning, student services, and financial aid. Individual initiatives that prove successful can be scaled up at the home institution and, where appropriate, expanded across the UNC System. To date, the Strategy and Policy Division has raised $3.85 million in funding from the ECMC Foundation, the John M. Belk Endowment, Arnold Ventures, and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation.

In the first SSIL grant competition, external reviewers selected six projects for implementation and evaluation. Each implementation team developed its project in concert with one of six Research Affiliates—faculty from within the UNC System who were selected by the Student Success Innovation Lab on the basis of their expertise in education research. These Research Affiliates partnered with the institutional teams to plan the projects and draft proposals. They will now serve as the principal investigators to conduct the evaluation of the SSIL projects.

2019 SSIL Projects

UNC Asheville: *Working Smarter and Harder: Advising and Registration for Timely Graduation*
- **Research Affiliate:** Angela Dills, Western Carolina University
- **Project Description:** The grant will fund two student advising initiatives: a course scheduling tool that helps students optimize their schedule and a full-time case manager, who will support students most likely to struggle academically. Students with academic warning status and students who receive academic alerts in the first eight weeks of class will be eligible to participate.

East Carolina University: *Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Impact of Learning Assistants*
- **Research Affiliates:** Carl Westine, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Nianbo Dong, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- **Project Description:** This project will expand an existing Learning Assistant model to include additional gatekeeper courses in subject areas with high rates of D's, fails, and withdraws (economics, foreign language, and math). The learning assistants are trained, near-peer undergraduate student instructors, who will co-teach courses with instructors while concurrently enrolled in a course on curriculum and pedagogy.

UNC Charlotte: "*Funds to Finish" Index and Intervention: Identifying Students with Financial and Academic Planning Risk and Intervening to Promote Timely Graduation*

- **Research Affiliate:** Dora Gicheva, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- **Project Description:** UNCC will develop a "Funds to Finish" index that assesses whether a student's academic plan is aligned with his or her financial aid eligibility. UNCC's advisors will be able to intervene when students struggle in gateway courses to help them re-conceptualize their academic pathways. Students will also receive access to financial aid counseling modules. Randomly selected students who complete the financial aid counseling modules will receive $250.

UNC Greensboro: *Disrupting the Churn: The Effect of Targeted Supports on Late College Outcomes*

- **Research Affiliate:** Steve Hemelt, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- **Project Description:** Students in this project will receive support from a Major Transition Advisor to identify alternative academic majors that may be a better fit based on academic strengths, career aspirations, and timely degree completion. Randomly selected students will receive a grant ($500-$1,000) to support graduation in exchange for participating in the year-long transition and advising coaching.

North Carolina A&T State University: *The Aggie Success Academy*

- **Research Affiliate:** Julie Edmunds, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- **Project Description:** The Aggie Success Academy allows students who have one or more of the risk factors that influence retention to take general education courses (English, history, and freshman studies) in the summer before their first fall enrollment. Students will have the support of the university's tutoring, advising, financial literacy, and academic skills programs.

UNC Pembroke: *Using "Completion Grants" to Help More Students Graduate*

- **Evaluation team:** Tina McEntire, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Insight Policy Research
- **Project Description:** UNC Pembroke will provide "completion grants" to students who are close to graduation but have an unpaid university balance and have exhausted all other sources of financial aid. The pilot will follow UNC Charlotte's successful completion grant model. Results from UNCC's program show that the overall graduation rate is 8.4 points higher for the completion grant recipients than the control group, and about half of the grant recipients graduated in the term they received the grant. (The System Office is in the process of selecting an additional three universities to participate in this project alongside UNC Pembroke.)