University of South Carolina recognized as national leader in graduating minority students

The University of South Carolina has been recognized as one of the leading universities in the country for improving graduation rates for minority students and ranks in the top five among flagship universities for closing the graduation gap between minority and white students over the past decade.

University of South Carolina’s graduation rate for minority students is among the best in the nation and the school is one of only 26 singled out for exemplary performance in a new national report examining minority student graduation rates.

The Education Trust report, titled “Rising Tide,” examined graduation rates among students at colleges and universities over a 10-year span. The results showed that from 2003 to 2013, graduation rates among minority students enrolled at public four-year colleges and universities rose by 6.3 percent, with a minority graduation rate of just over 50 percent.

At the University of South Carolina, the graduation rate rose by 12.3 percent over the past decade, with a minority graduation rate of more than 67 percent. In addition, the gap between white and minority student graduation rates declined by 5.3 percent during the same 10-year period.

"The University of South Carolina’s high ranking in today’s ‘Rising Tide’ report by The Education Trust is a strong affirmation of our intentional and thoughtful approach to improving graduation rates for all students,” said University of South Carolina President Harris Pastides. “The rising completion rates for underrepresented students are particularly gratifying. I applaud the university’s administrative team, faculty and staff for the implementation of best practices in recruitment, advising and student support as well as the creation of a full summer semester that encourages our students to graduate early or as we say, ‘On Your Time.’ ”

The Education Trust is a national nonprofit advocacy organization that promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels, particularly for students of color and low-income students. While the report made clear that many intuitions must do more to boost graduation
rates for minority students, it highlighted the University of South Carolina as a model for achieving success. The University of South Carolina is the only South Carolina school included in the list.

“Leading institutions have shown how leaders can change the culture of their campus to focus on student success. They consistently analyze their data, they find troubling trends, they engage faculty to find solutions, and they listen to students and make them part of the problem-solving process,” said Andrew H. Nichols, director of research for The Education Trust and the report’s co-author.

The gains at the University of South Carolina are the result of a sustained effort by the university to ensure every student who is admitted has the support needed to graduate, said Dennis Pruitt, vice president for student affairs, vice provost and dean of students.

Those programs include:

- Student Success Center: A comprehensive one-stop-shop for academic support services includes peer tutoring, one-on-one academic coaching and mentoring programs.
- University 101: A pioneering program first introduced in 1972, University 101 is designed to help new students make a successful transition to the university, both academically and personally.
- Gamecock Guarantee: The scholarship program offers first-generation college students with financial need the opportunity to attend University of South Carolina. The program covers undergraduate tuition and technology fees for four years and provides an array of support services.
- Opportunity Scholars: The program encourages first-generation, low-income student success by creating a “small college” atmosphere. Program participants take freshman-year courses as a cohort and engage in tutoring assistance, academic advising, guidance on undergraduate research and study abroad opportunities, mentoring and cultural enrichment opportunities.
- Gamecock Gateway: In partnership with Midlands Technical College, University of South Carolina offers a way for students, including those traditionally underrepresented, to make the transition to university life.
- The Office of Diversity and Inclusion: Led by the university’s chief diversity officer, the office is dedicated to developing campuswide diversity strategies.

“This university is a unique place where there are opportunities for students to be successful inside and outside the classroom,” Pruitt said. “We’ve normalized the idea that all students need help at some point — whether it be academic, social or emotional — and we’ve put programs and services in place to meet whatever individual needs a student may have.”

Earlier this year, the University of South Carolina was awarded its fourth consecutive Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine. And, according to Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, University of South Carolina ranks 74th in the country in graduating African-Americans across all disciplines, putting it in the top 3 percent nationally.