

Temple University

Opening up opportunities for motivated students of all backgrounds to access an excellent college education has been part of the Temple experience since Russell Conwell, the university's founder, offered to teach a group of young Philadelphians with little money or formal education in 1884. That tradition continues today, manifested in a series of innovative initiatives tackling higher education's toughest challenges: opening up new admissions pathways, improving retention and graduation rates, and reducing student debt.

FLY IN 4 is Temple's new graduation partnership. The goal: reduce student debt by getting more students to graduate on time. Students who sign the pact pledge to meet with advisors, advance in class standing, and have a graduation-review meeting. In return, if a student isn't able to access the courses needed to graduate in four years, Temple will pay for the remainder. Today's Temple sophomores are the first class with access to Fly in 4. Six hundred more sophomores than last year are on track to graduate in four years. If they stay the course, they'll save more than \$15 million in college costs.

Although many colleges have similar graduation pacts, Fly in 4 is the only one that offers need-based grants for the 500 students with the greatest financial need in each freshman class. In creating the need-based grants, President Neil D. Theobald cited research suggesting that students who work off-campus more than 15 hours a week are significantly less likely to graduate on time. "The notion of 'working your way through college' is a myth," Theobald says.

TEMPLE OPTION is a new admissions pathway for students who show great potential for success but don't perform well on standardized tests. Temple was the first public national research university in the Northeast and remains one of the nation's only urban-serving public national research universities to offer "test-optional" admissions. Temple Option is a response to the growing body of research suggesting that high-school GPA, class rank and "noncognitive" factors (such as a student's grit, determination and self-confidence) are more reliable predictors of college success. "We cannot ignore the mounting evidence that standardized test scores inject socioeconomic bias into the admissions and financial aid equations," says Temple Provost Hai-Lung Dai.

About 18 percent of freshman enrolling at Temple in fall 2015—the first cohort that could apply via the Temple Option—elected not to submit standardized test scores. Freshman enrollment among underserved populations surged (African-American and Latino enrollment increased by 19.9 and 25.7 percent respectively) while the average high school GPA of Temple freshmen continued to climb, reaching a record high of 3.51.

Other innovative programs include:

- **ADVISING INITIATIVES** such as the Risk-based Retention Project, a custom-designed statistical model that identifies students at the greatest risk of dropping out during their first year so that advisers can personally intervene; and the Critical Paths Program, which helps students stay on course to graduate by creating eight-semester academic maps for every major at Temple, including critical milestones for advisers and students to track.
- **DIAMOND AMBASSADOR SCHOLARSHIPS**, which encourage low-income students to study abroad. Getting more students from low-income and/or first-generation families to consider studying abroad is one of the most stubborn challenges in higher education. These use-it-or-lose-it funds, which may be used to fund study abroad at any point in a student's Temple career, are automatically pushed to sophomores with the greatest combination of financial need and freshman GPA.
- **THE TRANSFORMATION PLANNING GRANT.** Temple was one of seven universities selected to receive a bold new grant from APLU/USU that seeks to transform the way higher education is delivered. Temple used the funds to bolster its new admission pathway (see Temple Option, above), to develop a new pilot pre-college curriculum at a nearby urban public high school, and to explore new ways to incorporate noncognitive factors in retention strategies.

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