Executive Summary

At SF State, it is estimated that each year approximately 10% of students are denied graduation after applying to graduate under the assumption that they are ready to earn their degree. Students who are denied graduation often report feeling discouraged and confused. Without proactive guidance and support, these students may walk away from earning their degree, when they are very close to final degree completion.

In January 2017, our campus hired 16 new advisors as part of the rollout of the Campus Student Success Plan. The Graduation Denial Project (GDP) was piloted in June-August 2017 to provide support to students who had been denied graduation for the Spring 2017 term. Advisors reached out to students who had been given final denial notices in order to:

- Ensure students knew they have been denied graduation and review the reasons for the denial
- Determine options for students to resolve their graduation denial
- If possible, assist students with resolving missing requirements through GE petitions, referrals to other departments, etc.
- Gather data on the reasons for graduation denial in order to reduce the denial rate for future semesters

In Spring 2017, 4,040 students applied for graduation, of whom 327 students were denied graduation (an 8.09% denial rate). The colleges with the lowest rates of graduation denials were the College of Business (4.65%), the College of Health and Social Sciences (5.06%), and the Graduate College of Education (5.43%). The colleges with the highest rates of graduation denials were the College of Ethnic Studies (19.40%), the College of Liberal and Creative Arts (11.31%), and the College of Science and Engineering (9.51%).

Of the 327 denied students, 279 received some form of outreach from a College Success Team (CST) advisor. Students who did not receive outreach from a CST advisor, worked with a graduation evaluator from the Registrar’s Office to resolve their denial.

Of the students who received outreach, the most common reasons for graduation denial were: missing major requirements (54%); not meeting the 120-unit minimum (23%); missing upper division general education requirements (10%); and not meeting the 40-unit upper division minimum (8%).

Advisors sent 251 emails, made 192 phone calls, and got a response from 147 students. Advisors were able to plan a resolution for all missing requirements for 80% of these students and at least some missing requirements with 97% of these students. The most common means to resolution were planning future coursework (61%) and resolving an issue with the students’ transcripts (17%).

Of the students who responded to advisor outreach, 11% planned on resolving their denial issue, allowing them to still graduate in Spring 2017. The remaining students planned on graduating during the upcoming academic year, either in Summer 2017 (35%), Fall 2017 (46%), or Spring 2018 (9%). At the conclusion of the GDP in August 2017, 71 previously denied students (22%) had been awarded their degrees.
Introduction

The Graduation Denial Project (GDP) was piloted in June-August 2017 in order to provide support for students who had been denied graduation. Advisors from each College Success Team (CST) reached out to students who had been denied graduation in order to:

- Ensure students knew they have been denied graduation and review the reasons for the denial
- Determine options for students to resolve their graduation denial
- If possible, assist students with resolving missing requirements through GE petitions, referrals to other departments, etc.
- Gather data on the reasons for graduation denial in order to reduce the denial rate for future semesters

A total of 4,040* students applied for graduation in Spring 2017; of those applicants, 327* students received a preliminary and/or final denial. Of these denied students, 265 were referred to CST members by graduation evaluators, and 279 received some form of outreach from a CST advisor.

*Students who double majored in different colleges are counted twice in these figures.

A breakdown of denied students, referred students, and students who received outreach are broken down by college below.

### Outreach Efforts

Graduation Evaluators from the Registrar’s Office referred 265 denied students directly to the CST advisors. Every student who was referred to a CST received an email and/or a phone call. Some teams also reached out to denied students who were not directly referred to a CST; other denied students reached out to a CST on their own, after receiving their denial letter.
If students responded to outreach, advisors within the CSTs worked with them to determine their missing requirements and possible strategies for resolution.

The following chart breaks down denied students and outreach efforts per college.

### Missing Requirements

For students who responded to outreach, CST advisors were able to determine the missing requirements that caused the graduation denial. These missing requirements were based on official denial letters from the graduation evaluators and flagged requirements on the students’ Degree Progress Report (DPR).

Missing requirements were classified as: **Major** (any requirement within the major); **Minor** (any requirement within a declared minor); **LDGE** (any lower division GE requirement); **UDGE** (any upper division GE requirement); **GPA** (grade point average below a 2.0 in any GPA metric); **120** (fewer than 120 total units); **UD Units** (fewer than 40 upper division units); **Other Units** (such as residency unit minimum); **AI** (American Institution Requirements); **WER** (Written English Requirements); **SF State** (any of the SF State Studies requirements); **Comp Study** (complementary studies); and **Other** (such as CESD requirements on the old Segment GE pattern).

Among all referred students, the most common reason for graduation denial was missing a major requirement (54%). The next most common reasons were: not meeting the 120-unit minimum (23%); missing UDGE (10%); not meeting the UD unit minimum (8%); and missing LDGE (8%).
Across each college, the most common reasons for graduation denial varied. A breakdown of denials due to missing major requirements, 120 units, UDGE, UD Units, and/or LDGE is presented below.

More information about missing requirements in each college is presented in the Appendix under College Reports (starting on page 8).

Resolution of Denials

Students worked with CST advisors to generate a plan to resolve their missing graduation requirements and determine a timeline for graduation.

Possible resolution options included: completing a GE petition to complete a missing GE requirement; resolving an issue with a major class, such as completing a course substitution; fixing an issue with a transcript from a student’s transfer institution(s); retroactively withdrawing a student from a course(s);
planning future coursework for a student at SF State or another institution; or partially resolving a student’s missing requirements (e.g. solving some but not all missing requirements).

The most common resolution across all colleges was to plan on taking future coursework (61%). Amongst those students, the majority (75%) planned to return to SF State for those classes.

While planning a resolution for their graduation denials, CST advisors assisted students with planning a timeline for reapplying to graduate. In cases where students could prove that all graduation requirements were met by the end of the Spring 2017 term, students were awarded their degree retroactively for Spring 2017. Other students who needed to complete additional requirements, planned to apply for graduation in a future term.

The majority of students planned to graduate in an upcoming term, either in Summer 2017 (35%), Fall 2017 (46%), or Spring 2018 (9%). 11% of students planned to resolve their missing requirements and graduate in Spring 2017.
At the conclusion of the GDP in August of 2017, approximately 22% of previously denied students had reapplied for graduation and been awarded their degrees. A breakdown of these students by college is presented below:

* denotes number of graduated students in each college from the students who were initially denied graduation

**Recommendations**

As a result of the Spring 2017 GDP, the CST advisors have developed the following recommendations:

- Continue structured outreach efforts to students who have been denied graduation
- Move the graduation application deadline to the semester prior to the student’s intended graduation term. This will allow more time to note any missing requirements and allow students more time to resolve those missing requirements.
Graduation Denial Project
Spring 2017

- Improve the tone and consistency of messaging to students who are denied graduation, to ensure they receive friendly and accurate information regarding their denial and missing requirements. Include content in denial messages which refers students to advising and offers support.

- Streamline the process by which previously denied students can reapply for graduation. This could include a shortened reapplication form that clearly identifies how the student has resolved their previous denial. This shortened reapplication form should also carry a much smaller application fee or perhaps no fee.

- In collaboration with colleges and departments across campus, utilize GDP data to determine the most common reasons for graduation denials and possible solutions for those issues.

The CST advisors are continuing their outreach efforts to students denied graduation in Summer 2017 and Fall 2017.
Appendix: College Reports

College of Business

The College of Business (CoB) College Success Team consisted of one college specialist and 3 part-time graduation specialists. In Spring 2017, 942 CoB students applied for graduation, of whom 42 CoB students were denied graduation (4.6%). In Spring 2017, CoB had the lowest rate of graduation denials among all of the colleges.

Of the students denied graduation, 31 were referred to the CoB team, and 33 received outreach from the CoB team. Outreach efforts and response rate for CoB are described below.

![Caseload and Outreach CoB](image)

Of these 42 denied students, the CoB team was able to determine the reasons for denial for 40 students. These missing requirements are presented below.

![Missing Requirements CoB](image)

Advisors were able to assist 31 students in planning for how to complete their missing requirements. For most of these students, they also helped in determining a reasonable timeline for graduation. See information presented below.
Graduation denial rates varied from department to department. The departments with the highest rates of denial within the CoB were Labor Studies (16.67%), Economics (15.38%), and Decision Sciences (9.09%). The lowest rates of denial were in the departments of Accounting (1.35%), Management (2.21%), and Marketing (3.08%).
*n values indicate total graduation applications within that department during Spring 2017.

CoB also has a unique advising model in that all Business Administration majors receive their major and GE advising from the CoB Student Success Center. Other majors within CoB (Economics, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Labor Studies) receive their major advising from faculty advisors, and must seek out GE advising from the UAC or their CST.

The following chart depicts the graduation denial rates for Business Administration and non-Business Administration majors in CoB.

During the Spring 2017 semester, the denial rate for non-Business Administration majors was almost twice as high (7.87%) compared to Business Administration majors (4.07%). Efforts to encourage non-Business Administration majors within CoB to seek non-major advising from the CoB Student Success Center may reduce this denial rate.
**College of Ethnic Studies**

The College of Ethnic Studies (ETHS) College Success Team consisted of one college specialist and one part-time graduation specialist. In Spring 2017, 67 ETHS students applied for graduation, of whom 13 were denied graduation (19.4%). In Spring 2017, ETHS had the highest rate of graduation denials among all of the colleges.

6 of these students were referred to the ETHS team, and 13 received outreach from the ETHS team. Outreach efforts and response rate for ETHS are described below.

![Caseload and Outreach ETHS](image)

Of the 13 denied students, the ETHS team was able to determine the reasons for denial for 11 students. Their missing requirements are presented below.

![Missing Requirements ETHS](image)

Advisors were able to assist 5 students in planning to complete their missing requirements and in determining a timeline for completing their degree. See information presented below.
The departments with the highest rates of denial within ETHS were Africana Studies (40.00%) and American Indian Studies (33.33%). The lowest rates of denial were in Asian American Studies (13.04%) and Latino Studies (16.13%).

*n values indicate total graduation applications within that department during Spring 2017.
The smaller number of applicants in ETHS makes it difficult to compare the reasons for denial between different majors. However, graduation denials in ETHS on a whole exhibited different patterns than graduation denials in other colleges. ETHS students had the highest rate of denials for failing to reach the 120-unit minimum and lacking lower division GE requirements (not including the Graduate College of Education). Future efforts could emphasize the importance of seeking advising help for non-major requirements, and the importance of keeping track of total unit minimums.

ETHS students also had the second lowest rate of graduation denials due to lacking UDGE. This may be due to the number of UDGE classes found within ETHS, which may indicate the value of submitting multiple classes within a given major for UDGE approval.

**Graduate College of Education**

Students from the Graduate College of Education (GCoE) received outreach from advisors in other CSTs. In Spring 2017, 92 GCoE students applied for graduation, of whom 5 were denied graduation (5.43%).

2 of these students were referred to the CSTs, and 2 received outreach from a CST advisor. Outreach efforts and response rate for GCoE are described below.

Of these 5 denied students, the CST was able to determine the reasons for denial for 2 students. The missing requirements are presented below.

The GCoE students did not respond to outreach efforts, and therefore the advisors were unable to assist these students.
College of Health and Social Sciences

The College of Health and Social Sciences (HSS) College Success Team consisted of one college specialist and two part-time graduation specialists. In Spring 2017, 891 HSS students applied for graduation, of whom 45 were denied graduation (5.27%). In Spring 2017, HSS had the 2nd lowest denial rate amongst all of the colleges.

39 students were referred to the HSS team, and 36 received outreach from the team. Outreach efforts and response rates for HSS are described below.

![Caseload and Outreach HSS](image)

Of the 45 denied students, the HSS team was able to determine the reasons for denial for 34 students. The missing requirements are presented below.

![Missing Requirements HSS](image)

Advisors were able assist 29 students in planning a resolution for their denial and determining a timeline for completing their degree. See information presented on next page.
Graduation denial rates varied from department to department. The departments with the highest rates of denial within HSS were Environmental Studies (11.54%), Social Work (8.70%), and Sociology (8.00%). HSS had four programs without a single graduation denial (0.00%): Dietetics; Industrial Design; Nursing; and Recreation, Parks, and Tourism.
*n values indicate total graduation applications within that department during Spring 2017.

Several of the departments in HSS are set up in cohorts, where groups of students take similar courses and meet regularly with a major advisor. These departments are Nursing and Child and Adolescent Development. In Spring 2017, denial rates in these cohorted departments were more than three times lower than in non-cohorted departments (1.69% compared to 6.16%). Other departments may wish to examine the strategies utilized in these cohorted departments when attempting to address their own graduation denial rates.

College of Liberal and Creative Arts

The College of Liberal and Creative Arts (LCA) College Success Team consisted of one college specialist and two graduation specialists. In Spring 2017, 1322 LCA students applied for graduation, and 147 were denied graduation (11.12%). In Spring 2017, LCA had the second highest rate of graduation denial across all of the colleges.
116 students were referred to the LCA team, and 147 received outreach from the LCA team. Outreach efforts and response rates for LCA are described below.

Of the 147 denied students, the LCA team was able to determine the reasons for denial for 107 students. The missing requirements are presented below.

Advisors were able to assist 65 students in planning how to complete their requirements. 51 of these students also planned a timeline for their degree completion. See information on next page.
LCA has the greatest number of departments out of any college at SF State, and had amongst the greatest variation in graduation denial rates. During Spring 2017, the highest rates of denial were found in Women and Gender Studies (27.78%), Political Science (19.28%), and Philosophy (18.52%). The lowest graduation denial rates were found in Technical and Professional Writing (0%), Broadcast Electronics and Communication Arts department (3.50%), Theatre Arts (5.36%).

Graduation denial rates for each department in LCA are presented on the next page.
*n values indicate total graduation applications within that department during Spring 2017.

The departments in LCA that have the lowest rates varied in size (from 7 applying for graduation in TPW to 143 in BECA), and none of these departments have mandatory advising holds placed on their students. More examination is needed to determine why those departments have been able to help their students graduate successfully at a higher rate.

The departments in LCA with the highest denial rates also range in size. When examining the reasons for graduation denial in three departments with the highest denials (WGS, PLSI, and JOUR), lacking major requirements and 120 total units were still the most common reasons for denial. More details regarding these departments is presented below.

* *n values indicate total number of denied students who worked with a CST advisor.
** Although PHIL has a slightly higher denial rate than journalism, it was excluded because only one denied student worked with a CST advisor.
College of Science and Engineering

The College of Science and Engineering (CoSE) College Success Team consisted of two part-time graduation specialists. In Spring 2017, 794 CoSE students applied for graduation, and 75 CoSE students were denied graduation (a 9.07% denial rate). CoSE had the third highest rate of graduation denial across all of the colleges.

Out of all denied students, 48 students were referred to the CoSE team, and 49 received outreach from the team. Outreach efforts and response rates for CoSE are described below.

Of the 75 denied students, the CoSE team was able to determine the reasons for denial for 46 students. The missing requirements are presented below.

Advisors were able to assist 26 students in planning for completing their missing requirements, and 36 students in deciding on a timeline for graduation. See information presented on next page.
In Spring 2017, graduation denial rates varied from department to department within CoSE. The majors with the highest denial rates included the Earth Science (25.00%), Physics (14.29%), and Biology (10.48%). The lowest denial rates were found in the Mathematics (2.94%), Geography and Environment (5.00%), and Chemistry and Biochemistry (5.56%).
Within the department of Biology, there were different patterns of denial among the different BIOL degree programs. When comparing all Biology BS degrees to the BA degree in General Biology, BA students were more than twice as likely to be denied graduation compared to BS students (17.07% denial rate compared to 8.88%).

All reasons for Spring 2017 graduation denials among Biology BA and BS majors are presented in the figure below.

When looking at the reasons for the denials, BA majors were far more likely to be denied due to missing the 120 total units or 40 upper division unit minimum compared to BS majors. Efforts to reduce graduation denial rates among Biology BA majors should include increasing awareness of non-major graduation requirements and offering referrals to advising resources.
Appendix: Supplemental Data

The following chart depicts the number of students who were denied only because they failed to meet one of the unit minimums: the 120-unit total unit and/or 40 upper-division unit minimums.

![Chart 1: Student denied only for missing unit minimums (120 total and/or 40 upper-division units)](chart1.png)

The following chart depicts the number of students who were denied only because they failed to meet a non-major requirement: General Education, American Institutions, and/or SF State Studies requirements.

![Chart 2: Students Denied only for missing General Education, American Institutions, and/or SF State Studies Requirements](chart2.png)
The following chart depicts the number of students who were denied only because they failed to meet a major requirement, minor requirement, and/or complementary studies.