



Academic Recovery Implementation Companion

**History, Models, Case Studies, and
Campus Profiles from a Multi-Campus Initiative**

- The history and origins of Academic Recovery
- Theory of change and design principles
- Five implementation model types
- Deep-dive case studies from VCU and Utah
- Campus profiles from all 11 institutions
- Lessons learned and systems changes observed

Origins and History

The UIA Academic Recovery Project emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as a direct response to intensified inequities in student academic outcomes. While high D, F, and W (DFW) rates in gateway courses have long challenged institutions, the pandemic magnified their impact—especially for low-income students, underrepresented students, first-generation students, caregivers, and working learners.

These students faced compounding barriers: lost wages, increased family responsibilities, disrupted learning environments, and mental health challenges. From 2021–2022, UIA convened member campuses to identify scalable strategies to preserve forward progress.

The Georgia State Foundation

Georgia State University’s Accelerator Academy was selected as the foundational model due to its demonstrated success in helping students who previously earned a D, F, or W reattempt critical courses with targeted academic, financial, and coaching support.

With funding from Ascendium Education Philanthropy and the DeLuca Foundation, UIA supported 11 large public research universities in adapting and scaling this approach across diverse institutional contexts.

Why Academic Recovery Matters

Non-passing grades in foundational courses interrupt degree progression, increase time to completion, lower GPA, and can create challenges with financial aid eligibility.

These academic setbacks often carry psychological consequences—eroding confidence, belonging, and motivation for students already navigating structural inequities.

Data consistently show that a small number of high-enrollment gateway courses account for a disproportionate share of DFW outcomes and course retakes.

Academic Recovery reframes course failure as a systems challenge rather than a student’s shortcoming.

Theory of Change

Across campuses, we found that when high-DFW gateway courses are paired with intentional supports for repeat-takers—academic structure, coaching relationships, and financial relief—students are more likely to succeed and persist. Over time, these improvements generate gains across the board: retention-based revenue, and institutional learning that reshapes how campuses address anticipated academic barriers.

Where to Begin	The How	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data identifying high-DFW courses and repeat-takers • Faculty willing to redesign or teach recovery sections • Academic coaching, SI/tutoring, and advising capacity • Modest financial resources for tuition support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted recruitment of repeat-takers • Dedicated or adapted course sections • Embedded academic coaching and peer learning • Supplemental instruction aligned to course demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher retake pass rates • Improved GPA and academic standing • Increased term-to-term retention • Shorter time to degree

What We Tested and What We Learned

Over three years, Academic Recovery tested multiple approaches and generated consistent insights about what works:

What We Tested	What We Learned
Tuition subsidies and microgrants	Grants reduce access barriers but do not drive engagement alone
Separate recovery sections vs. integrated sections	Embedded supports outperform optional services
Optional vs. embedded academic support	Timing and modality matter for working students
Summer vs. fall/spring implementation	Faculty ownership is essential for scale
Centralized vs. distributed project management	Single-project-manager models create end-of-grant risk



The Central Learning

Failure is rarely about student ability and almost always about course and system design. Students did not succeed because they tried harder the second time—they succeeded because the experience changed.



Design Principles That Worked

Several design elements emerged as consistently impactful across institutions:

- 1 Embedded Support Mattered More Than Optional Services**

Tutoring and supplemental instruction were most effective when they were integrated into the course experience rather than offered as add-ons. Students responded to support that was normalized and expected, not stigmatized as remediation.
- 2 Relational Support Was Critical**

Near-peer coaching—especially when coaches shared similar academic or life experiences—increased engagement, persistence, and help-seeking behavior. Peer and relational coaching outperformed transactional models.
- 3 Faculty Engagement Determined Success**

Campuses that intentionally recruited and supported faculty to redesign courses saw stronger and more durable outcomes than those that treated recovery as a parallel support program. Faculty engagement is the primary lever for sustainable scale.
- 4 Early Structure and Feedback Mattered**

Courses that emphasized early wins, frequent low-stakes assessments, and clear expectations reduced disengagement before midterm. Most disengagement happens in the first four weeks.
- 5 Iteration Improved Results**

Campuses that treated implementation as a learning process—adjusting recruitment strategies, timing, and support structures over time—improved both enrollment and outcomes. Academic Recovery catalyzed broader system-level shifts when treated as a learning process versus a pilot.

Non-Negotiables vs. Adaptable Elements

Institutions seeking to replicate Academic Recovery should distinguish between non-negotiable design elements and contextual adaptations:

Non-Negotiables (Required for Impact)	Adaptable Elements (Context-Specific)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Focus on high-enrollment, high-DFW gateway courses2. Intentional recruitment of students retaking those courses3. Structured academic support beyond the classroom (coaching + SI/tutoring)4. Reduced financial friction for retaking the course5. Ongoing use of data for iteration and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Term timing (summer vs. fall/spring vs. quarter)• Delivery mode (integrated vs. standalone sections)• Incentive structures (cash vs. non-monetary)• Coaching model (peer, professional, hybrid)• Integration with probation, advising, or learning center models

Implementation Model Gallery

While all campuses shared core design elements, implementation models varied based on academic calendars, governance structures, and student populations. Five distinct models emerged:

A Summer Intensive Programs

Campuses: North Carolina A&T, University of Illinois Chicago, Georgia State University

These programs focused on high-DFW courses (particularly math) with peer coaching and structured tutoring in compressed summer terms. UIC's Summer Edge integrated first-time and repeat students into small, cohort-based sections with intensive success coaching. Georgia State scaled their Accelerator Academy with tuition subsidies, progression grants, and embedded supplemental instruction.

B Academic Warning / Probation-Linked Models

Campuses: Arizona State University, Virginia Commonwealth University

These models embedded recovery supports within academic standing interventions. ASU emphasized peer coaching and reflective learning. VCU leveraged the Campus Learning Center to align academic coaching with probation policies and early registration incentives—generating over \$200K in retention-based revenue.

C Full-Term Programs

Campuses: UCF, CU Denver, Purdue, University of Utah

These programs operated across full fall/spring semesters with expanded supplemental instruction, embedded coaching, and iteratively refined eligibility and recruitment. Purdue shifted from online summer pilots to in-person models with redesigned math pedagogy. Utah focused on faculty-led redesign and early intervention strategies.

D Quarter System Programs

Campuses: UC Riverside, Oregon State University

These programs adapted Academic Recovery for quarter-term calendars. UCR transitioned from generic SI to discipline-specific tutoring aligned with gateway STEM courses. Oregon State incentivized faculty course redesign and integrated peer support within quarter structures.

E Integration with Existing Student Success Infrastructure

Campuses: Oregon State University, Virginia Commonwealth University

These campuses embedded Academic Recovery elements into existing advising, coaching, and learning center infrastructures to support sustainability beyond grant funding. This integration model shows the clearest path to institutionalization.

Deep-Dive Case Study: Virginia Commonwealth University

From Course Difficulty to Retention Risk: A Systems Reframe

VCU scaled a targeted Academic Recovery Program (ARP) from a single introductory psychology course into a multi-course intervention spanning MATH 151, CHEM 101, UNIV 111, and BIOL 101.

The Discovery That Changed Everything

Initial assumptions focused on traditionally difficult courses such as Calculus or Accounting. However, when VCU analyzed where students actually stopped out after failure, the data told a different story. Gateway courses like UNIV-111/112, Intro Biology, and Intro Psychology were far more likely to precipitate departure for vulnerable populations.

This reframing shifted the institution's approach from counting DFWs to understanding exit points. In Spring UNIV-111, nearly half of enrolled students were repeating the course. Faculty and staff recognized that failure in this course was not primarily academic—but structural.

The Intervention Evolution

The team treated incentives as a lever: the pilot paid a flat \$1,500 to enrollees, then shifted to milestone-based payments to reward sustained engagement. Non-monetary rewards (early registration) reinforced midterm coaching milestones. Implementation evolved to combine the Campus Learning Center's coaching expertise, an Academic Recovery Orientation session, proactive texting outreach, and sustained coach outreach—moving the model from “get students in the door” to “keep students engaged.”

Results



PARTICIPANT RETENTION

**80% for ARP participants vs.
53% for nonparticipants**



REVENUE IMPACT

\$208K in retention-based revenue gains;
net gain ≈ \$128K after expenses



DOSE-RESPONSE EFFECT

Students attending ≥5 coaching sessions
showed materially better outcomes



SYSTEMS CHANGE

Secured faculty buy-in, redefined “barrier
courses,” inspired similar initiatives
across departments

Deep-Dive Case Study: University of Utah

When Data Forces Institutional Reckoning

The Discovery

THE 13-ATTEMPT STUDENT

At the University of Utah, faculty discovered that a student had attempted the same gateway course 13 times, spending more than \$50,000 in tuition before finally passing once Academic Recovery supports were provided. This was not an isolated case of individual struggle—it was a systemic failure made visible by data.

That discovery fundamentally changed campus conversations. Faculty and administrators recognized that allowing repeated attempts without changing the learning environment was not neutral policy—but an active contributor to student harm. Academic Recovery became a catalyst for reexamining course repeat policies, advising pathways, and gateway course design.

The U Succeed Model

Utah's U Succeed combined targeted recruitment, inclusive pedagogy, and embedded supports into a cohesive course-level model. Leadership began with data-driven targeting and generous scholarships to recruit motivated students. Instructional practices were redesigned for inclusion—scaffolded lessons, collaborative learning, adjusted assessments, and small-class environments.

The model embedded academic supports (required/optional study pods, coach appointments) and experimented with an optional AI tutor in the online environment. Implementation emphasized cross-unit coordination (deans > department coordinators > advisors) and faculty ownership of early action strategies.

Results



PASSING STUDENTS

Nearly 70% more passing students in AR sections



DEWI RATE

Cut dramatically from nearly 100% to 33%



RETENTION GAINS

AR students who passed: 11 pts higher than AR nonpassers; 8 pts higher than non-AR students



STUDENT CONFIDENCE

Pre/post surveys showed meaningful increases in academic confidence



FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

Faculty voluntarily expanded roles and partnered to institutionalize changes

Where Systems Changed

As a result of Academic Recovery, multiple campuses implemented changes that affect students beyond those directly served:

- Course repeat data is now reviewed routinely rather than episodically
- Gateway course selection shifted from perceived difficulty to stop-out risk
- Faculty conversations about redesign and responsibility for failure became normalized
- Coordination between academic affairs, advising, and learning centers deepened
- Recovery-informed design is being applied earlier in the student journey

Operational Lessons

Academic Recovery also revealed important operational lessons:

- Identifying repeat-takers required more sophisticated data coordination than many campuses anticipated
- Institutional research, advising, and academic affairs had to align in new ways to surface actionable information
- Recruitment strategies had to be refined around timing, modality, and student work schedules
- Single project manager models created vulnerability as grants approached completion—prompting a shift toward co-leadership and distributed ownership



Campus Implementation Profiles

The following profiles highlight key implementation choices and learning from each participating campus:



ASU iterated its model multiple times, expanding eligibility criteria and course options. The campus shifted from transactional support to relational coaching, finding that students responded more positively to consistent coaching than one-time incentives. ASU used Academic Recovery learning to redesign elements of the UNI220 curriculum to emphasize reflection, resilience, and academic mindset. The work also prompted alignment across advising, tutoring, and academic warning policies.



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL FLORIDA

UCF expanded Supplemental Instruction availability to up to four sessions per week. Early tuition reimbursements improved enrollment, but sustained engagement was driven by embedded SI and coaching. Academic Recovery normalized the use of academic support services and influenced how support is integrated into high-enrollment gateway courses. UCF plans to institutionalize elements across additional courses.



NCAT implemented Academic Recovery in high-DFW STEM courses, emphasizing summer and off-cycle offerings. Tuition subsidies and structured academic supports increased access for students who might otherwise have stopped out. The campus is exploring proactive identification of at-risk students and integrating Academic Recovery principles into broader support strategies.



University of Colorado **Denver**

CUD expanded participation criteria and course offerings over time. The campus found that financial incentives increased interest but did not ensure completion, leading to greater emphasis on embedded supports. Student feedback revealed confusion around incentives when tuition was not paid out of pocket—reinforcing the importance of aligning supports with student realities.



Purdue made significant changes after initial pilots, shifting from online asynchronous summer offerings to in-person fall/spring implementations. The campus redesigned peer coaching roles and financial structures and developed new data reports to identify course repeaters more effectively. Academic Recovery contributed to a broader campus focus on math mindset and instructional culture.



UCR shifted from traditional Supplemental Instruction to discipline-specific tutoring to improve long-term student awareness and use of academic resources. Advisor and faculty referrals were critical to recruitment. Summer implementation proved challenging due to housing and employment costs, prompting refined timing and outreach strategies.



UIC integrated Academic Recovery with executive leadership support from the Chancellor and Provost. The initiative normalized academic support use by embedding it directly into courses and informed broader student success strategies. UIC is exploring expansion into additional gateway courses and early intervention models.



OSU emphasized faculty engagement and incentivized course redesign through buyouts. Academic Recovery contributed to deeper faculty use of student success data for curriculum adjustment and informed discussions about expanding redesign efforts into additional departments.

What Academic Recovery Ultimately Demonstrated

Academic Recovery demonstrated that failure in gateway courses is not an inevitable feature of rigor. It is a solvable design problem.

When institutions redesign courses and supports around student needs, students who have already failed can succeed—and the same design principles can prevent failure altogether.

The learning generated through Academic Recovery now serves as a foundation for broader, more preventative approaches that can reach thousands more students, while maintaining fidelity to what students and data have shown actually works.

If these supports work so well after failure, why wait until students fail to offer them at all?



The Fundamental Shift

Perhaps most importantly, the work moved campuses beyond a hope-based approach to student failure.

Instead of hoping students would retake courses and figure it out on their own, Academic Recovery showed what is possible when institutions take responsibility for redesigning the environments in which students learn.

This implementation companion is part of the Academic Recovery document suite.