



# Increasing Student Engagement at St. Petersburg College

## How a Pilot NSLS Chapter Improved Student Success and Retention

As the first two-year college in Florida, St. Petersburg College (SPC) has a long history of educating students and preparing them for their career. In recent years, SPC struggled, as many other colleges and universities do, with engaging their students and retaining them, especially Black males.

Administrators at SPC explored various options to improve engagement and retention. They understood the need to offer students valuable co-curricular activities that strengthened their bond to the school through an active community of peers and that continued developing skills employers seek.

To test the impact on engagement and retention, administrators began a pilot program of The National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS).

Established in 2001, the NSLS is the largest leadership honor society in the country, consisting of more than 1.2 million members and 700+ chapters. Their accredited leadership training program helps students define personal success, create a plan to achieve it, and develop in-demand skills.

SPC wanted to determine if an NSLS chapter would improve engagement and retention for their students, especially with Black males. As part of their pilot program of the NSLS, they sent a limited number of invitations to Black males and participants in their Take Stock in College program who attended the Clearwater Campus, one of SPC's 10 campuses.

Within only one semester, retention increased among those new NSLS members, as did their success in the classroom. Stephanie Henningsen, Student Life and Leadership Coordinator and NSLS Chapter Advisor, believes this increase is a direct result of the students joining a community of success-oriented peers and engaging in the leadership program.



*"I've seen how the students have developed comradery with one another as they discuss what their goals are and their plan for obtaining them,"*

Stephanie Henningsen  
Student Life and Leadership Coordinator

### Key Results:

Of the new members, 24 were Black, most of which were male. Those 24 members achieved:



\*Success Rate is the percentage of credits enrolled that resulted in a grade of A, B, or C and is calculated as:  $\frac{\text{Successfully Completed Credits}}{\text{All Credits Attempted}}$ .



## St. Petersburg College NSLS Chapter

**Date of Inception:** August 2019

**Chapter Advisor and Title:**

Stephanie Henningsen, Student  
Life and Leadership Coordinator

**Members:** 58

**Inducted Members to Date:** 13

## About St. Petersburg College

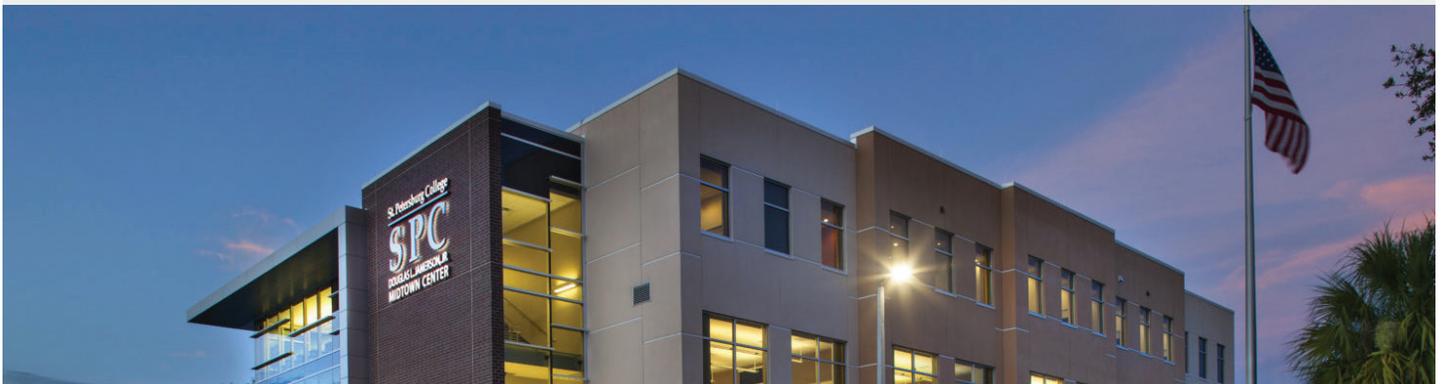
Founded in 1927, St. Petersburg College (SPC) was Florida's first two-year college. SPC offers more than 180 career-focused degree and certificate programs that ensure students meet the needs of today's employers.

**Mission:** Empower students and the community to achieve success and economic mobility through academic excellence and engagement.

**Total Number of Students:** 39,507 (Credit) 46,706 (Total)

**Total Number of Campuses:** 10

**Accreditations:** Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS-COC) and other, program-specific accreditations.



## Are Students Prepared for Their Careers?

According to the [McGraw-Hill Education 2018 Future Workforce Survey](#), only 41% of students feel extremely or very prepared for their careers.

Additionally, fewer than half of students report feeling they've gained the critical skills to transition to the workforce, such as complex problem solving, resume writing, workplace technologies, and interview skills. This disconnect has led to a dramatic decrease in retention rates, especially for two-year institutions.

In fact, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#), two-year institutions have an average retention rate of only 62%, 23.5% lower than four-year institutions.

As college administrators at two-year institutions struggle to retain students, they seek co-curricular activities that help students develop additional skills required for the modern job market. They also look to incorporate programs that build a community on campus.

SPC believed the NSLS would deliver on these needs because they provided an opportunity for students to:

- Set long-term goals.
- Collaborate with other students on creating a plan to achieve them.
- Share their struggles with a community of like-minded students.
- Develop 21st century skills, such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking.

With limited resources, SPC wanted to test a pilot program with only one of their 10 campuses to ensure this program would appeal to their student body, especially Black males, a demographic they specifically struggle to retain. The students who joined began the five steps to induction to develop their leadership skills.



## ROADMAP TO INDUCTION



## Student Experiences in the SPC Chapter of the NSLS

When he received his invitation to join the NSLS, Keenan Murray wasn't sure what to expect. However, after learning about the benefits the program had to offer – including resume building, the opportunity to expand upon current leadership skills, and gaining hands-on experience to learn additional leadership qualities – Murray considered it “the opportunity of a lifetime.”



***“This program does a really good job of strengthening your leadership traits. It is almost like they give you this self-awareness of traits you didn't know that you had.”***

— Keenan Murray, Business Administration

As one of 13 formally inducted members from St. Petersburg College, Murray has built upon the leadership skills he acquired in the NSLS and has become more active on campus. Today, he also serves as Secretary of the Clearwater Campus Student Government Association.

For Murray, one of the biggest attractions of the NSLS program was building a community on campus by learning about his peers. “It showed that no matter who you are, you still have leadership traits,” he said.

The NSLS program also received positive reviews from De’Laun Wesley, a second-year English major.

“To me, this program is deeply needed--leadership is greatly needed now more than ever and this program [develops] leaders,” Wesley said. “It’s beneficial, from my standpoint, that students of all ages take part in a leadership program such as this.”

While he believes that developing leadership skills is essential, Wesley also mentioned the impact the community has had on him.



***“I can honestly say that the NSLS has been a life-enhancing program. The impact it had on me and my NSLS team is that we have built life-long relationships that will prove useful later in life.”***

— De’Laun Wesley, English



### About the NSLS

As the nation’s largest leadership honor society, the NSLS helps students achieve their definition of personal success. Members must complete the accredited leadership training program to become fully inducted.

**Mission:** Building Leaders Who Make a Better World  
**Total Number of Members:** 1,213,949 (Spring 2020)  
**Total Number of Chapters:** 711 (Spring 2020)  
**Accreditations:** Cognia and the National College Credit Recommendation Service (NCCRS)

### NSLS Member Benefits



\$350,000 in Scholarships Awarded Annually



Exclusive Job Board



Community of Leaders



Live-Streamed Events with Industry Leaders



Partner Discounts with National Brands



Personalized Letter of Recommendation

### How the NSLS Helps Increase Student Engagement and Retention

In recent years, more and more students have struggled to earn their degree, both at two-year and four-year institutions. In fact, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#) only 33% of students who began attending two-year institutions in Fall 2015 graduated within three years.

The report also states that 41% of students were no longer enrolled in the first school they attended and had not been reported as a transfer at a different institution. In other words, nearly half of students were no longer pursuing their degree within three years.

Henningsen, NSLS Chapter Advisor at SPC, has seen a dramatic increase in student retention and engagement in students who accepted their invitation to the NSLS.

This level of engagement has resulted in higher retention rates for NSLS members and improved their success in the classroom. Some students, such as Keenan Murray, have become even more engaged on campus by joining other organizations.

Additionally, Henningsen believes the increase in retention rates is tied to the community and close-knit bonds students build through the NSLS. “Having The National Society of Leadership and Success on campus allows students to focus on who they are and how to relate with others,” she said. “I also have students comment on how the Speaker Broadcasts have helped them to focus on their goals.”



*“During our first year in the program, I have seen shy students come out of their shell to talk with their peers.”*

Stephanie Henningsen  
Student Life and Leadership Coordinator

### Key Results from NSLS Members at St. Petersburg College



\*Success Rate is the percentage of credits enrolled that resulted in a grade of A, B, or C and is calculated as: Successfully Completed Credits/All Credits Attempted.

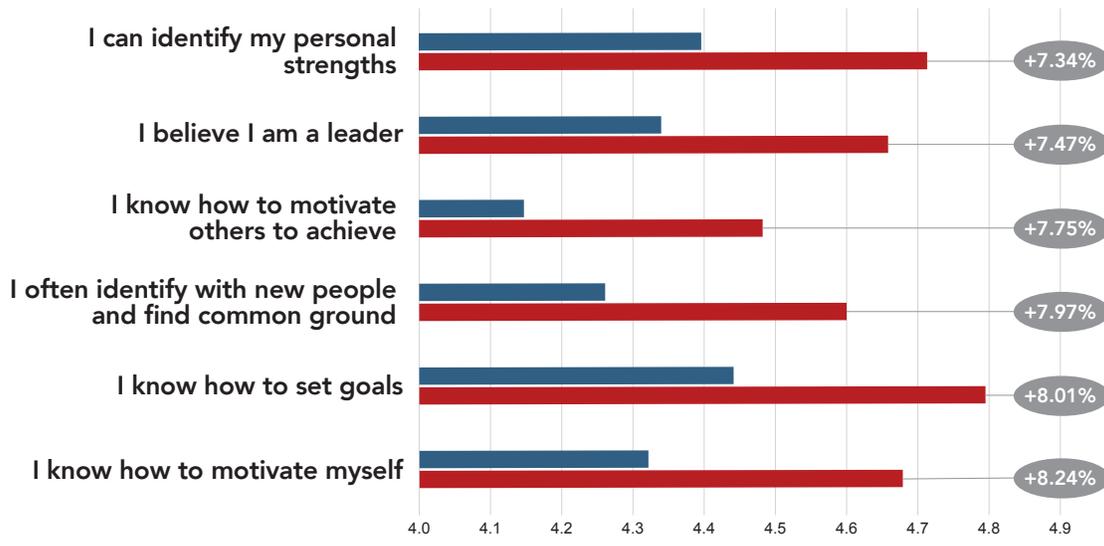


## Equip Your Students with Leadership Skills

Every year the NSLS asks new members to rate themselves on a scale of one to five in 10 areas prior to beginning the program and then again once they've completed the program.

In 2019, students increased their knowledge in all ten of those areas. The results show that students responded that the program helped them:

### NSLS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM OUTCOMES



THE NATIONAL SOCIETY OF LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS

Pre-Induction Survey Post-Induction Survey +% Percentage Growth

Based on 857 responses from members in fall 2019, on a scale of 1-5.

As students improve in these key areas, they are better prepared to embark on their career upon graduation.

Additionally, as St. Petersburg College has shown, NSLS members retain and graduate at higher rates than the student population as a whole because they are engaged with a community of success-oriented peers helping them to achieve their goals.

## Are your students building the skills employers seek in new graduates?

Learn how the NSLS can transform your students into leaders.

Start a Chapter