



# TRANSMITTAL LETTER

The University of North Carolina  
*General Administration*

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Transmittal Number 50  
November 17, 2006

**Subject:**

**400.1.5. Improving Retention and Graduation Rates**

**700.5.1[R]. Regulation on Student Applicant Background Checks**

This letter transmits one revised policy and one new regulation:

**400.1.5. Improving Retention and Graduation Rates.** This policy was amended by the Board of Governors on September 8, 2006. Please contact Alan Mabe, Vice President for Academic Planning and University-School Programs, at 919-962-4589 with any questions.

**700.5.1[R]. Regulation on Student Applicant Background Checks.** This regulation was adopted by President Bowles on October 26, 2006. Please contact Harold L. Martin, Sr., Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 919-962-4614 with any questions.

## **IMPROVING RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES**

### **Introduction**

The policies adopted by the Board of Governors encourage constituent institutions to decrease the average length of time students take to complete their degrees while maintaining the quality of undergraduate education and the integrity of the baccalaureate degree. In addition, students must also be expected to assume responsibility in planning their academic schedules so as to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

### **Plan to Improve Retention and Graduation Rates in The University of North Carolina**

UNC's plan to improve retention and graduation rates has two elements: (1) University-wide policies and goals that may decrease the average time taken for completion of degrees, including the requirement that each institution perform institutional studies, based on factors that have been identified as causing students to take longer to complete degree requirements, or drop out, and develop an institutional plan to encourage retention and shorter average time to graduation; and (2) campus and University-wide measures to assess the effectiveness of the policies and goals adopted.

The goal is to move the time taken for completion of the baccalaureate degree toward a four-year period for students enrolled full time and continuously throughout their academic careers, or toward the equivalent of eight full-time semesters for part-time students or students who interrupt their enrollment for valid reasons.

#### **I. University-Wide Policies**

The Board of Governors has adopted the following policies for all institutions comprising the University of North Carolina:

1. Undergraduate students are expected to enroll in at least 15 semester hours credit per term. Thus it should be possible for a full-time student to complete most baccalaureate degree programs within four academic years or the equivalent (eight semesters of full-time study). Effective Fall 1995, baccalaureate degree programs shall be limited to no more than 128 semester hours. Any semester hour requirement beyond 128 must be approved by the Board of Governors. Any program authorized by the

Board of Governors to require 135 semester hours or more shall be officially designated as a five-year baccalaureate program. Requests for an exception to the 128 hour limitation for existing programs shall be submitted to the Board of Governors.

2. In all institutional catalogs and also in orientation materials for parents and students, the normal number of hours and length of time required to attain the baccalaureate degree will be prominently displayed along with a description of the factors that may extend the length of time to successful completion of the degree for individual students.
3. The University will sponsor one or more conferences for administrators and faculty on successful strategies to increase retention and graduation rates and reduce the length of time to degree.
4. Recognizing that many students must work while in college, that part-time jobs off-campus are limited in some areas, and that working on campus has a positive correlation with retention and graduation because it limits student's work hours, imposes discipline on student schedules, and provides a stable source of income to help meet college expenses, the Board of Governors supports on-campus employment of students. This employment could reduce the number of "dropouts" for financial reasons and thereby shorten the time to graduation.
5. Each constituent institution shall review and revise or adopt a plan for improving retention, and four- and six-year graduation rates and shortening the average time taken to graduate for students who begin their studies as first-time, full-time freshmen. The plan shall incorporate the policies stated in items 1 and 2, above, and include, but not be limited to, a review of campus policies and practices that may affect retention rates, graduation rates, and time to graduate, with particular attention to the following:
  - a. review baccalaureate degree program graduation requirements to ensure that all programs comply with the semester hour limitations stated in policy 1, above;
  - b. review course schedules for the past three years to determine whether all courses required for graduation are offered on a timely basis and with an adequate number of sections and, where inadequacies are discovered, take steps to correct them;
  - c. review the availability of appropriate and timely academic advisement, especially at the freshman level, to assist students in making effective decisions, to increase the potential for students selecting appropriate courses and schedules, to provide students with assistance in selecting a major at the appropriate time in order

to reduce excessive changes of majors, and to increase student awareness of the importance for traditional students of enrolling in at least 15 semester hours per semester in order to complete the degree in eight semesters;

- d. review policies and practices governing course withdrawal, course repeat, progression, suspension, and reinstatement policies to ensure that such policies are not encouraging and facilitating behaviors that lengthen time to graduation;
- e. review the specification of courses within majors to determine whether excessive or unnecessary specification or augmentation of general education course for certain majors is increasing course requirements for students changing majors;
- f. review higher than typical institutional grade point average requirements for admission to a major or satisfaction of grade requirements in major courses to ensure that these requirements are not leading students to reduce course loads or to repeat courses unnecessarily, thereby lengthening time to graduation;
- g. review financial aid policies to ensure that students are aware of opportunities for financial aid and that those policies do not encourage part-time or prolonged enrollment.
- h. collect campus and university-wide data on retention, progression, graduation and time to degree and use it to assess factors that contribute to success and factors that may account for a student not being retained, not making adequate progress, or not graduating.
- i. Review campus retention policies and practices in light of data analysis and best practices and revise and adjust policies and practices as appropriate. Track cost of efforts and the need for resources to address retention options.

## **II. Goal Setting**

Each campus, in consultation with the General Administration, shall establish goals for increasing retention and graduation rates and for monitoring the time full- and part-time students take to graduate. The President shall establish guidelines for implementing the goal setting.

## **III. Measures of Progress and Success**

- ⊖ The University has developed a monitoring process that enables it to track retention, graduation and the length of time to degree for both full-time

and part-time students as well as other groups such as community college transfers. This report will be produced annually.

- ⊖ The University will use the baccalaureate graduate survey to ask graduates how long they took to complete the baccalaureate degree and, if longer than four years, why.

**IV. Campus Reporting**

The President will provide guidelines for establishing the goals for retention and graduation and for meeting the reporting requirements in this policy.

**DRAFT**

**IMPROVING RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES**

**Introduction**

This plan responds to legislation enacted by the 1991 Session of the General Assembly (House Bill 1340, Section 92), which provides the following:

~~The Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina shall adopt policies that will encourage the constituent institutions to have their students complete their degrees more quickly. A plan for implementation of these policies, including means of measuring its success and progress, shall be presented to the 1993 General Assembly by February 1, 1993.~~

~~[Portions of the Introduction have been deleted.]~~

The policies adopted by the Board of Governors encourage constituent institutions to decrease the average length of time students take to complete their degrees while maintaining the quality of undergraduate education and the integrity of the baccalaureate degree. In addition, it should be recognized that students must also be expected to assume responsibility in planning their academic schedules so as to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

**Plan to Improve Retention and Graduation Rates  
in The University of North Carolina**

The UNC's plan to improve retention and graduation rates has two elements: (1) the ~~adoption of~~ University-wide policies and goals that may decrease the average time taken for completion of degrees, including the requirement that each institution perform institutional studies, based on factors that have been identified as causing students to take longer to complete degree requirements, or drop out, and develop an institutional plan to encourage retention and shorter average time to graduation; and (2) ~~the development of~~ campus and University-wide measures to assess the effectiveness of the policies and goals adopted.

The goal is to move the time taken for completion of the baccalaureate degree toward a four-year period for students enrolled full time and continuously throughout their

academic careers, or toward the equivalent of eight full-time semesters for part-time students or students who interrupt their enrollment for valid reasons.

## I. University-Wide Policies

The Board of Governors has adopted the following policies for all institutions comprising the University of North Carolina:

1. Undergraduate students are expected to enroll in at least 15 semester hours credit per term. Thus it should be possible for a full-time student to complete most baccalaureate degree programs within four academic years or the equivalent (eight semesters of full-time study). Effective Fall 1995, baccalaureate degree programs shall be limited to no more than 128 semester hours. Any semester hour requirement beyond 128 must be approved by the Board of Governors. Any program authorized by the Board of Governors to require 135 semester hours or more shall be officially designated as a five-year baccalaureate program. Requests for an exception to the 128 hour limitation for existing programs shall be submitted to the Board of Governors by Fall, 1994.
2. In all institutional catalogs and also in orientation materials for parents and students, the normal number of hours and length of time required to attain the baccalaureate degree will be prominently displayed along with a description of the factors that may extend the length of time to successful completion of the degree for individual students.
3. The University will sponsor one or more conferences for administrators and faculty on successful strategies to increase retention and graduation rates and reduce the length of time to degree.
4. Recognizing that many students must work while in college, that part-time jobs off-campus are limited in some areas, and that working on campus has a positive correlation with retention and graduation because it limits student's work hours, imposes discipline on student schedules, and provides a stable source of income to help meet college expenses, the Board of Governors ~~in future budgets will support~~ reasonable increases in resources for on-campus employment of students. This assistance employment could reduce the number of "dropouts" for financial reasons and thereby shorten the time to graduation.
5. ~~During 1993, Each of the constituent institution shall~~ review and revise or adopt a plan for improving retention, and four- and six-year graduation rates and shortening the average time taken to graduate for students who begin their studies as first-time, full-time freshmen. The plan shall incorporate the policies stated in items 1 and 2, above, and include, but not be limited to, a review of campus policies and practices that may affect

retention rates, graduation rates, and time to graduate, with particular attention to the following:

- a. review baccalaureate degree program graduation requirements to ensure that all programs comply with the semester hour limitations stated in policy 1, above;
- b. review course schedules for the past three years to determine whether all courses required for graduation are offered on a timely basis and with an adequate number of sections and, where inadequacies are discovered, take steps to correct them;
- c. review the availability of appropriate and timely academic advisement, especially at the freshman level, to assist students in making effective decisions, to increase the potential for students selecting appropriate courses and schedules, to provide students with assistance in selecting a major at the appropriate time in order to reduce excessive changes of majors, and to increase student awareness of the importance for traditional students of enrolling in at least 15 semester hours per semester in order to complete the degree in eight semesters;
- d. review policies and practices governing course withdrawal, course repeat, progression, suspension, and reinstatement policies to ensure that such policies are not encouraging and facilitating behaviors that lengthen time to graduation;
- e. review the specification of courses within majors to determine whether excessive or unnecessary specification or augmentation of general education course for certain majors is increasing course requirements for students changing majors;
- f. review higher than ~~general~~ typical institutional grade point average requirements for admission to a major or satisfaction of grade requirements in major courses to ensure that these requirements are not leading students to reduce course loads or to repeat courses unnecessarily, thereby lengthening time to graduation;
- g. review financial aid policies to ensure that students are aware of opportunities for financial aid and that those policies do not encourage part-time or prolonged enrollment.
- h. collect campus and university-wide data on retention, progression, graduation and time to degree and use it to assess factors that contribute to success and factors that may account for a student not being retained, not making adequate progress, or not graduating.



- i. Review campus retention policies and practices in light of data analysis and best practices and revise and adjust policies and practices as appropriate. Track cost of efforts and the need for resources to address retention options.

## II. Goal Setting

Each campus, in consultation with the General Administration, shall establish goals for increasing retention and graduation rates and for monitoring the time full- and part-time students take to graduate. The President shall establish guidelines for implementing the goal setting.

~~Each institution shall submit a report to the President by January 10, 1994 that summarizes its findings and the corrective actions being taken or to be taken. Thereafter, each institution shall report on its progress in its annual assessment reports.~~

## III. Measures of Progress and Success

- ⊖ The University has developed a monitoring process that enables it to track retention, graduation and the length of time to degree for both full-time and part-time students as well as other groups such as community college transfers. This report will be produced annually. Institutions will respond to it by reporting on their progress in improving graduation rates and reducing time to degree in their annual reports on institutional assessment.
- ⊖ The University will use the quadrennial baccalaureate graduate survey to ask graduates how long they took to complete the baccalaureate degree and, if longer than four years, why. The results of this survey will be available in the winter of 1993 and will be analyzed by institutions in their 1994 reports on institutional assessment.

## IV. Campus Reporting

The President will provide guidelines for establishing the goals for retention and graduation and for meeting the reporting requirements in this policy.

### **Regulation on Student Applicant Background Checks**

1. UNC constituent institutions will perform background checks on either (i) all applicants offered admission, or (ii) all applicants offered admission who indicate their intent to attend, before the applicant may matriculate, as follows:
  - A. The UNC Suspension and Expulsion Data Base
  - B. The National Student Clearinghouse (when a method for automated checks becomes available). Until an automated method for conducting these checks becomes available, constituent institutions may limit their checks to applicants who are neither in high school at the time of the application nor show continuous enrollment in an educational institution since graduating from high school.
  - C. NC Department of Public Instruction enrollment data base (when it becomes available). Until the DPI database becomes available, constituent institutions will check DPI enrollment records for all NC residents who do not provide a public school transcript in situations in which a high school transcript is required for admission.

A constituent institution may conduct these background checks on an applicant before deciding whether or not to offer the candidate admission.

2. UNC will continue to work with NC DPI and the NC Community Colleges to have a high school or community college long term suspension or expulsion record supplied to UNC along with the high school or community college transcript.
3. UNC constituent institutions will perform criminal background checks on applicants being considered for admission, applicants admitted, or applicants offered admission who have indicated their intent to attend, before the applicant matriculates, if the application and supporting materials contain one or more of the following triggers (or red flags):
  - i. The application together with supporting material contains materially inconsistent answers that have not been satisfactorily explained;
  - ii. The applicant answers one or more of the six criminal background/discipline questions affirmatively or submits subsequent information indicating (1) pending criminal charges, (2) acceptance of responsibility for a crime, (3) criminal convictions or (4) school disciplinary action, unless the affirmative answer or supporting material relates to a school disciplinary action that resulted from an offense that is remote in time or was insubstantial;
  - iii. The application omits one or more answers without an acceptable explanation for the omission;
  - iv. The application has an unexplained time period since graduation from high school during which the applicant was not, for example, enrolled in higher education, enlisted in the military, or employed fulltime; or
  - v. Any other reason sufficient to the constituent institution.

Constituent institutions are not required to perform criminal background checks on applicants who are younger than 16 years old at the time of the acceptance or on residents of North Carolina who have attained the age of 65 and are entitled to a tuition waiver under G.S. §115B-2.

4. All admissions letters for applicants who are to have criminal background checks performed will state that the admission is conditional on the results of a criminal check.
5. A constituent institution that is going to conduct a criminal background check must obtain the applicant's consent, either in writing or electronically, to the criminal background check and to the use of the applicant's social security number for purposes of the check. Alternatively, the constituent institution may provide instructions for the applicant to initiate the criminal background check directly through a specified vendor. If legally permissible, the constituent institution will offer as an alternative to allow a fingerprint check without using a social security number. The constituent institution or vendor consent will require the applicant to list the places the applicant has lived or gone to school outside North Carolina for more than 6 months in the last 7 years at a time that the applicant was at least 16 years old.
6. A constituent institution may either include the cost of conducting background checks in an increase to the general application fee or may charge the cost of criminal background checks to the applicant who is the subject of the check.
7. The scope of the criminal background check will depend on the residential history of the applicant:
  - A. For current NC residents whose applications and release forms do not disclose more than 6 months out of NC, a North Carolina criminal background check will be conducted.
  - B. For non-residents and NC residents whose applications or release forms disclose significant time outside NC, a residence check will be conducted, and then a criminal background check will be conducted for all appropriate states unless the applicant opts for a national FBI fingerprint check.
  - C. For international students, a criminal background check of appropriate scope will be conducted.
8. Students who are admitted within 2 weeks before classes begin and who are subject to having a criminal background check pursuant to paragraph 3 above are allowed to be conditionally admitted and are allowed to matriculate pending the results of a criminal background check.
9. The vendor or other entity conducting the criminal background check will provide the constituent institution with a list of applicants with no criminal record, and the constituent institution will have electronic or paper access to the information for the applicants whose check shows a positive criminal record.
10. If an applicant has a positive criminal or disciplinary record, the constituent institution must:

- A. Compare the results of the checks to the application and supplemental information supplied by the applicant to determine discrepancies. If there are no discrepancies and if the constituent institution has made an individual determination that the applicant does not pose a significant threat to campus safety, and there is no additional information indicating that a decision to admit should be modified, the applicant may be admitted or a previous decision to admit may stand.
  - B. If there are discrepancies, or if there is information indicating that admission decision should be further examined, the constituent institution must provide the applicant an opportunity either to demonstrate that the report of criminal, disciplinary or other relevant history was erroneous (e.g. wrong person) or to explain the discrepancy.
  - C. If the report is determined to be accurate and there is a discrepancy between the reported information and the application or supporting material the applicant submitted, or there is additional information that amplifies the application information or otherwise indicates that the admission should be examined further:
    - i. The presumption is that the admission will be denied or withdrawn if the applicant has failed accurately to disclose relevant information in response to a question on the application. The burden is on the applicant to demonstrate that the omission or misinformation was the result of an honest mistake, that it was not intended to mislead, and that the applicant should be admitted in spite of the failure to disclose;
    - ii. If the failure to disclose accurate information does not result in the denial of or withdrawal of the offer of admission, but there is information that draws the decision to admit into question, before the student may matriculate, the constituent institution must make an individual determination as to whether the nature of any crime committed or other behavior disclosed, together with other available information, suggests that the applicant will pose a significant threat to campus safety. If the constituent institution determines that there is a significant threat, the admission must be denied or withdrawn. If not, the student may be admitted in accordance with the normal admission process.
11. Each constituent institution must maintain a record of the kinds of background checks, if any, conducted on each applicant and the results of those checks. If an applicant's record shows a history of conviction of, guilty plea to, or acceptance of responsibility for a crime or a significant disciplinary sanction at another educational institution, the constituent institution must maintain a record of the process used to determine whether or not the student posed a significant threat to campus safety and of the basis for that determination.

*Effective date:* This regulation is effective for all students who matriculate after 8/1/07.

Erskine B. Bowles