

**“Academics First”
Student Success Initiatives
June 2011 Board of Governors
Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs**

Introduction

The University of North Carolina represents the best tradition of educational excellence. To maintain and improve upon this excellence, UNC must maximize its resources to support campuses in their academic missions and to assist students in attaining their educational goals in an efficient and timely manner.

At its November 12, 2010 meeting, the UNC Faculty Assembly focused on the theme “academics first” by inviting panels of campus registrars, financial aid directors, and undergraduate advising leaders to explore students’ academic progress behaviors. Among the conversations were financial aid incentives/disincentives, drop/add and late withdrawal policies, course repeat rules, and satisfactory academic progress standards. These topics, individually and collectively, impact students’ academic progress, available seats in classrooms, and can foster a climate of student focus on academic progress and degree attainment. Taken together, these conversations focused on maximizing instructional capacity in support of student success.

Since the November meeting, a cooperative effort by the UNC Association of Student Governments, the UNC Faculty Assembly, and UNC General Administration Academic & Student Affairs continued delineating academic processes across UNC that could be addressed system wide to support “academics first” from the perspective of student progress and success. These processes function as incentives for students to embrace responsibility in their academic behaviors from application to diploma. The guiding principles for these discussions have been:

- a. set academic progress and degree attainment as the primary objective for students,
- b. support “seamless” education by students across all UNC campuses and the NCCCS, and
- c. maximize limited and declining resources (e.g., course sections, budget, staffing) to reward students who are serious about progressing toward and earning an undergraduate degree.

Issues Related to Financial Aid

1. A common FAFSA priority filing date for all UNC campuses.
2. A cap on the maximum time a student can receive the UNC Need-Based Grant (UNCNBG) once the state funding levels stabilize.
3. Encourage campuses to monitor Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) every term as opposed to annually.

4. Establish a common UNC definition of the federal Title IV regulation that defines a student as eligible for federal financial aid for up to 150% of the normal time to graduation.
5. In accordance with Federal regulations, monitor first-undergraduate degree completion and offer no additional federal grant aid (e.g., Pell, SEOG) after a student earns the initial undergraduate degree. Under federal rules, a student can take out federal loans for a second degree, if eligible.

Future Issues Related to Academic Processes

Initial mapping of campus policies related to drop/add, withdrawal, pass/fail, course load, admissions processes, terminology, etc. reveals a complex and varied picture across UNC campuses. To operate more efficiently and seamlessly for all students, the following recommendations support a common set of UNC processes without losing the academic program distinctiveness of each campus.

6. Revisit the community college articulation agreement with specific focus on seamless transfer to UNC.
7. Establish 0-29 earned and transferable credit hours toward a degree as a “new” student and 30+ earned and transferable credit hours toward a degree as a “transfer” student when reviewing students for undergraduate admissions.
8. Utilize the same earned credit hours standards for academic classifications of freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior (e.g., 0-29, 30-59, 60-89, 90+).
9. Define a common “drop” period for students on all UNC campuses and make late drop and withdrawal regulations more consistent.
10. Regularize course repeat policies including limiting the number of repeats permitted during an academic career in UNC.
11. Discuss the use and number of Pass/Fail grades permitted.
12. Develop a uniform policy of course equivalence for military experience. The UNC SERVES initiative has already identified this need and the American Council on Education (ACE) has a recommended inventory of equivalences.
13. Determine the best practices for assessing and assigning AP, IB, and other high school credits.
14. Discuss how to institute a common maximum course load policy with a process for exceptions.

15. Create a common standard for financial aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP).
16. Require undergraduate students to graduate once they have earned the credits to do so while permitting them to pursue more than one degree in a timely manner.
17. Consider a maximum length of award cap on campus-initiated tuition funds set aside for need-based aid that is equal to the current tuition surcharge regulation or by a specific cap on the number of semesters/units awarded.
18. Create an “academic progress agreement” between the campus (via the advisor) and a degree-seeking undergraduate student who has attempted 141 or more credit hours and has not graduated.
19. Review the academic calendars for all UNC schools to determine if calendars can be made the same or more closely aligned. This does not suggest graduation on the same day, the same exam schedules, or the same class time periods.