

Benchmark II: Evaluate National, State, and University Landscape

Due Date: September Board Meeting

Instructions: The committee should use Benchmark II to assess what is happening nationally and statewide in this strategic priority area. This benchmark will identify the major issues facing higher education in this strategic priority area, as well as explore solutions peers are implementing to address these issues. To complete Benchmark II, the committee should respond to the questions outlined below.

Introduction

When thinking about the appropriate goals relating to improved student success for the students of UNC, it is important to consider both a snapshot of the major issues confronting higher education and what some other peer university systems are doing to address them. Four focal areas have been identified from an in-depth scan of the higher education landscape: timely degree attainment, achievement disparities, financial needs and student indebtedness, and skills development.

Questions:

What do research and practice show as the key issues higher education is facing across the country/state in this strategic priority area?

Focal Area I. Timely Degree Attainment

Issue: What's the right metric and for whom?

Selecting the right metrics for the right students is critical. The increase in the number of post-traditional students, the increase in the number of students who choose part-time academic paths, the loss of summer federal support for certain populations, and the increasing loan burden all impact attainment metrics. Currently, most graduation rates are calculated for first time in college (FTIC) students who are enrolled full time, but are based on continuous enrollment – analogous to a clock ticking time. The clock begins ticking and continues despite life events that require stop outs. One might think of a student who has a family emergency or who takes off time to train for the Olympics. But the clock keeps ticking and that student becomes a negative statistic for the institution. A transfer to another, perhaps more elite institution also counts as a negative. Alternately, using seat time (the time a student is actually actively enrolled) might be an appropriate metric for some groups and would more accurately reflect time to degree. The UNC average seat time (semesters enrolled) for completion is 10 semesters (including summer) with a range of 8.2-11.5.

Another issue resides in the growing number of students who transfer. Nearly half of our institutions now award more than 40% of undergraduate degrees to students who are not counted in their FTIC cohort. Should institutions be given credit for those students who begin their careers in one institutions but ultimately graduate from another? Should the first institution receive partial credit for the success of those students who may have spent two-three years there?

Graduate Within 4 Years Original UNC Institution: 43%
Any UNC Institution: 44%
National Public Institutions Rate: 34%

Graduate Within 6 Years Original UNC Institution: 63%
Any UNC Institution: 67%
National Public Institutions Rate: 59%

Issue: What's Going On to Improve Completion?

Many high impact practices have emerged with proven results. For example, programs which incentivize students to enroll in 30 hours per year have shown results. 79% of students who complete 30 hours in their first year eventually graduate, compared to 69 percent completing between 24-29 hours and only 37% completing 12-23 hours. Following a concerted campaign, the University of Hawai'i system experienced a 14.7 percent increase in the number of undergraduate students enrolled in 15 or more credits. (Source: "The Game Changers." Complete College America report. October, 2013.)

Several institutions have embarked upon projects to improve timely degree attainment by improving guided pathways to success designed to improve student transitions and movement through a degree. Such programs include enhanced degree audit capability, intrusive advising, redesign of large "gateway" courses, and improved articulation (with 2-year and 4 year institutions) Arizona facilitated transfer through statewide course numbering and extensive pathway programs. Maryland undertook the redesign of 70 gatekeeper courses with state funding. Tennessee improved articulation through cohort programs, course maps, and a 41-credit common core. (Source: "Improving the Yields in Higher Education: Findings from Lumina Foundation's State-Based Efforts to Increase Productivity in U.S. Higher Education." September, 2015.) Many of our institutions utilize a series of strategies – from reminders to register for classes to high impact practices such as supplemental instruction to efforts to increase meaningful internships. One new collaborative effort is the system led partnership of five universities with the PAR (Predictive Analytics Reporting) Framework to better harness the use of data and evidence informed interventions. <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2016/07/prweb13573448.htm>

Focal Area II. Achievement Disparities (gender, socio-economic status, race, rurality, STEM, etc.)

Nationally, over 70% of high school sophomores report plans to earn a bachelor degree. Although aspirations are elevating, achievement of those aspirations are not - especially for low income and minority students. Although graduation rates nationally have improved, the gap between white and underrepresented students has shown miniscule improvement (less than 1 percentage point). "In short, the fastest growing racial/ethnic groups continue to have the lowest rates of postsecondary enrollment and attainment" (Lumina). Further, a low-income college student with top math scores has the same chance of graduating with a bachelor's degree (41 percent) as an upper-income student with mediocre scores. More stunning, in 2013, 77% of adults from families in the top income quartile earned at least bachelor's degrees by the time they turned 24. At the same time, only 9% of people from the lowest income bracket did the same. These disparities appear in other demographic categories as well. For example, the percentage of men earning degrees in engineering and computer science (~81%) still is

dramatically different than women (~19%), even while women now comprised the majority (~57%) of undergraduates.

The 2014-15 Report on Undergraduate Retention and Graduation and other recent analyses noted the following areas of concern for UNC:

- o UNC's low-income students graduate at lower rates than higher income students, 60% compared to 72%, respectively.
- o Male students graduate at lower rates compared to their female colleagues, 63% compared to 71%, respectively. This holds across all racial ethnic subgroups.
- o The proportion of women graduating with STEM degrees is nearly half that of men; this trend has remained fairly flat over the last several years.
- o Underrepresented minority students graduate at lower rates than their counterparts of other races, 55% compared to 72%, respectively.
- o Nearly one-third of stop-outs have a B- average GPA or better.

Focal Area III. Financial Needs and Student Indebtedness

While much national attention has been focused on the issue of student indebtedness, much remains to be learned about the extent of the actual problem and more in-depth detail is needed about the nature of student debt. When looking at national data, the following facts are important to consider:

- The most recent data show that seven out of ten graduates from public and nonprofit institutions leave with student loan debt, averaging close to \$29,000.
 - o This is an increase over the past ten years in both the number of graduates with student loan debt and the amount of debt.
- The US Federal Reserve estimates that US student loan debt totals \$1.26 trillion with 43.3 million Americans with some form of student loan debt.
- Compared to the other southern states, North Carolina supported student aid dropped about 6% while it increased in the SREB states overall by about that amount.

There are a number of issues regarding financial need and student indebtedness that must be addressed within UNC. First, the cost of attendance must be contained. Trying to minimize debt is an important goal for all institutions. Recall however, UNC institutions are required by the Board to have tuitions in the bottom quartile of their peer institutions. The perception that students who stop out have enormous debt burden is not exactly correct, and the reason is that most students drop out in the first two years of college, so logically debt would be lower the shorter amount of time you are in school. The student profiles are changing: the average age of a new undergraduate is now 21 years; they work more hours; more have financial need such as the 50% of our students who come from family annual incomes of under \$24,000). Yet we also know that on-campus employment (limited availability) has a strong positive effect on student outcomes. Some facts:

- Just under 40% of UNC undergraduates who obtain a degree actually graduate with no debt.
- The average indebtedness for UNC graduates is less than other four year public universities' undergraduate rates.
- On average, of students who stop-out, 43% do so after the first year, and have an average debt of \$4200.

- Of more concern are the students who accrue debt and then never finish a degree, thereby foregoing the increased ability to pay off debt gained from the higher salaries to which they have access as a baccalaureate.

Focal Area IV. Skills Development for 21st-Century Workforce

Certain key skills are seen as fundamental for any college graduate to have, and are demanded by employers. Recent literature denotes the need for what are commonly termed ‘21st century skills’, some of which overlap with employer surveys, such as flexibility/adaptability and interpersonal skills. Evidence about a ‘skills’ gap, beyond certain key disciplinary areas, is mixed, with employers noting that new graduates are not as well versed as necessary in communication skills and ‘soft’ skills such as leadership, ability to work in a team, and initiative. Much of the research indicates that improving students’ “soft skills” is at least as critical as instructing students in the more tangible, quantifiable “hard skills,” if not more so.

The Institute for the Future cites six key work drivers, or disruptive shifts, that necessitate new skills:

- super-structured organizations,
- globally-connected world,
- new media ecology,
- computational world,
- rise of smart machines and systems, and
- extreme longevity.
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In order to meet these disruptive shifts, the Institute for the Future suggests ten ‘new’ critical skills necessary for success in the workforce:

- novel and adaptive thinking,
- sense making,
- social intelligence,
- transdisciplinarity,
- new media literacy,
- computational thinking,
- cognitive load management,
- design mindset,
- cross-cultural competency, and
- virtual collaboration.

Source: http://www.iftf.org/uploads/media/SR-1382A_UPRI_future_work_skills_sm.pdf

This list is representative of what may be termed ‘21st century skills’, or those skills deemed critical by employers operating in today’s dynamic, global, and fast-paced economy. These skills are, by and large, soft skills, and strategies designed to improve such skills can be incorporated into any course of study. The challenge is in creating metrics that can accurately measure success in attaining soft skills, which by definition are less quantifiable than hard skills. Other information can be found in the following:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/01/20/study-finds-big-gaps-between-student-and-employer-perceptions>

<http://www.alleghenyconference.org/PDFs/Misc/BridgingSoftSkillsGap.pdf>

https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/publications/Closing_the_skills_gap.pdf

What are peer systems or states doing to address these issues? Examples may include institutional initiatives that may be scalable to the system level.

While system-wide goals may vary slightly by state and by system, they all commonly provide large frameworks that then allow individual institutions to develop metrics according to common templates. Several system-wide strategic plans are referenced below. Systems are taking various strategies to address these issues, often providing a framework and ‘menu’ of activities from which institutions can choose in order to apply to their unique context and student population. Others have been described in the first focal area section. Note: only the parts of the plans relevant to student success are transcribed here, for more information on the entire plans, please consult the links provided.

Georgia: <http://www.usg.edu/strategicplan/>

This plan allowed Georgia to launch Complete College Georgia which presented a framework within which individual institutions could select and align goals meaningful to their context and mission, define and deploy high impact strategies linked to specific quantitative and qualitative goals, examine interim measures of progress/success, and provide annual updates for a five year period. The initial written plans represent a synthesis of key data analyses which provides a focused selection of strategies, and ongoing evaluation.

Strategic Imperative 1 Commitment to Academic Excellence and Degree Completion

The future of our state depends on Georgians obtaining meaningful college credentials at a significantly higher rate than today. This commitment to degree completion will target the emerging workforce represented by our youth as well as the existing adult workforce, many of whom have some college but no degree.

Develop Partnerships for College Readiness. The USG will develop more intentional partnerships with K12 education and the Technical College system and better utilize programs and assessments to ensure academic readiness for all students. We will define the success of our partnerships by what benefits our students and the State of Georgia. Collectively, Georgia’s educational partners will ensure that more Georgians graduate from high school ready for college and careers and increase the number of students participating in postsecondary education and earning degrees.

Reaffirm Commitment to Collegiate Access and Affordability. The USG will maintain its longstanding commitment to collegiate access, affordability, and value. Overall costs to students and families must be mitigated by affordable degree options and through continuance of a cost effective, access tier of colleges. Our access tier will accomplish this goal through a rigorous, focused commitment to educating

students while minimizing some of the amenities that increasingly define, but also increase the cost of, a college education. Finally, private sector and alumni support is an absolute requirement to support our continued efforts to increase need based grants and aid.

Develop New, Flexible, and Affordable Degree Options. The USG is committed to the development of new and flexible general education and degree program pathways that promote affordable and high quality course and degree completion options to Georgians. Next generation academic program structures and innovations in distance learning, prior learning assessment, and open courses and learning resources provide opportunities for great expansion of the academic enterprise.

Ensure Student Support for At risk Populations. The USG will continue the work to ensure student support for at risk student populations, whether economically challenged or underprepared academically. From influencing aspirations for college to establishing services and support for enrolled students, the USG and its educational partners recognize that postsecondary education is increasingly a prerequisite to a middle class life and is a key to economic development and creating strong communities.

Commit to High Quality Programs, Teaching, and Learning. The USG is committed to maintaining and improving the quality and diversity of academic programs, teaching, and learning opportunities. By placing an emphasis on academic program reviews, accreditation standards, faculty development opportunities, and pedagogical improvements, the universities and colleges will ensure the continual improvement of programs, curriculum, learning outcomes, and assessments.

University of Tennessee System: <http://president.tennessee.edu/static/strategicplan/index.html#goal1>

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Goal 1: Enhancing Educational Excellence

Increase the number, quality and diversity of students graduating from the UT System and benefiting from its distinct educational portfolio to produce at each campus and institute the most capable and best-prepared workforce for society.

- Raise the UT System's academic quality, stature and impact through educational excellence and student achievement across diverse populations.
- Drive educational excellence and student performance, and ensure a "best in class" student population.
- Establish a System mechanism to ensure campus/institute accountability for faculty quality and productivity.
- Develop and coordinate collaborative and innovative academic programs that build on the unique capabilities of the System's campuses and institutes and drive key outcomes and standards.

Virginia - <http://www.schev.edu/index/statewide-strategic-plan/overview>

- Strengthen curricular options to ensure that graduates are prepared with the competencies necessary for employment and civic engagement
- Provide effective academic and student services infrastructures focused on persistence and completion

- Increase on-time completion of certificates and degrees
- Engage adults and veterans in certificate and degree completion and lifelong learning

Arizona - <http://www.azregents.edu/sites/default/files/public/ABOR%20Strategic%20Plan.PDF>

Student Success Provision of Strat Plan: Goal One: Drive Student Educational Success and Learning

Sample Objectives:

- Engage students with quality and innovative teaching and learning experiences
- Encourage public service, research experience, internships, clinical placements and other types of professional engagement as an integral part of the overall student experience
- Equip graduates with 21st century communication, analytical and problem solving skills

Goal 2: Advance Educational Achievement Within Arizona

Objectives:

- Provide access and sufficient scale through numerous affordable and flexible degree options
- Embrace and utilize technology to create more efficiency in educational delivery
- Improve time to degree by providing excellent student support services
- Increase alignment of outcomes and coursework between K-12, community colleges, and universities
- Develop new and innovative financial aid models

University System of Maryland – <http://www.usmd.edu/10yrplan/>

- USM academic programs will respond to meet the changing educational and leadership needs of our state, our nation, and a growing and increasingly diverse undergraduate and graduate student population.
- Throughout its educational, research, and outreach activities, the USM will strive to produce graduates who are knowledgeable of and sensitive to the cultural, environmental, and technological issues facing a global economy; who understand the importance of and the responsibilities inherent in citizenship and community; and who have the knowledge, skills, and integrity to effectively lead the people and organizations they serve.