

Minutes, February 4 Meeting of Four-Year Workgroup of the Taskforce on College Remediation, Retention, and Graduation

Place: University of Central Arkansas

Time: Noon – 3:30 PM

In attendance: Workgroup members Baker, Purcell, Ray, Roden, Hodges; advisor Johnson

Others in attendance as observers: representatives from ASU, UALR, UAFS, UAPB, UCA, and UA System office

The Subcommittee members addressed the following topics provided at the January Taskforce meeting. Discussion of each topic included best practices as known by workgroup members and policy implications:

- 1) **How to decrease the need for remediation and how to provide it efficiently and effectively**
- 2) **How to increase retention and graduation rates at each level**
- 3) **How to increase the number of students who continue on to the next level**
- 4) **How to recruit/assist individuals who leave the pipeline**

Topic 1 comments: Remediation is ultimately a K-12 issue. We need to light the fire under the students, motivate them to do better their senior year in high school. We want students to be successful. Even though things are improving in the public schools because of initiatives and programs like Smart Core and Next Step, there are still public schools in Arkansas that are not preparing students for college (or the workplace) adequately. There is also a lag time before all the reforms catch up, and Arkansas can't wait because its economic future is on the line. Therefore, 2- and 4-year colleges need to work with P-12 to produce better high school graduates. Likely vehicles for partnerships are the Education Co-Ops, Education Renewal Zones offered through Colleges of Education, and High School Redesign, a project of the state office of ERZ and supported by ADE.

Motivators (with policy implications)

- 1) Place school districts which do not improve their remediation rates in “remedial distress.”
- 2) Use money as a motivator: increase amount of Governor's new Go Scholarship; that combined with the Arkansas Challenge scholarship can pay a student's tuition at a two-year college in the state. Market this fact widely and often

- 3) Mandate that all Arkansas 11th graders take the ACT (alternatively: all 10th graders take the preliminary ACT and therefore participate in the PLAN program)
- 4) Revamp senior year of high school in Arkansas such that students who do not do well on the ACT take remedial courses their senior year in high school – courses jointly designed among high schools, 2-year colleges, and 4-year colleges

Discussion also about

- 1) Two-year colleges handling all remediation in Arkansas. Problems with this approach are that 1) this policy would interfere with some four-year colleges' missions, 2) there is inadequate staff at two-year colleges to handle needs, and 3) regulations of intercollegiate athletics may conflict
- 2) Improving remediation instruction in colleges:
 - a) Consider computer-based, competency-based, individualized, open-entry/open-exit remedial classes (currently being used in some Arkansas community colleges)
 - b) Provide mandatory professional development for faculty who teach remedial classes
 - c) Policy – require colleges to report success rates: percentage of students who make a C or better in courses subsequent to the remedial courses. Will lead to best practices for other colleges to emulate
- 3) Adults returning to college may need remediation and should not be overlooked with the emphasis on reforming the senior year in high school

Topic 2 Comments on retention of students

- 1) In general, retention issues follow an antecedent-behavior-consequence pattern. Therefore Incentive funding may work best to increase retention. Suggestion: colleges look at their national benchmark colleges for target retention rates; then, if Arkansas colleges' current two-year retention rates are moving toward their target and are higher than their previous three-year retention rates, they will receive incentive funding.
- 2) In Arkansas financial need is a high priority. Double number of Governor's need-based Go Scholarships. Also increase state workstudy for students who work on college campuses because research has shown that campus employment increases bond students feel for a campus. Consider as well new category of scholarships based on first-year college performance (alternative: expand Challenge Scholarships to include students beyond their first year of college). And increase transfer scholarships at four-year colleges.
- 3) Identify at-risk students through a statewide-agreed upon instrument (like Mapworks) and front-load programs on each college campus to deal with students who are shown to be high-risk ("high risk" is not just academic)

- 4) Increase professional development of faculty at all Arkansas colleges to help them learn strategies to retain students
- 5) Retention needs to focus on institutional as well as student change. Policy: require each Arkansas college to develop a plan for retention of students and submit to ADHE
- 6) Potential policy: mandate mid-term grades for all Arkansas (students? Freshmen?) and programs developed for those who are not doing well.
- 7) Consider two-year colleges within four-year colleges as a means to retention, ie, "University College" structure
- 8) Potential policy: mandate that each Arkansas college use the same placement test in addition to the ACT in placing students into freshman classes. Recommended are Compass or CPT. Placement test should be aligned to the ACT as should high school Frameworks

Topic 2 Comments on Graduation of Students:

- 1) Incentive funding can also be used to increase graduation numbers and rates. Colleges can benchmark themselves against their national peers, set goals based on the benchmarks, and receive funding for moving toward these benchmarked goals
- 2) Colleges should develop programs to get stop-outs back in school and graduated. Colleges will need to determine who the students are who have stopped out with a large number of college credits, contact these students, and help them with program components like distance learning, prior learning assessment, individualized support, financial support. Best Practices mentioned in discussion were program at UAFS for former Whirlpool employees, degree completion program at Kansas State, and Graduation Projects at Kentucky universities and the University of New Mexico
- 3) Offer tax credits or post hoc scholarships to adults who return to college
- 4) Potential policy: each Arkansas college will develop a plan to increase graduation numbers (and within the larger universities, the plan will have college-specific subplans). This plan could be combined with the retention plan mentioned above. The plan could also involve a re-examination of the number of credits required for specific degrees and further implementation of the Eight-Semester Plan

Topics 3 and 4 Comments:

Helping and motivating Arkansans through the educational pipeline, P-16 will involve:

- 1) improving the transferability of courses and students among institutions by
 - a) having each college develop a transfer program (policy implication)

- b) increasing transfer scholarships
 - c) improving the financial aid transition from 2-year to 4-year school
 - d) in general, figuring out ways to get all Arkansas colleges to work together to provide students with seamless transfers. Best practice mentioned: Oklahoma State University has 40% in-transfer rate.
- 2) Develop a marketing campaign -- **Education Matters** -- for greater awareness of the importance of education to Arkansans and Arkansas
 - 3) Study where the leaks in the Arkansas education pipeline are, 9 – 16, and develop “early alerts” and incentives for improvement at specified levels, such as 8th grade, 10th grade . . .
 - 4) Expand college-awareness among middle school students
 - 5) Help adult place-bound students obtain a college degree – use technology, increase degree-completion programs, etc.

General comment – have a yearly conference in Arkansas to find out what is going on across the state in improving remediation, retention, graduation, and educational outreach.

Workgroup still needs to discuss topics related to implementation, funding, and assessment of ideas. This meeting will be at UCA either February 25 or March 10.

Minutes compiled by Karen Hodges from notes taken at February 4 meeting