

Student Input from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville  
Task Force for Higher Education Remediation, Retention, and Graduation Rates

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Good afternoon Madame Chair, members of the Task Force. I am Nate Looney representing the Associated Student Government for the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. I greatly appreciate the honor to speak with you today about the issues of retention and graduation rates at our higher education institutions in Arkansas. For the most part, my comments will be strictly related to retention and graduation rates and how these areas can be improved through increased *predictability* and *accessibility*.

Predictability refers to two separate issues that have a great impact on students' lives: predictability of costs and predictability of degree requirements. Students often times take lighter class loads, drop classes, or take time off to work because they either didn't predict which classes they needed to graduate or they didn't predict how to keep up with the all the different costs associated with a higher education today.

According to the Admissions office, a resident undergraduate student who lives on-campus and is not eligible for financial aid will need approximately \$67,000 to graduate in four years. According to the United States Census Bureau, the average family income in Arkansas is about \$37,000: barely half of the needed cost to send one child to college.

Many states have enacted prepaid college savings plans similar to "The Gift Plan," but provided extra predictability and an extra incentive to gain admission to college. These plans are administered at the state level and guarantee tuition at today's prices. Students or others can purchase their tuition in advance thus negating any price increases of tuition.

Also, increased need-based aid is needed for students who have the grades to go to college, but not enough for merit aid. Furthermore, a low-income student is more likely to be first generation student, which heightens the difficulties that the student faces when applying for college and other scholarships. These same students are more likely to take fewer credit hours to save money and/or work at college to make up for the high costs of education. Therefore, we believe expansion of need-based programs such as the Go grants will benefit retention and graduation rates.

Predictability is also a major factor with regards to the transfer of credits and students having adequate information to plan to graduate in a timely manner. We applaud the Department of Higher Education for the development of the Arkansas Transfer Course System matrix, and believe that it could be utilized in high schools for students to begin their college planning from 9<sup>th</sup> grade on. The system could also be improved if the information was able to be placed into a variety of majors and institutions to plot a 4-year plan on the internet.

Furthermore, we agree with Dr. Spence of the Southern Regional Education Board that Arkansas needs some sort of direct transfer agreement whereby certain associates degrees will be accepted by all the public baccalaureates as a completion of freshman and sophomore level courses and therefore making it possible for transfer students to also efficiently graduate in four years.

Finally, we believe that incentivizing expediency will be effective due to a high cost-elasticity of demand with college students and their education related expenses. Meaning, since college students are typically in need of money, that even small monetary incentives will have a great effect on behavior.

We believe that programs such as the “Cash for College” program used by the University of Texas at Permian Basin will provide a strong incentive for timely completion. Under this program, students can receive a \$300 credit for every 30 consecutive hours they complete towards their bachelor’s degree. The student can accrue up to \$1,200 worth of credits which can only be used during the student’s fourth year of college if they are on-track to graduate by that spring. Since this program requires students to take credits *towards a degree*, this will also serve to dissuade students from only taking heavier loads of needless classes to satisfy financial aid stipulations.

In summary, we believe that any measure that increases either the predictability or accessibility of our higher education system will have a positive effect on retention and graduation rates. Also, we believe that policy decisions that target retention and graduation rates through ways of increasing accessibility and predictability will reap the strongest benefits for the populace of Arkansas.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak today on these matters. We hope that we can be partners with you again in the future about ways to help Arkansas. If there are any questions from the Task Force members, it would be my pleasure to answer those for you at this point.