

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Strengthening the Arkansas Education Pipeline

Challenge Statement: There is a lack of awareness in Arkansas about the importance of a college degree. The number of Arkansans with a certificate, associate’s degree, or bachelor’s degree is below the national average. Insufficient numbers of Arkansas two-year college students are continuing on for a bachelor’s degree.

Evidence: Arkansas ranks 50th in the nation in the percentage of adults 25 and older with bachelor’s degrees (“Educational Attainment Rankings,” US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006). Only 18.2 % of Arkansas adults hold baccalaureate or higher degrees (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006). Only 16% of Arkansas ninth graders will graduate from college (NCHEMS). Of those students who enter a two-year Arkansas college, 20.1% will graduate in three years (Arkansas Department of Higher Education Graduation Rate Report). Of those who enroll in a four-year Arkansas college, 38.8 % will graduate in six years (Arkansas Department of Higher Education Annual Report on Retention and Graduation Rates).

Nationally, 25% of first-time community college students transfer to four-year institutions (Bradbury and Hurst, 2001). In Arkansas the percentage of students who earn a two-year degree and transfer on to four-year institutions is 11% (Arkansas Department of Higher Education Student Information System). The *Entering Undergraduate Transfer Students between Arkansas Institutions, fall 2007* report, lists 2,538 two-year college students who transferred to a four-year institution. While Arkansas ranks third in graduation rates (20%) at two-year colleges, and is only 2% below the national average (22%), this data only reflects first-time full-time students who enroll in the fall semester, and more importantly does not reflect the overall student graduation rate which includes part-time students.

Existing barriers must be eliminated in order to maximize the opportunity for students to succeed. Success should be defined as obtaining a degree or certificate, reaching an educational goal, and/or transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Some of these barriers require policy and/or legislative changes, while others require changes in institutional behaviors.

Additionally, in order to meet the goal of having the number of graduates to allow Arkansas to be competitive in the global economy, colleges must not overlook the need for increased numbers of minority, low income, and non-traditional students.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Request the governor to initiate a public campaign about the importance of a college education, including both the state’s ongoing efforts to improve the economy through increasing the number of bachelor’s degrees and more specific information about the relationship between education and income. Involve all sectors in the promotion of the campaign and target both adults and students.	2009-10	Arkansas citizens must value higher education and a campaign to educate the state’s citizens about the importance of going to college will have a greater chance of success if the governor initiates this campaign.
2. Encourage students near graduation to return and complete a degree (identify these students, and send letters encouraging them to return). Remove obstacles to graduation (such as graduation fees). Statewide effort should be made to contact these students.	2010-11	Many students have completed significant numbers of hours, but have not obtained a degree. Other states such as New Mexico and Kentucky are helping college stop-outs return to college and graduate.
3. Encourage colleges to develop pathway programs from the General Education Development (GED)	2013-15	Because ____% of Arkansas adults need to complete a high school degree in order to enter

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Degree to college courses.		college coursework, colleges need to develop pathways leading from the GED into college degree programs.
4. Develop, implement and fund a junior high outreach program.		
5. Test all 11th grade students for college entry (ACT or SAT) - expand Act 881 of 2007; Provide automatic admission for students scoring 25 or above on the ACT or equivalent score on SAT.		
6. Recruit more first-time freshmen.		
7. Mandate each college and university to develop a transfer plan to increase number of students who transfer between institutions in order to earn bachelor's degrees. Plan should include a mechanism for coordinating financial aid between institutions and innovative approaches to seamless transfer. Biennially, institutions must submit to ADHE a transfer report detailing success of initiatives and transfer rates. Recommend colleges and universities work with ADHE to continue developing the Arkansas Course Transfer System. A common course numbering system needs to be designed and implemented..	2011-12	The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education identified Arkansas as a low-performing state on transferability of course work across institutions (2004). To improve transferability, colleges and universities must focus on transfers and work together to eradicate barriers. The work of the Arkansas Course Transfer Taskforce needs to be continued to include courses beyond the 35-hour general education core classes.
8. Encourage students who have transferred to a four-year university without earning a degree to transfer back (reverse transfer) – credit hours that are needed to award an associate's degree or certificate.	2010-11	Students who earn a certificate or an associate's degree will be more employable than students with accumulated hours of college credit with no degree.

Recommendation 2: Preparation

Challenge Statement: Too many Arkansas students enter colleges and universities unprepared for college-level work.

Evidence: According to a report to the ADHE Coordinating Board for fall 2007, 52.9% of students tested below a 19 on the ACT resulting in the need to take one or more developmental courses. For two-year colleges, the numbers were even higher with 76.8% of students testing into one or more courses, and 65.6% of students testing into two or more developmental education courses. According to the information provided, there are large pockets of the state where the problem is much worse. In fact, 10 of the 22 two-year colleges have remediation rates reaching 80% or higher. Little data is currently available on the success of these students after completing developmental education courses.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Establish a systematic means of communicating to parents of middle school students, re: the importance of their children pursuing the Smart Core curriculum during high school.	Fall 2008 and ongoing	Parents need to understand the importance of and benefits to completing a rigorous course of study.
2. Require at state expense ACT in 11 th grade for all college-bound students. Mandate in high school senior year that students with ACT below 19 take credit remedial courses designed by secondary and post-secondary instructors working together.	2011-12	If students are to be college-ready, then they need early, structured, and recurring feedback from a college entrance examination; they also need to take courses while still in high school to address deficiencies detected through the college entrance examination.
3. Mandate districts with a high percentage of students needing remediation when they enter college provide special professional development for teachers; designate districts as "in remedial	2009-10	Teaching for college readiness requires helping students not just to learn facts but also to apply learning strategies and to think at higher levels. Teachers in districts with high levels of college

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distress.”		remediation will benefit from coaching in these strategies.
4. Require schools to administer the following preparatory examinations: PLAN, EXPLORE, and PSAT at state expense.	Summer 2008	These examinations provide early benchmarks for student performance on the ACT and SAT examinations. They also identify the areas in need of further student development.
5. Require the Arkansas SCHOLARS program, which is aligned with the Smart Core requirements.	Summer 2008	The Arkansas SCHOLARS program encourages students in the 8 th grade to pursue a rigorous course of study, thus increasing their ability to be college/work ready.
6. Eliminate the Smart Core opt out clause, effective with the Class of 2014. (The K-12 workgroup split the vote on this rec.)	Summer 2008	Research supports that it is in the best interest of all students to engage in a rigorous course of study.
7. Ensure Pre-AP courses are taught at the appropriate level.		
8. Support the Governor’s Task Force on after-school and summer intervention programs.	Summer 2008	Properly structured summer intervention and after-school programs can provide students with additional opportunities and support, thus increasing readiness.
9. Establish a scholarship program to provide tuition for concurrent credit students as a way of encouraging students to get a good start on college prior to full participation in college.	2011-12	Students who have earned college credit prior to enrolling have a greater likelihood of success in college.

Recommendation 3: Remediation

Challenge Statement: Since many students are under prepared for college-level work, remediation (developmental education) is critical for students to succeed, and ultimately receive a degree or certificate.

Evidence: According to a report to the ADHE Coordinating Board for fall 2007, 52.9% of students tested below a 19 on the ACT resulting in the need to take one or more developmental courses. For two-year colleges, the numbers were even higher with 76.8% of students testing into one or more courses, and 65.6% of students testing into two or more developmental education courses. According to the information provided, there are large pockets of the state where the problem is much worse. In fact, 10 of the 22 two-year colleges have remediation rates reaching 80% or higher. Little data is currently available on the success of these students after completing developmental education courses.

There is much information available on best practices through the National Center for Adult Education, Achieving the Dream project, and the Career Pathways project. These recommendations should be revisited as new and additional information becomes available through these programs.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Maintain 19 on the ACT as a baseline definition of remediation. Require colleges and universities to use a second placement instrument that correlates with ACT.	2009-10	Act 1052 of 1987 established 19 as a baseline definition of college readiness in mathematics, English, and reading.
2. Determine whether the current score of 19 on the ACT exam is a viable predictor of college success in credit bearing courses.	2009-2010	Current ACT data shows that students need a higher score if they are going to be successful in most college.
3. Mandate colleges and universities to set clear, measurable exit standards for remedial courses that correlate with the ACT and to send results of how students do in meeting these standards to ADHE in a biennial report.	2011-12	Colleges and universities need a pre- and post-course way to document success of quality remedial instruction; students need a way to show they have corrected college-readiness deficiencies.

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4. Encourage colleges and universities to develop innovative alternatives to semester-long remedial courses, such as on-line modules and early exit from courses.	2013-15	Accelerating student progress toward graduation will motivate students to persist to graduation and save tuition money.
5. Encourage universities and colleges to identify faculty with demonstrated teaching success with developmental education students, and provide professional development/training for these faculty members; and disseminate best practices for developmental education.	2009-10	Instructors who have been successful have a greater chance of helping these students succeed. Professional development/training will further enhance the teaching skills these faculty bring to the classroom.
6. Align developmental curriculum to subsequent college-level courses to help students succeed in the college courses. Reports on success rates should be collected.	2011-12	Data should be used to improve the curriculum to increase student success in developmental courses, and subsequent college-level courses.
7. Be more prescriptive in working with developmental students, and in providing support services for these students.	2011-12	Developmental students benefit from an environment where their progress is followed and there is a focus on their success.
8. Create a process for adult education students to move from a GED into college classes without the need for developmental education.	2011-12	National models have been developed and should be emulated in Arkansas to assist in preparing students for the transition to college-level work.

Recommendation 4: Financial Aid

Challenge Statement: The #1 reason that Arkansas students give for dropping out of college is lack of finances.

Evidence: Surveys conducted in Arkansas universities show that lack of funds and related issues like jobs and family obligations are the main causes of students' withdrawing. The average loan debt that Arkansas university students incur is \$19,256 (*"Student Debt and Class of 2006."* ProjectOnStudentDebt.org).

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Provide financial incentives to encourage associate's degree recipients to obtain a bachelor's degree. A tuition offset program, such as Georgia has implemented, could be offered which would pay the difference between tuition costs at a two-year college and those at a university for students who obtain an associate's degree, have a 3.0 GPA, and transfer to a state-supported university. In an effort to assist with the transfer of two-year students to four-year institutions, universities should consider increasing their transfer scholarships.	2011-12	Students who enter a university with an associate's degree are more likely to graduate than entering freshmen. Financial incentives are likely to increase the number of transfers and the overall graduation rates of two-year colleges.
2. Increase needs-based scholarships such as the GO! Opportunities Grant and the Workforce Improvement Grant.	2011-12	Increasing needs-based scholarships will help increase the number of low-income students who attend college.
3. Mandate review of 21 statewide scholarship/grant/loan programs for Arkansas students with the goals of making financial aid packages less cumbersome and more inclusive of all students.	2009-10	The 21 programs vary in requirements, applications, and administration and still do not always serve the neediest students.
4. Revise the statute that created the Academic Challenge Scholarship to allow additional students to receive the scholarship: those who do not enroll in an institution of higher education within twelve months of high school graduation but who meet the	2011-12	Being able to earn a scholarship through proving oneself academically in college should be a major incentive toward retention and graduation. Those studying the revision of the scholarship guidelines might want for the same reason to insert a

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academic requirements and those students who did not qualify at high school graduation but who meet requirements at the end of the first year of college.		provision for students to win back the scholarship. Revisions to the scholarship program should not extend the number of years of eligibility beyond the four now available under existing legislation.
5. Encourage the state to consider increasing the funding of state aid for student campus employment.	2011-12	Research has shown that students engaged in campus activities, including working on campus, are likely to be retained.
6. Explore giving financial incentives to Arkansas students who complete a bachelor's degree and remain in the state for a specified period of time.	2013-15	Opportunity Maine is the model for this financial incentive to earn a bachelor's degree and contribute to the state's economy by working in the state.

Recommendation 5: Retention and Graduation

Challenge Statement: Arkansas is much better at sending students to college than retaining them through to graduation.

Evidence: The college-going rate of Arkansas students is 67.4 %. The one-year retention rate at two-year Arkansas colleges is 45.9%. At four-year colleges it is 68.4% (*Arkansas Department of Higher Education Annual Report on College Going Rate*). Cope and Hannah, in conducting research of freshmen students, have shown that almost half of all attrition takes place during the freshman year with the majority taking place during the second semester or before the third semester of enrollment. **(Insert Arkansas Data)** Educators must be more prescriptive with students who are identified early on as those likely to experience problems. Fostering early academic successes will lead to retention and goal attainment.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Develop an early warning student support system to intervene when students are not doing well in a class.	2011-12	Early intervention results in retaining students for longer periods with higher success rates.
2. Improve student success with expanded student services.	2011-12	The Career Pathways model of intrusive student support services has a demonstrated successful retention rate of 88%.
3. Mandate each college and university to develop a retention and graduation plan, including benchmarked goals and programs for identified high-risk students. Biennially each college and university will submit to ADHE a retention assessment report that documents the degree to which the benchmarked goals were obtained.	2011-12	If Arkansas is to increase the number of adults with baccalaureate degrees, then students who enter college need to be retained. Arkansas institutions, however, differ in mission and constituency; therefore, retention goals should not be the same for all Arkansas colleges and universities.
4. Require a first-year experience course for each entering student, including a unit in career exploration.	2011-12	Research has shown that front-loading support for new college students increases their retention. Surveys of students in Arkansas colleges and universities (ACT, NSSE) show that our students' top reason for attending college is to obtain a good job.
5. Recommend that each college and university study and redesign introductory level courses with high D, F, and W rates.	2011-12	If students are not getting through core courses needed for their degrees, then colleges and universities need to find out why and address the reasons.
6. Recommend that the two-year and four-year college associations in Arkansas hold a joint annual statewide conference on college retention and graduation to share best practices.	2011-12	Why should each college and university reinvent the wheel? An annual conference will also provide valuable professional development.

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Recommendation 6: Funding and Governance

Challenge Statement: Colleges and universities lack funds to carry out these directives.

Evidence: Arkansas colleges and universities have developed a viable funding formula but are not yet funded 100% of need.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Provide incentive funding to colleges and universities which increase the numbers of students who are retained and/or graduated based on their approved benchmarked goals.	2011-12	If the Arkansas General Assembly approves funding incentives for the mandates in this report during the 2009 session, then colleges and universities could be eligible for incentive funding in 2011.
2. Provide incentive funding for colleges to target high-need employment areas and develop or expand programs in these areas; provide scholarships and grants for students who go into these areas.	2011-12	High-need employment areas in Arkansas, such as nursing, teaching, engineering, and math/science (Governor Beebe, April 2008) require targeted funds as incentives to focus on these needs.

Recommendation 7: Data Needs

Challenge Statement: We have no systematic way of knowing if remediation, retention, and graduation policies and initiatives we put into place will be successful. In order to provide implementation strategies for graduation, retention or developmental education, a statewide integrated data system that connects K-12, workforce education, higher education, and workforce services is needed.

Evidence: There is no one “global” database in Arkansas that links P-12 with college/university data with workforce information. There are only a few states that have the ability to track students from K-16 to entry into the workforce. Each presenter spoke about the importance of using data to make informed decisions about policy and program needs in higher education. Creating a data system that will validate institutional needs will result in both money and time being targeted to address graduation, retention and/or developmental education in Arkansas.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1. Determine what needs to be done to connect the systems. Start the process of either connecting the data systems or buying the software to extract the data needed. Determine staffing and funding needs to operate the system and put in a budget request. Implement new data system.	2008	These positions need to be funded during the 2009 General Assembly so that the data base can be operational by 2011. Such an integrated system would allow campuses to better assess programs and services provided to students, and to positively impact state-wide policies and campus programs.
2. Complete and fine tune a comprehensive statewide database that can track students from one level of education to another and from one college to another and from there into the workforce.	2011-12	If we don't have a way to collect tracking data, then we do not have a way to assess the programs we put into place in response to this report.
3. Develop an all-inclusive interactive database for students and parents to use for information about Arkansas colleges and universities, programs, transferring, scholarships, and the like.	2009-10	A website like Oklahoma's OKCollegeStart.org would provide in one place extensive information about preparing for, financing, and attending college.
4. Mandate that in measuring rates of remediation, retention and graduation the definition of <i>student</i> will be broadened beyond “first-time, full-time”.	2011-12	While data that relate to “first-time, full-time students” will be important to certain types of data collection, such as IPEDS, this traditional definition of a college student is insufficient for measuring remediation, retention, and graduation in Arkansas's

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		colleges and universities.
5. Determine the data elements needed to make good decisions for graduation, retention, and developmental education.	2008	Without accurate and appropriate data, good decisions about intervention cannot be made.
6. Use data from the student tracking database and the Arkansas institution information database to refine policies related to remediation, retention, and graduation.	2013-15	Policies need to be updated; data will provide objective bases on which to make policy decisions.
7. Develop staffing needs and funding to strengthen colleges' research capacities for student data.	2009-10	Additional staff will be needed at the campus level to collect and deliver data to the statewide system.