

DRAFT

Two-Year College Subcommittee Report

Rates of graduation, retention of students, and developmental education are issues that impact two-year colleges. Arkansas' two-year colleges have been working for many years to put programs and services in place to improve student success in each of these areas. Lately, some of the two-year colleges have received grants from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to participate in projects to improve student success. The Foundations of Excellence project focused on improving retention for freshmen students at four campuses with the goal of sharing the best practices developed from the grant. The Achieving the Dream project is administered by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and seeks to improve success in retention, graduation and developmental education with four Arkansas two-year colleges participating in the national project involving eighty (80) colleges in thirty-seven (37) states. The end result of this five-year project will be policy recommendations to improve student success.

Developmental education is a major issue at two-year campuses. As open door institutions, one of the four missions of a two-year college is to help students prepare for college-level courses through effective developmental courses and student services. Students at two-year colleges have an average age of 27, and over eighty percent (80%) of all incoming students need some remediation. This is a part of the role of two-year colleges that needs to be done well. A larger percentage of students at two-year colleges need remediation. In Fall 2007, the percentage of students assigned to remediation in at least one subject was 76.8 percent (76.8%) for two-year colleges and 39.5 percent (39.5%) for universities.

Retention issues at two-year colleges involve the challenge of working with part-time students who are employed, many with families. This provides a unique set of issues different from a more traditional student. These part-time students, many of whom are first generation college students, require a lot of help early in their college experience or they will likely not continue to the next semester. Student services is instrumental in this effort. The Career Pathways model, developed through the ADHE, provides a support system that uses federal dollars to help

students who are on welfare to obtain an education, graduate, and get a job. The intensive support services have resulted in an 88% retention rates for these students.

Graduation rates for two-year colleges in Arkansas are slightly below the national average, but well above the SREB average. There is one state in the SREB region that has a higher graduation rate than Arkansas' two-year colleges. While we are pleased with the accomplishments of our students, these numbers represent only first-time, full-time students, a small fraction of the students on two-year campuses.

While we must improve graduation rates for all students, we must also have a data system that tracks all students. Many students enroll in two-year colleges to complete a few courses to obtain the necessary skills to get a job. Graduation rates do not take into consideration these students because such rates are based on the completion of an associate's degree. Many students receive certificates that lead to better jobs and better pay. Nationally, twenty percent (20%) of students attending two-year colleges already have a degree, and are returning to obtain specific technical skills to get a better job, or to keep the job they have. Graduation is not the goal of every student.

The above information represents some unique issues for two-year colleges that have been taken into consideration as the following recommendations have been developed. In order to improve in these areas, better data must be collected to assess the effectiveness of programs and services being offered. We must continue the efforts that have been initiated, and support the efforts that are recommended as part of this report. The success of students is important to our institutions and our state. We are hopeful that the implementation of these recommendations will help further improve retention rates, graduation rates, and success in developmental courses.