

Recommendations from Four-Year Workgroup

Note: In Time Horizon, “short” is 2009-2010, “mid-range” is 2011-2012, and “long” is 2013-2015

Problem Statement 1: Too many Arkansas students enter colleges and universities unprepared for college-level work.

Evidence: Thirty nine percent of students who enter four-year Arkansas colleges and 76.8% of those who enter two-year colleges must take at least one remedial course (*Arkansas Department of Higher Education Annual Student Remediation Report*).

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
1-A) Mandate Explore in 8 th grade and Plan in 10 th grade for all students; recommend 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.	Mid-range	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.
1-B) Mandate districts with a high percentage of students needing remediation when they enter college to require special professional development for teachers; designate districts as “in remedial distress.”	Short	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 remediation will benefit from coaching in these strategies.
1-C) Keep 19 on the ACT as a baseline definition of <i>remediation</i> .	Short	Act 1052 of 1987 established 19 as a baseline definition of college readiness in mathematics, English, and reading. It would be counterproductive to shift the definition of <i>remediation/college-ready</i> while working on 1-A above.
1-D) Require colleges and universities to use a second placement instrument that correlates with ACT.	Short	Because some students are not good test takers, it is important to offer them the option of a second opinion.
1-E) Phase out opt-out option for Smart Core	Mid-range	Students rise to expectations placed on them, although some

		will need extra support to meet these expectations.
1-F) 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.	Mid-range	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.
1-G) Encourage colleges and universities to develop innovative alternatives to semester-long remedial courses, such as on-line modules and early exit from courses.	Long	Accelerating student progress toward graduation will motivate students to persist to graduation and save tuition money.

Problem Statement 2: 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*).

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
2-A) 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	Mid-range	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.
2-B) Recommend that each college and university require a first-year experience course for each entering student, including a unit in career exploration	Mid-range	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
2-C) Recommend that each college and university study and redesign introductory level courses with high D,F, and W rates.	Mid-range	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.
2-D) Recommend that the two-year and four-year college associations in Arkansas hold a joint annual statewide	Mid-range	Why should each college and university reinvent the wheel? An annual conference will also provide valuable professional

conference on college retention and graduation to share best practices.		development.
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Problem Statement 3: Insufficient numbers of Arkansas two-year college students are continuing on for a bachelor’s degree.

Evidence: 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*)

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
3-A) 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 should submit to ADHE a transfer report detailing success of initiatives and transfer rates.	Mid-range	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 transfer and work together to eradicate barriers.
3-B) Recommend colleges and universities work with ADHE to continue developing the Arkansas Course Transfer System.	Long	The work of the Arkansas Course Transfer Taskforce needs to be continued to include courses beyond the 35-hour general education core classes. A common course numbering system needs to be considered as well.

Problem Statement 4: An insufficient number of Arkansas adults hold bachelor’s degrees, and an insufficient number of Arkansas students in the educational pipeline are graduating with bachelor’s degrees.

Evidence: 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*).

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
4-A) Encourage each college and university to identify its college stop-outs and to develop degree completion strategies to help these adults graduate.	Mid-range	Other states such as New Mexico and Kentucky are helping college stop-outs return to college and graduate.
4-B) Encourage colleges to develop pathway programs from the GED to college courses	Long	Because ___% of Arkansas adults need to complete a high school degree in order to enter college coursework, colleges need to develop pathways leading from the GED into college degree programs

Problem Statement 5: 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
5-A) 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	Short	The 21 programs vary in requirements, applications, and administration and still do not always serve the neediest students.
5-B) Revise the statute that created the Academic Challenge Scholarship to allow additional students to	Mid-range	Being able to earn a scholarship through proving oneself academically in college should be a major incentive toward

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 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		retention and graduation. Those studying the revision of the scholarship guidelines might want for the same reason to insert a 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-C) Encourage the state to consider increasing the funding of state aid for student campus employment	Mid-range	Research has shown that students engaged in campus activities, including working on campus, are likely to be retained
5-D) Explore giving financial incentives to Arkansas students who complete a bachelor's degree and remain in the state for a specified period of time	Long	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.

Problem Statement 6: There is a lack of awareness in Arkansas about the importance of a college 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*).

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
6-A) 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.	Short	Because historically Arkansas has not had a culture that particularly valued higher education, there needs to be a campaign to educate the state's citizens about the importance of going to college. Having the governor initiate this campaign will emphasize the importance of it.

Problem Statement 7: We have no systematic way of knowing if remediation, retention, and graduation policies and initiatives we put into place will be successful.

Evidence: There is no one "global" database in Arkansas that links P-12 with college/university data with workforce information.

Recommendation	Time Horizon	Rationale
7-A) 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.	Mid-range	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.
7-B) Fund additional positions at ADE and ADHE to develop, maintain and mine this database.	Short	These positions need to be funded during the 2009 General Assembly so that the data base can be operational by 2011.
7-C) 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.	Short	A website like Oklahoma's OKCollegeStart.org would provide in one place extensive information about preparing for, financing, and attending college.
7-D) Use data from these two databases to refine policies related to remediation, retention, and graduation.	Long	Policies need to be updated; data will provide objective bases on which to make policy decisions.
7-E) Mandate that in measuring rates of remediation, retention and graduation the definition of <i>student</i> will be broadened beyond "first-time, full-time"	Mid-range	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 colleges and universities.

Problem Statement 8: 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
8-A) 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.	Mid-range	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.
8-B) Provide incentive funding for colleges to target high-need employment areas and develop or expand programs	Mid-range	High-need employment areas in Arkansas, such as nursing, teaching, engineering, and math/science (Governor Beebe, April

in these areas; provide scholarships and grants for students who go into these areas.		2008) require targeted funds as incentives to focus on these needs.
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