

Fort Hays State University
Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs

Institutional College Completion Team

Team Charge and Agenda for Action

I. The Challenge

Sylvia Manning, president of Fort Hays State University's (FHSU) regional accreditation body known as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) recently stated, "Too many students start but fail to finish college, and some US policymakers, concerned that limited taxpayer funds are being wasted, want to hold institutions accountable for their performance. Politicians, foundation leaders, and researchers are proposing and testing a number of accountability efforts, including tying the public funding an institution receives to its graduation rates and instituting standardized tests to prove that college students are learning."

The national completion agenda has been translated into at least two major goals. The Obama administration has challenged higher education to a 60% completion rate by 2020. The US is currently 16th in the world when it comes to college completion. Similarly, the Lumina Foundation has established a goal for focusing its funding efforts of achieving a 60% completion rate by 2025. Both of these initiatives are defined by including people who have a 2-year college credential or higher. The goals are derived from a study which argues that 60% of America's jobs will need a college credential of some type by 2018. Achievement of these objectives, it is claimed, will meet the country's economic needs, enhance individual earning power and strengthen American democracy through enhanced civic education embodied in the college experience.

The national completion agenda has been redefined into a state level challenge by the Kansas Board of Regents in their recently finished strategic plan known as *Foresight 2020*. *Foresight 2020* holds the state's governed and coordinated institutions of higher education accountable for elevated retention and graduation rates. The latest report on 2020 emphasizes two systemic goals that increase the overall educational attainment among Kansans by 2020:

- Increase, to 60%, the number of Kansas adults who have a certificate, an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree by 2020.
- Achieve a 10% increase in retention and graduation rates."

Kansas, as measured by national studies, has achieved a state level completion rate of 42.3%. This figure, of course, is far short of the national aspiration of 60% by 2020.

At the local level, FHSU's retention rates have been 68% in 2010, 62.7% in 2011 and 65.5% in 2012. The latest six-year graduation rate in 2011 was 40.9%. These numbers are similar to or slightly lower than other state comprehensive university peers, but not acceptable for an innovative university moving forward in the 21st century where accountability, efficiency and the

direct and indirect costs of losing students are crucial measures of performance. An *improvement agenda and comprehensive set of initiatives* is needed to meet the goals and responsibilities of Foresight 2020 and the institution's own moral and practical aspirations to improve the number of full-time freshmen students that start at FHSU, enhance their ability to persist through the entire college experience—whether on-campus or through distance learning—and attain a college credential in the least amount of time possible-whatever the credential may be.

II. The Charge

It is the *primary* responsibility of the College Completion Team to reorganize the university's existing Retention Committee into a team model that will take advantage of the expertise and resources found in the Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs to develop a comprehensive approach and strategic plan to meet national, state and institutional goals for retention, persistence and college completion. In other words, the Team must establish clear ownership of the retention, persistence and graduation infrastructure and demonstrate measurable progress with this initiative.

III. Roles

A *secondary* responsibility of the College Completion Team is the care and continuous improvement of the retention, persistence and college completion infrastructure. As a university wide "steering mechanism," the team must assume at least four critically important roles to carry out this quality improvement responsibility:

- 1) Advocate/Partner – To encourage departments, programs, faculty and staff to align their efforts with institutional strategies developed by the Team and other entities.
- 2) Auditor- The encourage analysis of the learning environment with the intention of organizing, collecting, and reporting data relevant to the identification of why students are not being retained, why they may not persist or why they may not attain a college credential. This role includes identification of "gaps" in the institutional student support services system.
- 3) Reformer – This role involves identification of broken or outdated university processes and policies, removing barriers to timely degree completion and expedition student throughout (e.g. guaranteed four-year graduation policy, proactive notification of critical course shortages, use of distance education to speed time to persistence and completion, etc.)
- 4) Monitor/Assessor --- To monitor key performance indicators and to encourage others to join in the continuing assessment of strategy and operational initiatives designed to monitor the success of the university's retention, persistence and completion planning efforts.

IV. Specific Tasks and Responsibilities

In the exercise of its primary charge and secondary roles, the Team is further charged with the following specific tasks and responsibilities:

- 1) Complete a comprehensive strategic retention and college completion plan by July 1, 2013 that addresses the following considerations/tasks:
 - a) Identify gaps in the existing retention and graduation infrastructure that need attention in order to better retain students, encourage persistence and expedite graduation attainment;
 - b) Explore ways to generate learning analytics on a continuing basis and implement good practice to leverage the value of these findings;
 - c) Develop new pre-enrollment retention efforts (e.g. plans of study, expectation letters, screening for retention risks, etc.)
 - d) Audit existing first year experience initiatives and evaluate early risk identification techniques, student-centered support services for the first year (e.g. orientation course) and accelerate student connections (e.g. social media) to the university social and learning community;
 - e) Explore and identify ways of helping students understand the value of college and fostering institutional loyalty (e.g. special videos and workshops);
 - f) Consider persistence initiatives that target the sophomore year;
 - g) Organize sub-committees to consider retention strategies for low income and other special populations (e.g. first generation, transfer, minority, distance education, commuter, international and other similar types of students);
 - h) Develop execution strategies to address retention and persistence opportunities and challenges identified in the planning process that are *connected, aligned and place heavy focus on student success in the learning experiences offered by FHSU*. The core strategy should focus on intervention in the learning experience (e.g. instructional design) wherever that may be (Tinto, 2012).
- 2) Facilitate the review of department- and college-level college completion strategies and practice with the intent of expanding institutional academic support programming.
- 3) Develop a website seeded with student retention and graduation data that also provides an archive of intervention techniques and academic support services for faculty, department chairs, deans and student affairs professionals.
- 4) Organize and administer workshops that educate and train faculty and chairs about student retention and persistence initiatives that can be customized to their programming. This is especially important for adjunct teaching staff.
- 5) Provide an annual report that includes meeting agenda and the minutes of the College Completion Team. This report should be easily accessible (website) for purposes

of accountability and improvements to all members of the on-campus community and Virtual College adjuncts.

V. College Completion Team Membership

The CCT will be comprised of the following members:

1. Director of Persistence & Retention, Co-Chair
2. Assistant Provost for Quality Management, Co-Chair
3. Associate Vice President for Student Affairs/Registrar
4. Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs
5. Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs/Director of Kelly Center
6. Academic Dean – (2-year term; rotates between the academic colleges with undergraduate degrees – College of Arts & Science, College of Business & Entrepreneurship, College of Education & Technology, College of Health & Life Sciences)
7. Representative of Administration and Finance
8. Director of the Virtual College
9. Two Department Chairs (2-year terms; rotating between the academic colleges with undergraduate degrees)
10. Representative of Computing Center/Institutional Research
11. Representative of Admissions
12. Two Faculty Members (2-year terms; rotating between the academic colleges with undergraduate degrees)
13. Representative of Academic & Advising & Career Exploration Center
14. Coordinator of Diversity Affairs
15. Undergraduate Student Representative from Student Government Association
16. Faculty Senate Liaison (President-elect)
17. Director, Student Financial Aid

To encourage diversity of membership represented on the committee, the Academic Dean, Department Chairs, & Faculty members will represent all 4 academic colleges with undergraduate degrees.

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Office of the Provost
Office of the VP for Student Affairs