

HIGHER ED MATTERS

Utah System of Higher Education, July 2013

Higher Ed Launches College Completion Initiative

Centerpiece is Campaign Encouraging Students to Enroll in 15 Credits per Semester

The State Board of Regents, with the support of the presidents of the eight institutions in the Utah System of Higher Education, has approved an ambitious initiative focused on increasing the number of students who complete their college education. The impetus for this effort is compelling data showing that “time is the enemy” when it comes to college completion. The longer it takes a student to graduate, the less likely it is s/he will graduate. The data are also clear that part-time students have lower graduation rates than full-time students.

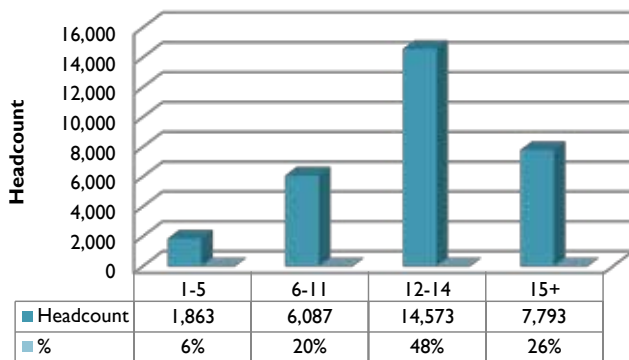
The Commissioner has recommended, with Board approval, implementation of five strategies that have been demonstrated to increase college completion. The first of these is to redefine full-time as 15 credits per semester, rather than the current 12 credits. USHE institutions will encourage more students to take a full 15-credit course load. Fifteen credits per semester leads to graduation in two years for an AA/AS and four years for a BA/BS, while 12 credits leads to graduation in three to five years for the same degrees. Most new, first-time freshman students at USHE schools took between 12 and 14 hours in fall 2012, so increasing their credit hours to 15 would mean only one additional class.

According to the Beginning Postsecondary Student Survey, students who earned between 24 and 29 credits in their first year were more than twice as likely to earn a degree as those who took fewer than 24 credits.

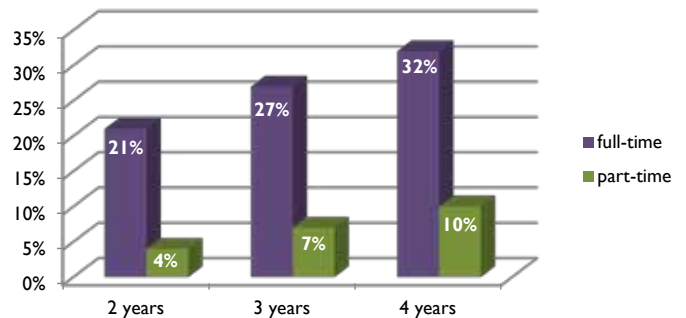
In addition, students who take 15 credits each semester:

- **Are more likely to complete college on time and earn better grades than their peers who take fewer credits.**
- **Finish college faster and can start on a career that provides financial independence and increased lifetime earnings.**

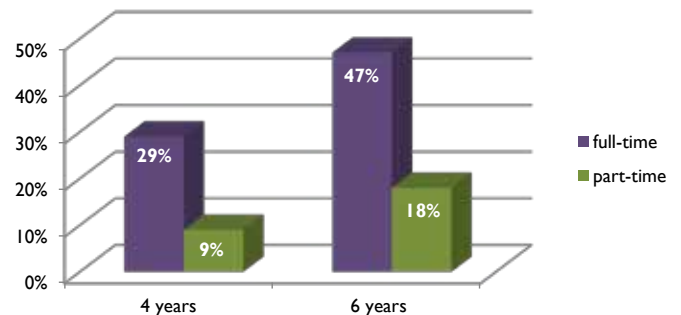
Number of Credits Attempted by USHE Students (fall 2012)



Graduation Rates of AA/AS Students at USHE Institutions (fall 2007)



Graduation Rates at 4-Year USHE Institutions (fall 2005)



USHE's College Completion Initiative (continued)

The Board of Regents adopted four additional strategies to increase completion. USHE presidents will report on their progress in implementation throughout the coming year.

ENCOURAGE THE USE OF PLATEAU TUITION AS AN INCENTIVE

Plateau tuition is a flat rate of tuition for a defined range of credit hours. Seven of the eight USHE institutions currently have plateau tuition structures that range from a low of 10 credits to a high of 20 credits. The Board has recommended that all USHE institutions set plateau tuition with a focus on 12 to 15 credit hours. Plateau tuition structures provide a financial incentive to take more credit hours each semester, thereby maximizing a student's tuition dollars and time. The Board of Regents has also recommended institutions clearly communicate to students and their families the cost savings they will realize by taking more than 12 hours a semester.

CREATE "GRADUATION MAPS" FOR EACH MAJOR AT EACH INSTITUTION

Students have a huge array of options when they register for courses and often do not have a clear sense of which courses to take when. Semester-by-semester degree program maps provide specific recommended courses to take each semester. These maps are currently common in some majors, such as nursing and engineering. They are listed as a best practice by Complete College America and recommended as a strategy to reduce graduation time.

ENCOURAGE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SUCCESS OF DEVELOPMENTAL MATH

Some students have already fulfilled their general education math requirement upon entering a USHE institution through Concurrent Enrollment, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate programs in high school. For others, the Board of Regents recommends students take math their first year in college. If students are not ready for credit-granting math classes, institutions should work with them to transition to those courses as early as possible in their college experience. Forty percent of Utah college students are placed in developmental math courses and completion rates for those courses and college-level math within two years are below 50%. Placing a time frame on the completion of developmental math will allow students to move into college-level material more quickly.

INSTITUTE REVERSE TRANSFER/STACKABLE CREDIT POLICY

Students who are awarded an associate degree are more likely to stay in school and finish a four-year degree program. The accomplishment of an associate degree can help students see their progress and stay motivated to complete additional education. The Regents have asked USHE institutions to explore the feasibility of automatically awarding associate degrees to students who complete the requirements on their way to a four-year degree. Those who do not complete a four-year degree will at least have a two-year credential on their resumes. Reverse Transfer is a process in which academic credits for course work, completed at a four-year university, are transferred back to a student's community college to satisfy associate degree requirements. This process benefits those students who transfer prior to completion of a degree at a community college.

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