

July 9, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents

FROM: David L. Buhler

SUBJECT: Completion Initiatives and Goals for 2015

Background

In July 2013, the Board passed a College Completion Resolution, identifying five initiatives proven to increase college success and graduation rates. The Presidents and their administrations and faculty have taken seriously the Board's charge and have been implementing these strategies. Over the past year, the eight Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) institutions have made significant progress on these initiatives.

1. *Establish 15 credit hours per semester as the normal full-time course load for students. Institutions are strongly encouraged to promote the recommended course load and ensure their own top scholarship requirements define 15 credit hours/semester as full time, no later than the 2014-2015 academic year.*

Institutions have embarked upon efforts to increase credit intensity (the number of credits students take per semester). USHE launched a "15 to Finish" marketing campaign, which now includes **two** videos, a website, posters, and other collateral material for institutions. USHE buys online ads just prior to and during institutional registration periods to encourage students to take more credits. Most institutions created their own "15 to Finish" landing pages and slogans, such as Utah Valley University's and Southern Utah University's "15 to Finish" marketing campaigns, and Dixie State University's "Finish in Four," which encourages students to take 30 credits each year.

Institutions have also required that the most prepared students--those receiving academic scholarships--complete 15 credits in order to renew their scholarships, while the Regents' and New Century Scholarships also require students to complete 15 credits to renew the scholarship.

2. *Set plateau tuition levels with a focus on 12 to 15 credit hours to help students maximize their tuition dollars and their time. Institutions are strongly encouraged to promote the advantages of taking more than 12 credit hours per semester as a way to complete a degree one year earlier.*

Seven of our eight institutions already have plateau tuition, which allows students to take more credits for the price of 12.

- 3. Create semester-by-semester degree program maps with specific recommended courses each semester and make them available to current and potential students, ensure they are updated regularly to help students stay on track to finish their degrees on time and better enable institutions to maximize course scheduling availability for students.*

Institutions have begun the complicated work of updating maps to each degree, with up-to-date recommended coursework, each semester suggesting at least 15 credits. They are in the process of posting these maps to their websites, where they will be easily accessible to current and potential students, families, and school personnel. In April 2014, the institutions developed a set of "best practices" for these degree maps, which are outlined in the attachment.

- 4. For students who have not already met general education math requirements in high school, (1) encouraging students to enroll in an appropriate mathematics course in their first year of college, (2) encouraging institutions to adopt a strategy to transition students from developmental to credit-bearing math within three semesters, (3) marketing Math 1050 as a preferred concurrent enrollment option for high school seniors.*

At the May 2014 meeting, the Board approved a set of math recommendations aimed to help students complete the correct sequence of math courses in high school to help them be successful in college.

The institutions, meanwhile, have been piloting innovative teaching methods to improve student success in math. These include Utah State University's math refresher courses for students whose last math class was more than a year previous; Weber State University's flipped math classes; Math Emporium, employed by Salt Lake Community College and Dixie State University. The "Emporium" model allows students to move through developmental math at their own rate, with an aim to decrease the total amount of time a student spends in developmental math. Snow College, meanwhile, has instituted "Project days," which help students see the practical applications of the math they are learning.

- 5. During the next year the Chief Academic Officers, Chief Student Services Officers and institutions are charged with exploring the feasibility of implementing reverse transfer/stackable credentials where students who complete the requirements for an associate degree are automatically awarded the degree, by institutions that award associate degrees, without an application (or fee). This may include the feasibility of a policy allowing for the "reverse transfer" of credits where academic credit for coursework completed at a four year university are transferred back to a transfer student's previous college to satisfy credentials such as a certificate or associate degree program requirements.*

USHE institutions have begun the complicated process of engaging in reverse transfer, which transfers credits "back" to a two-year institution after a student has successfully transferred to a four-year degree granting institution. Salt Lake Community College is exploring partnerships with the University of Utah and Utah State University. Those four-year institutions that also grant the associate degree have been removing barriers to the AA/AS degrees, such as graduation fees, and encouraging

students to request the posting of AA/AS degrees. Utah Valley University has seen a marked increase in AA/AS degrees as a result.

In June 2014, USHE awarded all eight institutions one-time Completion Grants of up to \$40,000 for efforts to further the five initiatives. All eight institutions received an award. These are outlined in a separate agenda item.

Given the progress of the state thus far, and the large number of efforts in progress at the institutions, we wish to build upon our success and deepen our engagement in the completion work, by asking each institution to set specific goals on each of the five initiatives. By setting three- and five-year goals, we believe we can significantly increase the completion work at our institutions, thus increasing the percentage of students graduating with a meaningful credential, and moving the state closer to the 66 percent by 2020 goal.

Commissioner's Recommendation

The Commissioner recommends that the Board commend the presidents and institutions of the Utah System of Higher Education for their first year progress in implementing completion strategies as outlined by resolution in July 2013. The Board further directs the institutions to develop goals for 2015, by January 1, 2015, as described in the attachment to this memorandum.

David L. Buhler
Commissioner of Higher Education

DLB/CF
Attachment



Next Steps on Completion Initiatives July 2014

The Board of Regents direct that institutions create 3-year and 5-year goals no later than January 1, 2015 to be reported at the January 2015 Board of Regents meeting, for further implementation of the

Board's Completion Initiatives, adopted by resolution in July 2013, as follows:

1. Establish 15 credit hours per semester as the normal full-time course load for students.

Institutions have made good progress on requiring 15 credit hours for scholarships.

Each institution sets a target based on the % of students they have taking 15 credits/semester or 30 credits/year. Data has been provided by USHE.

2. Maintain plateau tuition at seven institutions and work to inform students at all institutions so they understand the financial benefits of taking 15 instead of 12 hours per semester (or 30 hours per year including summers).

3. Create semester-by-semester degree program maps with specific recommended courses each semester and make them available to current and potential students.

The following best practices for graduation maps were developed by the institutional teams at the Complete College Utah meeting on April 30, 2014.

1. Prefix, number, title (no abbreviations), credits, semesters taught.
2. Full-time 15 credits per semester (or more) to finish in 4 years for BS/BA, 2 years for AS/AA/AAS, 1 year for certificates.
3. Part-time maps permissible as long as there is a full-time map.
4. Include milestones.
5. Maps are a companion piece to catalog and others tools (degree audit).
6. Add notes to encourage students to use available resources (advising, degree audits, etc.).
7. Students and parents must be able to access maps as stand-alone piece (not embedded in catalog).

Institutions should indicate what % complete these degree maps are, and set a target date for 100% completion.

4. Encourage students to enroll in an appropriate math course in their first year in college; transition students from developmental to credit-bearing math within three semesters; market Math 1030/1040/1050 as a preferred concurrent enrollment option for high school students.

USHE is collecting benchmark data for:

the number/percent of students who complete Math 1030/1040/1050 with a grade of C- or higher, or have earned credit for a QL through AP score (2008-2009 and 2009-2010 cohorts);



the number of semesters students are enrolled in Math 1010 and below until they successfully complete Math 1030 or above with a C- (2008-2009 and 2009-2010 cohorts).

Once USHE provides these data, institutions should set goals to increase the number of students successfully completing QL and decrease the number of semesters students spend in Math 1010 or lower.

5. Explore the feasibility of reverse transfer/stackable credentials.

Although the Board has approved more than 75 certificates, not all of these readily transfer credit to an associate degree, or "stack" to the next credential. At the May meeting, the Board approved two new certificates that do stack to an AAS degree, and these AAS degrees will then transfer to BS degrees at Weber State University.

Institutions that grant certificates should set a goal to increase the number of certificates that stack to an AAS degree and then to a BS degree.

The institutions have been exploring increasing the number of associate degrees awarded over the past year and have made significant progress.

Associate degree granting institutions should set a target for associate degrees awarded to students and for increasing reverse transfer.

One way to incentivize students to earn the associate degree is to intentionally explore prior learning assessments (PLAs). The PLA process permits students to apply for credit for what they have learned through military service, time spent in the workforce, or other meaningful experience. We encourage institutions to help address the 27% of Utahns with some college credit but no credential by intentionally increasing efforts to reach returning adult students, including the use of PLAs.