

# THE WHOLE STUDENT

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### Introduction

The goal of this report is to provide the reader a current, contextualized look at the present and future factors impacting North Dakota University System College Students; recommendations for addressing these factors are provided. The themes outlined in this report were identified during the Envision 2030 Educational Summit (May 2016) and follow-up Envision discussions on the Whole Student (October 2016); these themes are not an all-inclusive list of the issues impacting North Dakota University System Students.

## **Structure of the Report**

This report is structured by the themes that were identified through the Envision 2030 Education Summit and follow-up conversations. A brief overview, grounded in relevant literature and current practice, is provided for each theme. Specific recommendations for the North Dakota University System are provided which are based on review of best-practices, campus stakeholder discussions, national trends and standards. The recommendations align with the goals of:

- **Investing in Student Affairs**
- Increasing private funding and donations of professional time
- Adapting to the changing needs of students
- Expanding opportunities for distance learners

The report concludes by providing a summary of the recommendations the team developed that would best support students' success within the North Dakota University System.

### **First Generation**

First-generation students are defined as college students for whom neither parent has received a bachelor's degree or higher. The percentage of first-generation students enrolling nationwide is estimated "upwards of 24% of students enrolled in four-year institutions" and only 11% of low-income, first-generation college students graduate with a bachelor's degree in six years (EAB Student Affairs Forum, 2016). National research has confirmed this population to be at risk for lower graduation rates due to their and their family's lack of familiarity with higher education's multiple process and procedures, their more frequent low-income status, and lack of academic preparation (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzine, 2004). The North Dakota University System needs to understand, embrace and support first-generation students, recommendations include:

- A. Better University System-wide identification of first-generation students. Currently, the only way to identify first-generation students is through the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA). Not all entering students complete the FAFSA. A standardized question on the application for admission could assist campuses in reaching out to first-generation students throughout the admission, orientation and first-year cycle.
- B. On-boarding students into electronic services such as e-mail, campus connection, and learning management systems should be simplified to reduce jargon and increase understanding of all students, with particular focus on first-generation students.
- C. Better identification of first-generation college students will allow institutions to provide enhanced outreach and support, which could include:
  - o Reducing jargon in communication materials
  - Providing personalized support to assist students with essential enrollment processes (i.e. sending transcripts, completing financial aid verification, applying for orientation and housing, etc.)
  - Offering support programs that encourage mentorship,
  - o provide parents with helpful resources,
  - connecting first-generation students with other first-generation students,
  - o build a sense of community and provide comprehensive student success services throughout the college experience.

### **Diverse Students**

To enable student achievement and ensure global competiveness, institutions of higher education should strive for educational excellence through supporting efforts to create diverse and welcoming campus communities. "For the United States to regain its foothold as the world leader in college graduates, and to meet the projected workforce demands of the knowledge economy, we must ensure equitable educational access for an increasingly diverse population. Institutions of higher education can play a critical role in this effort by strengthening the focus on promoting higher education access and success for underrepresented populations, and fostering inclusion on college campuses" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 5).

Diversity refers to a variety of demographic and personal characteristics; including, but not limited to: race, ethnicity, family income, parental education, religious affiliation, sexual orientation. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is not only essential for the learners within higher education institutions – but also in the faculty, staff, and leadership.

The North Dakota University System needs to support, facilitate, and embrace diversity and inclusion initiatives, recommendations include:

- A. Encourage institutional commitment and prioritization of diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- B. Support diversity across all levels of North Dakota University System and at institutions (system/campus leadership, faculty, students). In fact, students report that "it is important for them to see themselves reflect in the faculty and curriculum to which they are exposed to crease at sense of belonging and inclusiveness" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 38).
- C. Seek out way to enhance the outreach and recruitment to a diverse array of students.
- D. Increase the support for services directed at all students' success, focusing on underrepresented groups.
- E. Review and revise (as necessary) North Dakota University System Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination statements.
- F. Assess the climate for diversity and inclusivity at the campus and system levels.
- G. Provide training, programs, and education related to underrepresented groups and systems (e.g cultural competency training, LGBTQ roommate matching).

# **Early-entry Students**

Early-entry (Dual Credit) students take college courses while in high school and may also be awarded high school credit for the high school equivalent of the college class; these courses are sometimes offered within the high school and/or at the College campuses. Early-entry courses must maintain the same academic rigor and achieve the expected outcomes of the college courses. The North Dakota University System has established minimum requirements for faculty teaching early-entry courses. Faculty of early-entry courses have access to professional development and resources. Courses may be delivered either face-to-face, online, or through the interactive video network.

Through conversations with college and high school personnel a variety of reasons were provided for students desiring to take early-entry courses, these included: lower cost for credits, less time to complete degree, ability to learn from home/rural locations, instruction provided by familiar instructors, early completion of high school requirements, career exploration (Career and Technical Education courses), limited elective credits available to students' in some high schools, and students/parents desire for more rigorous academic courses in High School.

Early-entry courses are becoming commonplace in the North Dakota high school curriculum. Most of the credits earned by early-entry students are within a few general education courses (e.g. Math, English Composition). There is opportunity for our 2-year institutions to expand the early-entry course offerings to include more Career and Technical Education courses in high-demand careers (e.g. Diesel, electrical) providing potential opportunities to better meet North Dakota workforce needs. Additionally, there is potential for early entry course offerings to be expanded to include a wider array of general education courses. A barrier to all early-entry course offerings is the Higher Learning Commissions requirements on qualified faculty (18 graduate credit hours in the specific discipline); this barrier will require those teaching early-entry courses (often High School teachers) at complete additional graduate credits to be in compliance.

Over time, the lines between k-12 and higher education institutions have become blurred. Based on this change, institutions need to better assess the impact of early-entry courses on students' success. While there is many benefits to early-entry courses, the North Dakota University System needs to provide data, support and collaboration related to early-entry courses. Recommendations include:

- A. Support the professional development of early-entry course instructors to ensure qualified instructors in accordance with the Higher Learner Commission qualified faculty requirements.
- B. Explore continued partnership with the Bank of North Dakota and/or state funding for earlyentry students' tuition.
- C. Invest in infrastructure that would enable more early-entry students to take CTE courses in high-demand career paths.
- D. Assess early-entry students' retention of learning and career readiness.
- E. Review standards for eligibility to enroll in early-entry courses.
- F. Better education and outreach to High School Counselors and Administrators regarding higher education institutions curriculum requirements to enable better entry-level advising.
- G. Assess how failed early-entry courses may impact future financial aid awards, acceptance in to college, and/or GPA.
- H. Seek to better understand the impact early-entry courses have on time degree completion.
- I. Identify demographic characteristics of early-entry students (e.g. first generation, honor student, rural, urban, availability to all students in high school course) to provide better support.

# **Redefining cohorts; Inclusive Metrics of Success**

Within higher education there are a variety of metrics and data sets that attempt to track the short-term and long-term success of students within higher education. The focus on success metrics has been amplified with the increased scrutiny and reporting regulations that have been applied by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Most states, including North Dakota, have developed or adopted funding formulas that link state funding allocations lined to student success outcomes such as credit production, graduation, and/or retention rates (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015).

The most commonly utilized student success metrics are those defined by Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS); it is argued that these measures fail to provide a comprehensive picture of college completion (Complete College America, n.d.). IPEDS only tracks, or 'counts', first-year, first-time students, this leaves many students untracked. Specifically, IPEDS fails to identify important characteristics/attributes of students, such as: part-time students, transfer students, low-income students, and those enrolling only in developmental courses.

It is recommended that institutions monitor and report outcomes (e.g. transfer rates, degrees awarded, graduation rates), but also identify and report important milestones toward those outcomes. These milestones can include credit accumulation, success in barrier courses, retention rates, and time to degree. Although these metrics are important, it is essential that we collect and have easy access to this data. In 2016 the Gates foundation published a report expressing the need to improve data infrastructure within higher education - highlighting the direct impact improvements could have on positive student outcomes (Engle, 2016). The report says "Better data alone will not guarantee better student outcomes, but a lack of better data will guarantee that our efforts to improve those outcomes will fall short of their potential" (Engle, 2016, p. 6).

One point of progress toward achieving more inclusive student success tracking is the adoption/utilization of the Student Achievement Measure (see: www.studentachievementmeasure.org/participants).

The North Dakota University System needs to recognize the importance of accessible, accurate, and meaningful data. Recommendation to move toward this include:

- A. Continue to report system-wide data that is inclusive of both progress and outcome data (e.g.
- B. Invest in the state-wide data systems to ensure consistent reporting and tracking.
- C. Design systems to easily analyze metrics for specific targeted populations to close achievement gaps (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, income, age).
- D. Provide **support to small institutions** to analyze and collect data.
- E. Implement best-practice recommendation from the Answering the Call (Engle, 2016) reports system-wide.

# **Technology**

Students today expect to actively engage with their learning in ways that are personally meaningful to them (Council of Economic Advisers, 2014). As a generation who has grown up with rapidly changing technology, students today have a consumer mindset in relation to their college experience using technology to organize their lives and facilitate their social connections. Students are moving away from email and relying on texting, push notifications and interconnected phone apps to manage their time and information (Yi, 2016). The North Dakota University System needs to meet students where they are delivering services and support through a variety of technology platforms and mediums.

#### Recommendations include:

- A. Move toward mobile access to services and information in the onboarding process as well as throughout the student's college career (e.g. application for admission, pay bills, CampusConnection, learning management system).
- B. Providing a one-stop student portal that combines all technologies under a single sign on would make important processes more accessible to students.
- C. Support campuses in meeting the students "where they are at" with texting, social media, push notifications to mobile devices for high priority information and other engagement opportunities. Utilize technology to facilitate community building and engagement.
- D. Educate students on appropriate and professional use of technology and social media so that they are ready to succeed in the workplace.
- E. Encourage institutions to provide professional developmental for employees regarding communication and effective use of technology to better support learning.

# **Early-Intervention**

Early intervention for at-risk students is based on the premise that an institution take a pro-active approach to intervene with and address students' problems will improve student academic outcomes (Zhang, Fei, Quddus, & Davis, 2014).

The North Dakota University System has supported the adoption of early-alert retention management systems over the past few year (e.g. STARfish, EAB). These tools provide early warning alerts of students exhibiting signs of academic distress (e.g. missing class, missed assignments) allowing advisors and others to intervene with these at-risk students. These tool are also able to communicate positive progress to students which may be a motivator for continued success.

The North Dakota University System needs to support institutions to enable early-interventions with atrisk students. Recommendations include:

- A. Continued system **support for retention management systems**/early alert platforms (e.g. Starfish, Student Success Collaborative)
- B. **Review of data retention trends** related to the implementation of retention management systems.
- C. Ensure early-alert systems have appropriate data points that are relevant to students' success.



### **Financial Assistance**

Increasing college costs coupled with stagnant federal and state aid programs contribute to the difficulty for students and families in paying for a college education. Financial reasons are one of the leading contributing factors to students dropping out of college (Kruger, Parnell, & Wesaw, 2016). While the North Dakota University System remains relatively affordable in comparison with other states the gap between federal financial aid and cost of attendance remains a problem for many students.

A national survey by NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (2016) documents a growing trend for campuses to address these financial barriers with emergency or gap aid. These grants take many forms ranging from small one-time loans or grants available to students who experience unexpected hardship to completion grants designed to pay outstanding balances so that students can graduate or continue into the next semester. Funding for these initiatives can be from private donors, foundations, or institutional. North Dakota State University implemented an emergency grant program in 2016 funded by an anonymous donation by an alumnus. To date, the program has issued approximately \$3,800 in student emergency funding for eight students. More importantly though, the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office was able to intervene with an additional twenty students who applied for the emergency grant to provide needed federal funding.

Pilot programs are currently underway at North Dakota University System institutions related to meeting students financial aid gaps. North Dakota State University also received grant funding from Great Lakes Higher Education Philanthropy to pilot gap aid grants for students in their senior year who are low income, students of color in high demand career fields. An emergency grant program is currently being reestablished at the North Dakota State College of Science, the College had an emergency fund program from 1961 until approximately 1995 and realizing the needs funds were redirected and raised to recreate the emergency grant program.

The North Dakota University System should explore the financial impacts on graduation rates and support campus efforts to utilize gap and emergency aid. Recommendations include:

- A. Gain a better understanding of the correlation between unmet financial need and graduation rates across the North Dakota University System.
- B. Encourage institutions to track the success of current Student Emergency Fund and Gap Aid programs within North Dakota University System.
- C. Support institutional-based private fund raising efforts for gap aid and emergency grants.
- D. Review timeline and administration of state-administered aid programs (e.g. CTE, academic) to leverage the benefits of scholarship to recruit students.
- E. Continue to support the North Dakota Challenge grant to increase students' access to scholarships and incentivize philanthropy.

### **Mental Health**

Research suggests that mental health concerns negatively affect the academic success of students and that counseling can lead to improved academic success and retention of students (University of Minnesota, 2008). In 2008 a task force concluded that to ensure students' success and safety it is essential to find a solution to the problem of inadequate services and ensure the mental health needs of students are being properly addressed. Although, some progress has been made across the north Dakota University System related to the recommendations of the task force other recommendations are still unmet.

The National Survey of Counseling Center Directors (2013) report indicates the number of students with severe psychological problems has increased in recent years nationally supports what North Dakota University System Counseling Centers are experiencing. North Dakota University System campuses are receiving an increase in requests to provide services to students experiencing increasingly more severe psychological issues. As the severity increases, so does the time that is required to provide quality mental health care. There is some indication that the ratio of counselors to students should decrease as severity of issues increase (International Association of Counseling Services, 2016).

Legality may also be a concern with increased caseloads. Since the International Association of Counseling Services standard ratio of mental health professionals to students is 1 to 1,000-1,500, a counseling center with a higher ratio may be legally vulnerable. That vulnerability increases as the center's ratio increases (International Association of Counseling Services, 2016). The increase in client load translates into counselors having less time available to provide preventive and intervention outreach/training to employees and student groups, serve on institutional committees, and provide consultations for faculty, staff, and administrators who are trying to handle difficult students' situations across campus.

The North Dakota University System needs to support and invest in providing mental health support/services to all students. Recommendation include:

- A. Explore ways to better support the mental health needs of distant learners. These students request services similar to services available to on-campus students. Providing mental health services across state lines presents legal and/or ethical problems. To provide services across state lines, licensed mental health professionals must be licensed in the state where the student is physically (ACA, 2014).
- B. Continue to support mental health outreach efforts system-wide (e.g. Mental Health First Aid training for students and employees).
- C. Assess current mental health providers to student ratios, current wait times, and credentials of providers at all North Dakota University System institutions.
- D. Conduct needs assessment related to Mental Health needs of all North Dakota University System campuses.
- E. Identify possible state and federal grants to assist with mental health needs in the North Dakota University System.
- F. Support state-wide initiatives and legislation to increase access to mental health providers.
- G. Review current student health insurance policy to ensure mental health coverage.
- H. Explore psychiatric and medication management services for all North Dakota University System institutions

# **Alcohol & Other Drugs**

College student alcohol use has been associated with reduced academic achievement (Singleton & Wolfson, 2009; Pascarella, et al., 2007), injuries and fatalities (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009). College student alcohol use also creates negative secondhand effects that can impact the entire community (CASA, 2007; Del Boca, Darkes, Greenbaum, & Goldman, 2004; Ham & Hope, 2003). Vandalism, unruly behavior, property damage, fights, and death can all be afflicted on innocent bystanders because of alcohol use of others (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). Given all these negative consequences, it is clear that alcohol use during college is a pervasive problem impacting not only the individuals engaging in the alcohol use, but other students and the higher education community.

North Dakota is not immune to the negative impacts associated with high-risk alcohol use. Since 1994, the North Dakota University System has consistently collected data (every two years) on college student alcohol and other drug use behaviors and perception. The 2016 ND Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Survey (NDATOD, 2016) indicated that 75.4% of ND College students had used alcohol in the past year, compared to the national average of 68.6%; and of ND College students 21 and younger 61.3% had used alcohol in the past year. The consequences among ND college students is also concerning, 29.4% reported having lost their memory as a result of their alcohol use, 18.2% reported driving a car under the influence, and 10.6% of survey respondents reported that they had been taken advantage of sexually while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Over the years, the data collected has shown encouraging results from the statewide-prevention efforts that have been employed by campuses and through the ND Higher Education Consortium for Substance Abuse Prevention (NDHECSAP). The NDHECSAP works collaboratively with campus and community partners utilizing the environmental management model of prevention, this approach recognizes that the decisions college students make about alcohol and other drug use are shaped by their entire environment. Thus prevention efforts are not only intended to change individuals' behavior, but are also aimed at changing the campus/community environment. This efficient statewide approach to address high-risk substance abuse has resulted in:

- A 10.4% decrease in the number of students that report drinking 5 or more drinks in one sitting (binge drinking) in the last two weeks (53% in 2006 to 42.6% in 2016).
- A drop in the average number of drinks consumed (per week) by students from 5.2 in 2008 to 4.16 in 2016.
- A reduction in students reporting using marijuana in the last year (23%) down from 26.3% in 2014 which is also lower than the national average of 32.5%.

Programmatically the NDHECSAP also enables an increase in campus networking and evidence-based practices at all ND institutions; a single point of contact for alcohol and other drug prevention for higher education in North Dakota; an opportunity for ND institutions to be involved in statewide and nationwide prevention initiatives; and the ability to apply for research and/or programming grants as a collaborative entity. High-risk alcohol use impacts the success of students; the North Dakota University System needs to support the prevention and education regarding high-risk alcohol and other drug use. Recommendations include:

- A. Renew support for the ND Higher Education Consortium for Substance Abuse Prevention.
- B. Invest in the administration and utilization of the ATOD Use Survey (trend data since 1994).
- C. Explore alternative funding resources to assist with ATOD prevention and education efforts.
- D. **Overtly support legislation** related to reducing ATOD use/misuse.
- E. Support dialogue between North Dakota University Institutions and local policymakers to support prevention related policies and practices.

# **Student Accessibility**

In alliance with creating a culture embracing universal design, campuses need to continue improving accessibility for all students.

Institutions invest resources in programs that enable all students to succeed in higher education, regardless of learning barriers. These services and support systems vary by institution but typically include: tutoring, testing accommodations, academic skills workshops, first-year experience courses, and online learning management systems. Oftentimes these services have greater utilization if located in close proximity to each other. Services need to be available to distant learners as well as face-to-face students.

More students are transitioning to institutions within the North Dakota University System with identified accessibility needs; the North Dakota University systems needs to support accessibility modifications and support to ensure students' success and access. Recommendations include:

- A. Ensure accessibility standards are met and maintained in all learning modalities.
- B. Provide **training for employees on accessibility standards** (e.g. universal design for academic courses).
- C. Support collaboration and training efforts to promote research-based, best-practices are consistently utilized.



# **Summary of Recommendations**

This report is structured around the themes identified through the Envision 2030 Educational Summit (May 2016) and follow-up Envision discussions on the Whole Student (October 2016). Below is a listing of those themes along with recommendations for the North Dakota University System moving forward.

### **First Generation**

- A. Better University System-wide identification of first-generation students.
- B. On-boarding students into electronic services such as e-mail, campus connection, and learning management systems should be simplified to reduce jargon and increase understanding of all students, with particular focus on first-generation students.
- Better identification of first-generation college students will allow institutions to provide enhanced outreach and support.

### **Diverse Students**

- A. Encourage institutional commitment and prioritization of diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- B. Support diversity across all levels of North Dakota University System and at institutions (system/campus leadership, faculty, students). In fact, students report that "it is important for them to see themselves reflect in the faculty and curriculum to which they are exposed to crease at sense of belonging and inclusiveness" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 38).
- C. Seek out way to enhance the outreach and recruitment to a diverse array of students.
- D. Increase the **support for services directed at all students' success**, focusing on underrepresented groups.
- E. Review and revise (as necessary) North Dakota University System Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination statements.
- F. Assess the climate for diversity and inclusivity at the campus and system levels.
- G. Provide training, programs, and education related to underrepresented groups and systems (e.g cultural competency training, LGBTQ roommate matching).

## **Early-entry Students**

- A. Support the professional development of early-entry course instructors to ensure qualified instructors in accordance with the Higher Learner Commission qualified faculty requirements.
- B. Explore continued partnership with the Bank of North Dakota and/or state funding for earlyentry students' tuition.
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# **Redefining cohorts; Inclusive Metrics of Success**

- A. Continue to report system-wide data that is inclusive of both progress and outcome data (e.g. PAR, SAM).
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