COMMISSION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
Friday, June 11, 2010

DISCUSSION ITEM B: <u>**Report: Effective College Access and Completion Interventions for Underrepresented Student Populations**</u>

Staff Recommendation For discussion only.

Background Effective strategies and solutions to boost college completion rates remain elusive, especially for underrepresented student populations (defined in this report as low-income students, minority students, and first-generation college students).

With this reality in mind, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education contracted with the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy (CEEP) to examine existing national research on the outcomes of programs designed to enhance the participation and success in higher education of historically underrepresented student populations and to identify effective programs and strategies for possible replication or scaling up in Indiana.

The CEEP report identifies college completion-focused programs at both the institutional and state level, including a self-reported inventory of programs and initiatives in place at public and private colleges and universities throughout Indiana. The report also offers findings and recommendations for opportunities for best-practice replication or scaling up in Indiana as well as recommendations for further data analysis and research.

Supporting Document *Executive Summary: Effective College Access, Persistence and Completion Programs, and Strategies for Underrepresented Student Populations, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy*

The full CEEP report is available online at <u>www.che.in.gov</u>.

Effective College Access, Persistence and Completion Programs, and Strategies for Underrepresented Student Populations: Opportunities for Scaling Up

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Effective strategies and solutions to boost college completion rates remain elusive, especially for underrepresented student populations (defined in this report as low-income students, minority students, and first-generation college students). For example, only 1/3 of full-time bachelor's degree students graduate in four years, and just over 55% will graduate within six years, which is considered "on-time" graduation. This report, completed by the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy on behalf of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, serves three purposes: it examines the extant national research on the outcomes of programs designed to enhance the participation and success in higher education of historically underrepresented student populations; it identifies effective programs and strategies for possible replication or scaling up in Indiana; and the report provides information about existing efforts underway at Indiana's public and private colleges and universities.

Literature Review

Despite the significant research attention dedicated to college student retention in the last several years, there is a surprising lack of truly rigorous studies available. Much of the evidence is anecdotal and qualitative, and the existing quantitative evidence tends to lack sufficient controls. The general conclusion of the reviewed research (particularly the work of Dr. Vincent Tinto of Syracuse University) is that although academic preparation and performance do play a major role in retention of underrepresented students, up to 75% of all dropout decisions are non-academic in nature. This statistic suggests that low achievement may be more a result of external pressures rather than a student's inherent ability. The literature has developed three lenses through which to view these non-academic factors:

Financial
- Non-tuition expenses (books, fees, meals, etc.) can be crippling, and schools generally do not provide enough funding to cover these costs.
- Part-time employment is a necessity for many students, but the presence of a job is associated with a significantly lower retention rate.

Psychological
- Many minority students, particularly African-Americans, have a need to "fit in" on campus and to feel welcomed. Feeling out of place on campus can lead academically-qualified students to drop out of school.
- Family support is critical for underrepresented students, but many of them are first-generation college students and thus do not have access to such support. Many underrepresented students must also take on additional family responsibilities, taking time away from classes and studying.

Institutional
- There are generally five types of interventions schools use to increase retention: transition programs, mentoring, learning communities, faculty/student interaction programs, and advising:
  - Transition programs include any type of summer bridge programs or orientation activities that a school may provide for its students. The literature indicates a positive relationship between an extensive transition program and student retention.
  - Mentoring programs can have multiple arrangements, from one-on-one to group mentoring, and may or may not be peer-to-peer. The literature is weak on the effectiveness of these types of programs, although there does appear to be a stronger retention effect for racial minorities.
  - Learning communities are groups of students that typically enroll together, take a significant number of classes together during each academic year, and (in the case of residential colleges) typically live in the same dormitory. The literature is lacking

regarding this intervention as well, but there appears to be no significant effect on retention through the use of such communities.

- o Faculty/student interaction programs typically refer to specialized programs allowing students to interact with faculty members for mentoring, advice, and even for research positions. Again, the existing research is very limited but such programs do not appear to have a significant effect on retention.
- o Advising programs as used in this context typically refer to targeted, dedicated advising services for use by freshmen or underrepresented student groups. The research for this intervention is again lacking, and what research is available suggests there is no significant effect on retention.
- The research indicates that these programs are best used to address the needs of certain subsections of underrepresented students. For example, African-American students benefit from mentoring programs, while other groups may realize no gain in retention rates.

State Action Review

Indiana and other states are working towards two goals: 1) provide *college access* to underrepresented populations, and 2) increase *completion rates* once underrepresented students enter college.

College Access

To improve college access, a number of states have created and funded their own college scholarship programs. These programs have emerged as popular strategies to address access within a state and increase enrollment in the given state's tertiary institutions. Fourteen states[1] have initiated scholarship programs that pay all or a portion of tuition expenses for high school graduates, and these programs can be described and compared using the following categories:

Selection Criteria
- The majority of states with scholarship programs set a minimum entrance GPA.
- The remaining states that do not set this benchmark either require that a student be admitted to a state university, or, as in the case of Alaska, require students to be in the top 10 percent of their graduating high school class.

Retention Standards
- Minimum college GPAs are an explicit requirement for most of the reviewed state scholarship programs.
- Minimally-acceptable GPAs range from a low of 2.0 in Washington (also the minimum GPA required for Indiana's Twenty-first Century Scholars Program) to a high of 3.5 in Mississippi.

Award Amounts
- Award amounts differ greatly across states and programs.
- A number of states cover full tuition. For example, the Georgia Hope Scholarship provides students with full tuition and most fees, plus a $150-per-semester textbook allowance for enrollment at any public college in Georgia's public system ($3,500 for private school tuition). Similarly, Indiana's Twenty First Century Scholar's program provides funding for the cost of four years of undergraduate college tuition at any participating public college or university in Indiana. Other states provide more modest

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[1] The 14 states and years implemented are: Indiana (1990), Georgia (1993), Mississippi (1995), Florida (1997), Louisiana (1997), New Mexico (1997), Kentucky (1998), South Carolina (1998), Alaska (1999), Michigan (1999), Michigan (1999), Washington (1999), West Virginia (1999), Nevada (2000), and South Dakota (2003).

support. For example, Nevada covers a maximum of 12 credit hours per semester with amounts varying from $40 to $80 depending on the institution.

Number of Recipients
- In 2006, Kentucky's scholarship program served the most students (approximately 118,000), followed closely by the Florida program (approximately 110,000 students enrolled in the program).
- In the same year, 10,000 Indiana students received scholarship funding under the Twenty-first Century Scholars Program.

State Cost
- Spending per student varies widely across state scholarship programs.
  This variability is attributable to three primary factors: 1) award amount; 2) number of recipients; and, 3) funding stream variability over time and across states.

Completion Rates

At the state level, two initiatives are reviewed in this report that are intended to assist state policymakers with increasing college completion through both research and information sharing between states: *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* and *Complete College America:*

  Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. Major goals of this program include:
  - A clear public policy commitment;
  - A strong data-driven accountability system;
  - Aligned expectations, standards, assessments, and transition requirements across educational systems (K-12, community college, higher education, adult education);
  - Incentives for improving services to academically-underprepared students; and
  - Financial aid policies and other financial incentives to promote persistence.
    (Achieving the Dream, 2010)

  Complete College America. Major goals of this program include:
  - Set completion goals;
  - Develop action plans and move key policy levers; and
  - Collect and report common measures of progress.
    (Complete College America, 2010a)

These two programs represent an important shift from concerns about access to concerns about completion. Findings from these programs are reviewed in the report and provide evidence for the conclusions and recommendations.

Institutional Response Review

In an analysis of 45 institutions where there is some empirical evidence for improvements in retention rates, the following intervention types were the most common:

- Counseling or mentoring of students, either by peers or trained personnel. Nearly 75% of programs with higher persistence rates used this method;
- Offering some form of instruction specifically for freshman (17 institutions, 38%);
- Transition/orientation programs and tracking/early warning systems (13, 29% each);
- Learning communities (12, 27%);
- Student-faculty interactions and additional academic support services (11, 24% each);
- Most institutions used a combination of interventions;

- The fact that counseling is only effective in conjunction with other approaches raises questions about excessive reliance on this approach.

Two-year public institutions present special challenges in increasing retention, with higher attrition rates and a larger proportion of at-risk students than four-year institutions. Similarly, there are important distinctions between four-year residential and non-residential colleges and universities. Surveys of two-year institutions suggest that these colleges are the least likely to employ the most effective retention strategies.

Within Indiana, the surveys of institutions provided the following findings:

- The entire range of persistence levers is in use state-wide, with no two campuses using exactly the same approach, even within the same campus system. This situation is beneficial since it indicates that institutions have started responding to the unique needs of their student bodies.
- The campuses that face larger persistence issues, such as Ivy Tech and IUPUI, have developed the most extensive retention packages in response to the problem.
- Of the 26 responding institutions, academic support (tutoring and advising) was the most common service offered, with 21 respondents indicating at least one services of this type is offered.
- Learning communities are the least common approach, with only two institutions reporting their use. Logistical costs for this intervention are high, likely leading to its infrequent use.
- Dual-credit options (allowing students to take college classes in high school) are being used in several institutions, which is a unique approach to persistence that is virtually ignored within the literature.

Recommendations
Based upon the examined research, the report puts forth the following recommendations:

- Indiana should continue to work with programs such as Complete College America and Achieving the Dream to increase and improve comparable data across states.
- Increasing access to higher education is important but not sufficient. Indiana state policymakers should continue to increase access to underserved populations; at the same time, they should also increase focus and spending on college completion at both two- and four-year colleges and universities with emphasis placed on underrepresented populations.
- In an effort to improve persistence and completion among underrepresented groups, more research is needed. In particular, state policymakers and college administrators should foster investigations of the relationship between increased access for specific underrepresented populations and subsequent persistence and completion rates for those groups.
- When using advising services for the purpose of increasing retention and persistence, school administrators should ensure that freshmen and at-risk student groups have access to specialized advising options designed to meet their specific needs.
- State and school administrators have a large number of retention levers at their disposal. The selection of specific levers, though, should be considered on a school-by-school basis.
- The non-tuition costs of college, including books, food, fees, and other items, severely impact the ability of underrepresented students to persist. State and school administrators should create or re-develop financial aid programs to deal with these types of hidden costs in a meaningful way.
- State administrators should pursue additional research on the effects of family responsibilities on student retention.

- There is a significant need for a detailed, comprehensive, and rigorous analysis of the comparative effects of different retention strategies, with a special focus on the distinct contexts of community, non-residential, and residential colleges and universities.
- Policymakers in Indiana should build on the 21st Century Scholars Program by expanding its scope from access to retention and making greater use of program alumni.