

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Achieving the Baccalaureate Degree

Presentation By

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Summary

Improving degree completion has been a priority of the California State University since 2002. This item presents a plan for renewed efforts to improve graduation rates.

Improving Student Progress to the Baccalaureate Degree

In Fall 2002 the Board of Trustees adopted a three-part initiative to improve the effectiveness and efficiency with which students earn the baccalaureate degree. The two overarching goals of the initiative are to graduate a higher proportion of students and to earn the degree while accruing fewer unneeded or unwanted courses. As Attachment A indicates, the graduation initiative has three parts: improving preparation to begin college, strengthening the transfer process, and helping enrolled students progress toward the degree. The CSU has made substantial progress on improving preparation for college through the Early Assessment Program (EAP). Similarly, a streamlining of the transfer process is well underway through the Lower-Division Transfer Project (LDTP). The final piece in this triad is campus actions to improve degree completion.

December 2002 saw the release of the report of the CSU Task Force on Facilitating Graduation, co-chaired by Jacquelyn Kegley, then academic senate chair, and Louanne Kennedy, then provost of CSU Northridge. When an early draft of the report had been developed, the Task Force met with four members of the CSU Board of Trustees, all of whom had indicated a strong interest in the topic and announced it to be a major initiative for the upcoming year. The Task Force report asked each CSU campus to develop a plan, based on institutional research, to improve graduation rates. Each plan would contain elements common to all CSU institutions and some elements unique to the specific culture and environment of the campus. Campuses were expected to address the development of roadmaps, the development of class schedules designed to accommodate these roadmaps, mandatory progress-to-degree audits, improved university catalogs, and the effective use of summer terms. They were encouraged to also consider developing first-year experience courses, effective advising practices, and faculty development experiences for improved

instructional effectiveness. Copies of the campus plans were forwarded to the Office of the Chancellor in November 2003.

Since that time, the Board has received regular progress reports on the general topic of campus efforts to facilitate graduation. For example, in November 2004, the Board heard a report on a December 2003 two-day conference on best campus practices in facilitating graduation; on a June 2004 meeting at the Chancellor's Office on the topic of first-year experience courses; and generally on campus progress in developing roadmaps for degree programs and using degree audits.

More recently, at its January 2005 meeting, the Board of Trustees heard a report that drew upon information and perspective gathered in collegial visits to seven campuses undertaken in the week of January 11–18, 2005. Five themes emerged in that report, including (1) a recommended focus on reducing units to the baccalaureate, rather than reducing time to the undergraduate degree; (2) providing support for lower-division students in clarifying life and career goals, on the way to declaring a major; (3) using degree audits and similar strong advisement practices; (4) assuring class schedules that meet students' needs; and (5) reviewing and, where appropriate, tightening of campus policies governing course repetition. At its March 2005 meeting, the Board heard a further report that was founded upon formal recommendations from the Academic Senate, CSU in describing a broad, multi-constituency consensus as to best practices.

Included in Attachment B, based on the themes derived from campus visits, is a plan for renewed efforts to improve graduation rates in the CSU. Campuses will be asked to address these items and report on their progress at future meetings of the Board.

Almost all undergraduates enter the CSU intending to get bachelor's degrees, yet 40 percent never earn a CSU degree and a third never earn a bachelor's degree from any college. This is an unfulfilled commitment of substantial time and money made by tens of thousands of students and by California's citizen taxpayers. Improved graduation rates will significantly benefit students and California's society and economy.

Proposed Resolution

The following resolution is recommended for adoption:

RESOLVED, That the Board of Trustees direct the chancellor to charge the campus presidents and faculty to implement the recommendations in this report and to file periodic reports on campus progress in meeting the goals.