



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

November 18, 2022

Academic Education Committee Report

The Academic Education Committee met on October 21, 2022, under the leadership of Committee Chair Stan Albrecht, with all committee members participating. The meeting was dedicated to discussions on institutional roles and missions with a special focus on completion and quality within the institutional role and how the Board and institutions can work together to improve completion.

Completion and Institutional Role

Utah has strong economic support that many other states do not enjoy, such as high state appropriations for higher education. The state ranks 14th highest in the country for the proportion of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher, but has room for improvement. All Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) institutions except Snow College and Salt Lake Community College have slightly lower completion rates than the average of their national peers, and those national rates are inadequate to the state's goals.

Across the United States, access and completion rates can differ markedly by institutional role. USHE degree-granting institutions reflect those national patterns: completion rates are about 20% higher at research and doctoral universities than at other four-year institutions. Four-year institutions have completion rates 20% higher than two-year colleges. Within an institutional type, institutions with open access roles have completion rates 20-40% lower than selective institutions of the same institutional level. All USHE degree-granting institutions, except for the University of Utah and Utah State University's (USU) Logan campus, are open access institutions; USU's regional campuses are open access and count in USU's completion metrics.

Various academic, personal, family, and economic factors affect whether Utahns access higher education, persist in their studies, and graduate. The committee conversation was centered on the need for the Board and institutions to understand those factors to meet students where they are and design completion strategies to help them succeed. Those factors include:

- widespread academic under-preparation in high school, leading to high numbers of Utah students in need of academic remediation and high failure rates in introductory courses;
- patterns of delayed matriculation (for example, LDS mission service);

- low ages for marriage and parenting causing students to slow down their time to completion, stop out for a time, or drop out entirely;
- low rates of students accessing federal financial aid and low levels of state financial aid;
- part-time enrollment patterns affected by economic difficulties, family responsibilities, and academic under-preparation;
- a strong economy that raises the opportunity costs of delaying entry in the workforce in order to finish a degree.

Discussion of Strategies to Improve Completion

The committee discussed how the Board and the system are attempting to address as many of these factors as possible through the Strategic Plan and actively supporting institutions in their efforts to improve completion rates. Strategic plan initiatives have been specifically designed to address:

- Academic under-preparation:
 - Concurrent Enrollment brings college opportunities to high school students and is an essential tool for addressing a critical gap in the high school mathematics curriculum. USHE has worked with the degree-granting institutions to use SB196 funds from the legislature to build up a qualified pool of high school concurrent enrollment math instructors. Now that capacity for offering courses is in place across the state through those faculty development efforts, the focus of the funding is shifting toward recruiting more students, particularly from underrepresented populations, into Concurrent Enrollment math.
 - To bypass costly remedial education, USHE is working on multiple placement options to put as many students as possible directly into college-level courses and has been developing co-requisite remediation models to embed development education within college-level coursework. This enables institutions to place students into credit-bearing college courses and provide them with adequate support to succeed. Faculty committees have worked together to design co-requisite courses in some key disciplines; conversations are just beginning in other disciplines and institutions are working to bring co-requisite options to scale.
 - Since USHE data indicates that more than half of the students who fail just one course will not graduate, the Strategic Plan initiative around introductory course success has been working with institutions and the General Education Task Force on improving the pass rates in key high enrollment courses. This year's efforts will include shared professional development strategies for General Education faculty.
- Structuring degrees to facilitate completion.
 - During the first year of the strategic plan, faculty from degree-granting institutions worked with the Commissioner's office to standardize minimum scores/maximum credits for prior learning assessment exams. This year the efforts will focus on collaboration between institutions to develop a shared intake tool to help returning or new adult students explore and take advantage of more credit-for-prior-learning options.
 - Another key strategic plan priority has been to streamline transfer to ensure that students get full credit for the coursework they have completed and to message the lower division courses they

should take to fulfill graduate requirements in key transfer majors at all USHE institutions.

Efforts this year will include addressing misalignments in General Education requirements across institutions.

- Financial and mental health barriers can also pose obstacles to graduation. Although these efforts are assigned to the Student Affairs and Finance and Facilities Committees, the Academic Affairs Committee supports their efforts to:
 - Help more students access federal aid by completing the FAFSA application, redefinitions state aid to distribute some existing funds to need-based aid, and collaboration between institutions on student basic needs, mental health, and student safety strategies.
- Updates to the policies on institutional roles and missions.
 - Because institutional roles are so fundamental to student access, affordability, and completion, the committee has prioritized updates to policies reflecting those roles. They include: Policy R312, *Institutional Missions and Roles* and Policy R315, *Service Area Designations and Coordination of Courses and Programs* (which currently do not include technical colleges); Policy R401 which defines the types of credentials that institutions can offer and the program approval process, a key tool for the Board to ensure academic programs meet state and regional needs; Policy R411, *Cyclical Program Review* which allows the Board to assess the quality of the academic programs offered by institutions; and Policies R470 and R471, which determine how degrees should be structured to facilitate transfer and completion.

Next Steps

Future meetings will continue the conversation on the types of credentials offered within institutional roles, how to structure those awards to facilitate completion, and how the Board can standardize assessment and accountability for program quality.

Commissioner's Recommendation

This is information only; no action required.