

AGENDA ITEM C2: DEGREE COMPLETION
BOARD RULE 400.0200.00
GRADUATION AND COMPLETION RATES
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING: SEPTEMBER 23, 2010

Graduation and completion rates for degrees and certificates serve as key indicators of Belmont Technical College’s progress toward helping students achieve their educational goals (Board of Trustees, *Ends Policies*, Section IV, 400.0200.00 *Degree Completion*). Belmont’s systematic approach to monitoring graduation and completion rates begins with entry of degree and certificate completions for students in the student information system. Reports based upon these data are generated and submitted to the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) in its Higher Education Information (HEI) system. Data are then tracked through external reports generated from the HEI system and published by OBR. OBR publishes performance reports that track institutions’ progress on University System of Ohio (USO) accountability metrics.

This Board of Trustees monitoring report focuses on Belmont’s data monitored and reported by OBR in its August 2010 draft of *Getting to Goal: Delivery Plan for Enrollment and Graduation Targets of the Strategic Plan for Higher Education*. The report addresses Belmont’s projections and performance on three graduation metrics: 1) total science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees awarded; 2) total degrees awarded to first generation college students; and 3) total degrees awarded to Black and Hispanic students. The data discussed in this monitoring report includes only those degree and certificate completions that OBR has presented in the August 2010 draft report, *Getting to Goal*.

Data

Data for this report are presented in Table 1, *Institutional performance on USO metrics, 2006/2007 through 2008/2009*. The table presents Belmont data submitted to the HEI system over the last two years. The 2006/2007 academic year data was designated as a baseline year for OBR’s monitoring and anchors institutions’ data with actual values for the 2006/2007 year. Data for that year sets a starting point for projections. Each institution developed projections for performance based on the 2006/2007 data with anticipated counts through 2013/2014.

The 2013/2014 academic year was designated by OBR as the year by which the USO would reach targeted goals. In the Table 1, shown below, “actual” values are those that have been drawn from Belmont’s information system, submitted by the College to the HEI system, and reported by OBR in its performance reports. When administrators developed projections for performance, those projections for future years through 2013/2014 were reported to the Board of Trustees and approved. The College has had opportunities to update projections annually.

Table 1, *Institutional performance on USO metrics, 2006/2007 through 2008/2009*

			2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009		2013-2014
			Actual	Actual	Projected	Actual	Projected
Total degrees awarded annually			286	313	235	341	351
	Associate		204	227	235	271	293
	Certificates (= 1 yr < 2 yrs)		82	86	NA	70	58
Total STEM degrees awarded			78	153	109	181	128
Total degrees to first-generation students			80	112	79	168	94
Total degrees to Black and Hispanic students			7	2	5	9	7

In the first table, there are six horizontal rows of data. The first three rows show the total number of degrees awarded annually, the total number of associate degrees, and the number of certificates awarded to students who completed programs intended to require at least one year and not more than 2 years of study. In addition to the certificates equal to one year and less than two years, Belmont has a small number of academic programs, such as those designed for students seeking certificates in medical transcription and heating and air-conditioning that can be completed in less than one year. Those awards are not included in counts of actual or projected totals for the USO metrics.

Analysis

Data in this monitoring report document the progress that has been made since 2007 and through 2009 in graduation and completion rates. More recent data will be available later this year. The total number of degrees and certificates awarded in 2007 was 286, and the total number for 2009 is 341. The 2009 total shows an increase of 19 percent in two years. The number of degrees and certificates projected for 2014 is 351 (293 associate degrees and 58 certificates). Thus the projection submitted to OBR suggests that there will be an additional increase of 10 completions over the 2008/2009 academic year. An initial assessment of the 2013 projection appears to be low; however, a number of variables contribute to the seemingly low projection. One such variable is the semester conversion process and the emphasis that has been placed on encouraging students to complete their programs while the quarter system remains in effect. This could lead to a short-term increase that might not continue into 2013. Another variable in projecting total degrees and certificates is the demographic profile of students which appears to be in flux in response to changing economic conditions in the area.

Comparisons of actual data for 2008/2009 on three dimensions that contribute to actual graduation and completion rates can also be examined to inform Belmont's approach to increasing completion rates overall. Actual and projected counts for three USO metrics for completions are displayed in the Table 1 and are shown in the rows below the counts for total degrees.

Belmont's projected that 109 STEM degrees would be awarded during the 2009 academic year; the actual count was 181. The difference between projected 2009 and actual 2009 data for STEM degrees is 66 percent. One factor that may have contributed to the projected count being 72 degrees below the actual count, 181, is that definitions for what was to be categorized as a STEM degree were not clear when projections were made. After projections were made for the 2009 academic year, clarification on how and what level STEM degrees would be counted were clarified by OBR.

A similar increase can be seen in the number of degrees to first-generation students. For the 2009, 79 awards were projected and 168 was the actual count of awards to first-generation students. In this category, the increase is 113 percent. As was the case with STEM degrees, methods for gathering and reporting data have been clarified since initial projections were made. It is likely that when projections are reevaluated, there will be a smaller discrepancy between projected and actual counts.

The completion and graduation rate for Black students and Hispanic students are combined into one category i.e. *Black and Hispanic students*. The rate has varied over the past two years with two awards in 2008 and nine awards in 2009. The projected count for 2013 was set at seven.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Graduation and completion rates align to a certain extent with enrollment rates. This could be, if for no other reason, because students' persistence depends upon recruitment and enrollment. As a result of connections between enrollment and graduation and completion rates, many of the strategies that are being and have been implemented to increase enrollment ultimately are tested by graduation and completion rates. In light of shifts in the state's funding model from relying upon enrollment numbers to completion rates, data related to retention of students to graduation will be receiving heightened attention in Ohio.

Although the economic downturn may have served as an initial stimulus to encourage students to persist towards degree completion, the recent increase in enrollment has created a need to analyze the manner in which students are served by the College. Recently changes have been made in the enrollment and advising functions in response to the increased number of students being served. Some of these changes were with the New Orientation processes which allowed advisors to see more new students in a group setting, thus freeing up time to better serve continuing and returning students. In addition, the newly implemented process of scheduling advising appointments has increased advisors' time for meeting with students. Increased service to students through placement testing and career and academic advising also has an impact on students, especially for students who may not have the support systems or knowledge on how to pursue higher education.

Belmont will continue to develop and implement initiatives in support of enrollment and persistence towards degrees completion for each category defined by the USO. In addition to an overall strategic plan for enrollment management, the college has also developed strategic initiatives targeting students who are 25 and older, Black and Hispanic students, first-generation students, and students enrolled in STEM degree programs.

Implementation of Strategies for Improvement

Targeted Recruitment Plans: Under-represented populations of students are the focus of targeted recruitment plans. Strategies aimed at recruiting students have been in the development stage and implementation is planned for the 2010/2011 academic year. One of the groups identified for targeted recruitment is adults who are 25 years old and older. This group of students is one that Belmont will be monitoring for progress on the USO metrics.

First Year Experience: A comprehensive program for new students was implemented in summer 2010 to promote student success from the point of inquiry to completion of their first year. The program created a partnership with seven feeder high schools to bring their students to Belmont to be tested, advised, informed of college policies, to meet current students, and to register online for classes. For these students it begins a year of constant contact with the college. The program is designed to help retain students from fall through summer quarter. Additionally, the program will involve faculty in advising 2nd year students and guiding students to graduation.

The Student Success Course (PSY104): Belmont's student success course has been revised for fall quarter 2010 to focus on what students need to learn to be successful college students at Belmont and transfer institutions. Critical thinking has been a key ingredient of the course redesign. Another key component will be the instruction on how to use the college computer information system.

Topics such as time management, study skills, goal setting, and learning styles are included.

Able Collaboration: Since January 2008, Belmont has hosted an Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) class on main campus. ABLE is administered through Mid-East Career and Development Center in Zanesville. ABLE classes primarily served those students who have not yet earned a high school diploma, and students who are working to gain skills necessary to earn their GED diploma. The class can also serve those students who do not yet possess the academic skills necessary for experiencing success in Belmont's entry-level transitional studies courses. In the spring of 2010, a second ABLE class was added at BTC's North Center site. An ABLE class is also available in Monroe County at the former Woodsfield High School. Belmont's advisors and staff work collaboratively to guide those students who require further skill development prior to BTC enrollment into ABLE classes.

ABLE classes were offered continuously during the 2009/2010 academic year at the main campus, North Center. During that year, ABLE classes were offered for the first time at the Monroe County location. Belmont has been working on establishing a partnership with Mid-East Career and Development Center to implement a pilot program aimed at identifying students who can benefit from ABLE classes and referring those students to the most skill-level appropriate ABLE classes. In addition, Belmont will be making college resources available to the ABLE students who choose to begin the transition to college with ABLE classes.