

AGENDA ITEM B3: DEGREE COMPLETION
GRADUATION AND COMPLETION RATES
STRATEGIES EMPLOYED TO IMPROVE GRADUATION RATES
BOARD RULE 400.0200.00
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING: SEPTEMBER 22, 2011

Belmont’s systematic approach to monitoring graduation and certificate completion rates begins with entry of degree and certificate completions for students in the student information system. Reports based upon these data are reported to the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) through its Higher Education Information System (HEI). Data can be tracked for monitoring through external reports generated by the HEI system and published on the Board of Regents’ web site. OBR publishes performance reports that track institution’s progress on University System of Ohio (USO) accountability metrics. This report presents degree and certification completion rates in a table showing the trend for degree and certificate completion rates from the 2006/2007 academic year through the 2009/2010 academic year.

This report displays graduation and completion data elements included in the USO’s performance success measures. These measures are represented in the six column chart that details degrees awarded annually and broken out by the following categories: number of associate degrees awarded, number of certificates awarded, number of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) degrees awarded, number of degrees awarded to first-generation college students, and total number of degrees awarded to Black and Hispanic students. Data were summarized and reported by HEI in its performance reports.

Data/Analysis

Table 1, *Degree and certificate completions, 2006/2007 through 2009/2010* displays data from the HEI report, *University System of Ohio Accountability Measures: Degrees by Level FY 2006-2007 through FY 2009-2010*. The HEI report was distributed in January 2011 to show institutions’ progress on accountability metrics.

Table 1, *Degree and certificate completions, 2006/2007 through 2009/2010*

				Academic Year			
				2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Total degrees awarded annually				286	313	341	331
Associate				204	227	271	280
Certificates *				82	86	70	51
Total STEM degrees awarded				145	153	185	198
Total degrees to first-generation students				96	112	141	157
Total degrees to Black and Hispanic students				7	2	9	6
* Certificates equal to 1 year and less than 2 years							

The total number of degrees and certificates awarded has increased over the four-year period from 286 in the 2006/2007 year to 331 in 2009/2010. The overall increase is 16%. Associate degree awards increased by 37%, and certificates awards declined by 39% during this same period. STEM degrees awarded increased by 37% and total degrees to first-generation

students increased by 64%. Total degrees awarded to Black and Hispanic students declined from 7 in 2006/2007 to 6 in 2009/2010.

Data analysis of graduation and completion rates from 2006/2007 through 2008/2009 led to initiatives designed to improve outcomes for all students. Implementation of the First Year Experience (FYE) and revisions to the Student Success Course were aimed at improving graduation and completion rates for new and continuing students in all academic programs.

First Year Experience was created in 2010 to promote student success from inquiry to completion of students' first year through to graduation. All students attending college for the first time were invited to participate in FYE. Continuing students were welcomed into FYE activities as well; however, student services' tracking of FYE students includes only first-time students. The program focuses on academic engagement, educational commitment to obtaining a college degree, campus involvement, and academic self-efficacy. FYE activities include four specific workshops for new students: *Brain Friendly Learning*, *How to Study*, *How to Take Tests*, and *Time Management*. A total of 34 students attended one or more of the workshops, and six students completed the workshop series. Structure for and FYE schedule of activities has been put in place for future students' involvement and more consistent methods of data collection and analysis to evaluate outcomes are being implemented.

Belmont's Student Success Course was first designated as PSY104. Following revisions, the course is designated as *FYE101* on the schedule. Refinements to the course addressed student outcomes that are critical for students to succeed while at Belmont. Key ingredients to success include critical thinking skills, more consistent utilization of the college information system by students, and career testing that provide students with greater emphasis on persisting to graduation and completion of academic pathways and developing and meeting career goals. In fall 2010, 222 students registered for the student success course, and 175 of those students persisted to spring 2011.

In addition to the strategies developed to increase graduation and completion rates overall, the following strategies have been implemented to help students prepare for employment following graduation.

- In order to encourage more student participation in career services activities, the career assessment inventory, Kuder¹ is available to students on a one-to-one basis. From July 2010 through June 2011, 116 students completed the Career Assessment Inventory through "Kuder Journey." This service helps students to align their academic goals with career goals and assists students in striving towards degree completion. Kuder has been offered during the student success classes in the past and is now available to students working one-on-one with the director of career services.
- Interviews with prospective employers are being held more frequently on campus. The office of Career Services hosted CONSOL Energy for recruiting interviews and First Energy for internship interviews. To prepare for an interview, each candidate participated in a resume review process. Sixteen industrial electronics program students interviewed with CONSOL Energy and three were selected for employment. Eight power plant program students interviewed for the internship opportunity and two were offered internships. On-site job

¹Information about the Kuder Test Survey software is available from: <http://www.hollandcodes.com/kuder-test-survey.html>

recruiting may spark retention and persistence through graduation among students as they observe real-life employers offering viable positions to students' peers and classmates.

- An online environment for accessing job opportunities and posting resumes is available to employers and students through the College Central Network Services. This new online platform for job search services was introduced in April 2011. This service allows students to create and publicize their resume, search for jobs offered through the Belmont Career Services office, the Ohio Two-Year College Career Services Association, and national search boards. Registered participants can watch career development videos and read informative articles to increase employability. To date 171 students, 25 alumni, and 30 employers have registered with the online service. This service may provide incentive for students to complete their degrees when they realize that opportunities await them upon graduation.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Administrators and staff members in the Student Services office recognize the importance of retaining students as they move toward completion of their degree and certificate programs and that graduation rates are an indicator of eventual student success. The strategies presented are designed to support and retain students toward their goal of associate degrees, transfer degrees, and certificates. Additional strategies being developed for implementation in fall 2011 include the following:

- New intake model for entering students has at its foundation the corporative efforts of the Advisement Center and Student Success Center. New students to the College will be guided from application, pre-test placement preparation, Accuplacer testing, orientation, advisement, and registration through college success courses, success workshops, and tutoring. The new intake model is based on a collaborative approach between student services and the Student Success Center.
- The Retention Module System (RMS) for “at-risk” students who are new, full-time, first-time students for Fall 2011 has been piloted and is being implemented in academic advisement. The RMS provides an important tool designed to identify students who are at risk for dropping out and includes tools for notifying the appropriate advisors and faculty members when students demonstrate characteristics that have been identified as potential threats to student persistence. Early alerts of academic difficulty are one way the RMS can be used to provide interventions when faculty members notice a student has missed classes or stopped attending all together. Advisors monitoring the RMS can then provide assistance to students and help them stay on the pathway to success and graduation.
- Case management will be facilitated by identifying the students through the RMS that are “high risk”. The Academic Advisors will provide supportive assistance in monitoring and documenting academic progress in the student’s first year, developing intervention strategies, and focusing on educational goals that promote student success and degree completion.
- Degree Completion Plans (DCP) for students are being developed to ensure that their semester conversion needs and certificate/degree completion requirements are met. Initially the Academic Advisors are meeting with students who have 45 credit hours or more to assist in their degree completion before the semester conversion takes place. Advisors will then meet with students who have fewer than 45 credit hours to ensure these students are on sequence for completion. Advisors will work with students who are assigned to their

academic areas of expertise. Additionally, as new students enter Belmont each student will receive a DCP that will be continuously updated as they proceed towards their degrees and certificates.

- The Graduation series is a new initiative for fall 2011 that is designed to help guide students through a series of activities from entry to graduation. The specific events will include:
 1. Financial planning focusing on Financial Aid issues,
 2. Degree Completion Plans,
 3. FYE101 course that includes an emphasis on a holistic view of college and graduation,
 4. Career Services presentations in the FYE101 course as they apply to potential jobs/careers linked with different academic programs Belmont offers,
 5. Transfer program information and encouragement focusing on the importance of completing Bachelor's degrees after transfer to four-year institutions.
- Explore the Student Strengths Inventory (SSI) as an assessment tool for a proposed cohort of six classes, three multi-disciplinary courses (MDS), and three FYE101 courses. Students in these sections would participate in academic exercises and reflections to address non-cognitive issues of academic engagement, academic self-efficacy, educational commitment, campus engagement, social comfort, and resiliency.
- Create a Data Plan to systematically and effectively collect and analyze graduation and completion data to assist students toward graduation.

Upon reviewing the programs and initiatives for student success as they are connected to graduation and completion rates it is evident that there is a basic foundation in place to engage students. Recently implemented improvements are anticipated to contribute continued increases in graduation and completion rates at Belmont.

Targets for Improvement

- Establish a more systematic approach to reporting and analyzing data for the Student Services Department.
- Distribute graduation surveys at all college graduations held in March, June, September, and December, collect results of the survey, and analyze and report the results.
- Increase the number of Belmont students who post resumes through College Central Network Services by 5%.
- Increase the number of employers who post employment positions through College Central Network Services by 5%.