

ANNUAL REPORT

of the

Student Advisory Board

to the

Oklahoma State Regents
for Higher Education

May 2014

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Purpose. The purpose of the Student Advisory Board is to communicate to the State Regents the views and interests of all Oklahoma college and university students on issues that relate to the constitutional and statutory responsibilities of the State Regents. In representing students, the Student Advisory Board shall combine the opinions of students with good, sound research to develop the best proposals and recommendations for The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education.

Creation. The creation of this board is consistent with provisions of House Bill 1801 of the 1988 session of the Oklahoma Legislature. Seven members are elected annually by delegates to the Oklahoma Student Government Association. Members represent public tier and independent colleges, and they serve a one-year term (May through April).

MEMBERS

C.J. Cavin, Chair, University of Oklahoma

Ryan Melton, Vice Chair, Rose State College

Jared Allison, Oklahoma State University

Deborah Bowman, Langston University

Trisha Kingsbury, Seminole State College

Evan Palmer, Mid-American Christian University (Resigned April, 2014)

Joseph Wells, Northeastern State University

Student Advisory Board

Recommendations and Counsel to the State Regents

Academic Advisement

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board holds that academic advising is imperative to a college student's education. The Student Advisory Board believes that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should encourage institutions to provide clear, concise procedures for academic advising, as well as encourage institutions to engage in national and statewide professional development conferences for academic advisors.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board feels strongly that correct academic advising aids a student's educational process. Not only will the financial burden of the student decrease, but students benefit from being made cognizant of credits that transfer and different courses necessary for a particular degree choice. Furthermore, a college student's success can be contingent on the level of professionalism received from academic advisors. Failure to achieve proper advising standards can result in students having to retake courses, or remain in school for a longer period of time. This failure also affects four-year graduation rates, and can cause undue financial strain on the student. Because of the important nature of academic advising, the Student Advisory Board believes that each institution should encourage academic advisors to become members of the Oklahoma Academic Advising Association (OACADA), which hosts one conference per academic semester. The OACADA helps academic advisors in professionalism, development and strategic advising, and is a local system that can aid in the sharing of ideas and innovation. The Student Advisory Board believes that the resources available at this conference would substantially benefit academic advisors in aiding students through the educational process, and as a result lead to higher four-year graduation rates and better student satisfaction.

Approval

Unanimous

Financial Literacy / General Education Requirements

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recommends that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education add a financial literacy course to the prerequisite list for college students as part of the general education requirement for graduation.

Background / Analysis

It is imperative that students learn how to manage their money and expenses. With an ever-changing economy and more higher education expenses, students need to know how to treat their money. Many students get out of college with debt from school, hopefully a decent job soon following, and financial expenses like a house and car to now worry about. If higher education is to benefit the economy and the growth of this state, students need to know how to use the money they earn. Currently most colleges in the state have seminars and information in places like bookstores where students can be educated on finances. They have made it so that credit card companies on campuses do not offer incentives for students to get credit cards. H. R. 627, which was approved in 2009, has helped to protect students from getting credit card offers and prevented students from being able to gain quick access to a credit card if they are under twenty-one. With all of these actions being taken to help students be financially literate, having a class during their first year or two of college would help students even more. The Student Advisory Board strongly recommends that a financial literacy course be required in the general education component of the degree program for students.

Approved

Unanimous

Higher Education State Funding

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board supports the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's request for an increase in funding for higher education, to ensure that all programs and institutions may be able to continue to enrich the lives of the citizens of Oklahoma through economic and social progress. Increased funding is vital to economic development and the Complete College America initiative and continues to make a difference on the national and international stage.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board feels strongly those programs such as the Oklahoma Tuition Equalization Grant and the Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program aid students in the state substantially. These scholarships originate in state funds, and help students achieve graduation with less financial burden. Often, students suffer from financial stress that can lead to lower performance and incompleteness of degree requirements. The stress that stems from a lack of financial funding not only impacts the students but also the faculty, staff, and administration who must make the difficult decisions as to what collegiate programs receive funding on tight budgets. This leads to a stressful environment for all involved in the higher education process. The Student Advisory Board believes that higher education is among the most important issues facing the State of Oklahoma, and needs an increase of funds in order to continue in the edification of the citizenry. Higher education's minimum budget needs exceed the appropriations approved by the governor and legislative leaders, and the Student Advisory Board feels that it is imperative to the livelihood of Oklahoma that students receive all funds necessary to attain a college degree, and that institutions receive an increase in state funding in order to further the goals of economic development. Additionally, increased appropriations result in a more affordable college experience.

Approval

Unanimous

Oklahoma's Promise

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board believes that Oklahoma's Promise is an extremely important program for higher education to ensure that qualifying students have the opportunity to attend college, where they otherwise would not. In order to maintain the program's intent of opportunity for this segment of students, the income eligibility level should be adjusted annually to account for increases in inflation and the current cost of higher education. Further, because many, if not most, lower income students work to help support their higher education expenses, any legislation to mandate a minimum number of enrollment hours for Oklahoma's Promise students should allow institutions of higher education to make exceptions for hardship cases.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board strongly supports programs such as Oklahoma's Promise scholarship program to aid students in the state. Recognized by many as America's best college access program, it encourages academic success and financial support as an incentive. Since its beginning, Oklahoma's Promise has grown to almost 20,000 scholarship recipients annually. However, it is expected that the failure to adjust the income eligibility level of \$50,000 for inflation will result in a decreasing number of students qualifying for the program and enrolling in college over future years. Based on the national consumer price index, a \$50,000 income in 2000 dollars is equivalent to about \$67,650 in year 2013 dollars, and \$50,000 in 2013 is equivalent to only about \$37,000 in year 2000 dollars. The result is that since 2000 the estimated percent of Oklahoma families with a total income of under \$50,000 to qualify for this program has shrunk from 61% to 45%.

Current legislation in the form of HB 3211 would require all Oklahoma's Promise college students to enroll in at least 30 credit hours each academic year (fall, spring, summer, intercession semesters, etc). As currently amended the bill allows higher education institutions to establish policies for exceptions to the requirement. Current provisions in the bill indicate that if an Oklahoma's Promise student does not enroll in 30 hours or receive an exemption from the requirement, the student will be disqualified from the program. This measure may have a negative impact, as data show that Oklahoma's Promise students currently average 26 hours of enrollment per academic year in all institutions, and average 22 hours of enrollment in community colleges. Concerns have been raised about the bill, especially by some of the state two-year colleges, because many of their Oklahoma's Promise students are first-generation college students, work extensive hours, and may find it difficult to enroll in 30 credit hours. Because Oklahoma's Promise students at community colleges are significantly less likely to enroll in 30 hours, the legislation in its current form holds a very real risk of excluding many students from this opportunity for higher education. The fact is that under the current provisions for the program Oklahoma's Promise students already complete college at a higher rate than non-Oklahoma's Promise students.

Approval

Unanimous

Increased Partnership with Educational Entities

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board supports increased partnership with educational entities. It is very important for students to be able to obtain a degree and enter into the world of work. If Oklahoma colleges and universities work with CareerTech to identify equivalencies between themselves and community colleges, there could be a significant increase in the number of certificates and Associate of Applied Science (AAS) workforce degrees pursued by students.

Background / Analysis

There are numerous students that go to Institutions of Higher Education to obtain a bachelor's degree but something halts them and they withdraw from school without completing their degree. Some of those students have the hours or are only a few classes short of obtaining a certificate or associates degree in a different major without noticing it. Oklahoma colleges and universities can coordinate with feeder community colleges to identify students who have completed sufficient coursework to be awarded an associate's degree so that they are able to transcend into the workforce.

The Student Advisory Board encourages the partnership of CareerTech with colleges and universities to identify and maximize the amount of degrees obtained by students in Oklahoma.

Approval

Unanimous

Reverse Transfer

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board strongly supports institutions that have adopted the practice of reverse transfer. The Board urges the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to work with institutions and develop a system-wide reverse transfer program. It is of the Board's opinion that every institution of higher education should provide resources for this program.

Background / Analysis

Some college campuses across the state are participating in a reverse transfer system that enables students with multiple hours to earn the "benchmark" of a degree. "Reverse Transfer" is a process in which credit hours earned by students after transfer to another institution may be applied to certificate or degree requirements at a previously attended institution or institutions. State Regents' policies regarding requirements and standards for awarding an undergraduate certificate or degree shall apply. This program not only helps students get more degrees, it helps Oklahoma receive more college graduates. This not only helps the individual out, it also helps to work towards the state initiative of "Complete College America". This initiative's main focus is to provide a plan of increasing postsecondary credentials to fuel a strong economy. There are 5 main points of the Complete College America plan. Point three states that Complete College America aims to "Build bridges to certificates & degrees". Point 4 states, "Reach higher for adult completion". Providing resources for Reverse Transfer at each institution of higher education would help to reach both of these points.

Approval

Unanimous

Priority Enrollment for Veterans

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board strongly supports priority enrollment for military veteran students and supports any measures that encourage veterans to continue their education. Veterans who have served our country deserve the courtesy and respect to be able to enroll in the classes that they are required to take, rather than being placed into non-degree courses. The Student Advisory Board believes that every effort should be made to ensure that veterans are able to earn a degree and enter the civilian workforce in a timely manner, and strongly encourages the development of priority enrollment to assist veterans.

Background / Analysis

Veterans learn many skills through their military service that are invaluable in the workforce. However, many veterans exit the military lacking an accredited degree from a respectable college or university. Many veterans wish to pursue a formal degree, but are faced with multiple barriers that also affect nontraditional students. Institutions of higher education in Oklahoma must do everything possible to aid America's veterans in the educational process.

Veterans have the GI Bill, which significantly aids in the process of continuing a veteran's education. The United State Congress recently made a few changes to the GI Bill that can significantly affect the veterans that are not able to get into the classes that they need to get full assistance in tuition payment. The GI Bill is currently designed to assist veterans in the areas of:

- Academic counseling
- Counseling services
- The Statewide Conference on Serving Student Veterans
- Streamlined financial aid services
- Workshops

It would only be a benefit to add priority enrollment to that list. The Student Advisory Board strongly encourages the development of more services to assist veterans, including early enrollment for classes.

Approval

Unanimous

Weapons on Campus

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board would like to affirm its support of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's stance against guns on campus; the exception being police officers and state higher education certified security officials. Seeing as this topic is being brought up through legislation and on campuses, the Student Advisory Board would like to stand with the State Regents and state higher education institution officials to keep guns off college campuses. The protection of students across the state should be a top priority of every institution, and the Student Advisory Board believes this will help keep students safe.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board affirms that keeping guns out of student housing and campus life is not an infringement of the Second Amendment. Students should be well aware that when they move into the residence halls they have the college security to keep them safe. As Chancellor Johnson has stated publicly, there is no scenario in which guns on campuses will do anything other than create a more dangerous environment for the students, faculty, staff and visitors. The Student Advisory Board supports this claim. The college has the responsibility to have proper safety plans and precautions to help ensure students safety. The presidents of all of the state institutions of higher education in Oklahoma have unanimously endorsed the prohibition against weapons on their campuses. The Oklahoma State Regents should continue to fight legislation against guns on campuses. The Student Advisory Board supports the efforts given by the State Regents on this matter.

Approval

Unanimous

2013-2014 Student Advisory Board Activities

Monthly Meetings. Beginning in May, 2013, members of the Board met monthly, with the exception of June and July, to receive orientation, discuss issues, make campus visits and work plans, and prepare and vote on recommendations.

State Regents Tuition Hearing. The SAB Chair spoke at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Tuition Hearing in Oklahoma City on April 24, 2014.

Higher Education Day at the State Capitol. Two members traveled to the State Capitol on February 11, 2014, to work with the state higher education community in representing The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education's concerns to state legislators and Governor Fallin. C.J. Cavin, Chair of the Student Advisory Board, spoke in the general meeting.

Student Leadership Retreat. Three members worked in conjunction with the State Regents Council on Student Affairs and the Oklahoma Student Government Association to host and participate in the Thirteenth Annual Oklahoma Student Leadership Retreat that took place October 10-11, 2013 in Norman. As Chair of the Board, C.J. Cavin served on the Planning Committee for the 2014 Student Leadership Retreat.

Oklahoma Student Government Association Conferences. Members of the Board attended the annual Oklahoma Student Government Association Fall Congress at the State Capitol in Oklahoma City, and Spring Congress at the Tulsa Community College Southeast Campus.

Campus Visits. In addition to representing the students at the institutions in their tier, members of the Student Advisory Board networked with student leaders from other campuses, and visited the following campuses to discuss student concerns:

East Central University
Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology
Northeastern State University-Broken Arrow
Tulsa Community College
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma
University of Tulsa

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Regional Legislative Tours. One member of the Student Advisory Board attended all of the events, and another member attended three of the events:

SW Region at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma
Central OK Region at the University of Central Oklahoma
NW Region at Oklahoma State University
Oklahoma City Region at Rose State College
West Region at Northwestern Oklahoma State University
Tulsa Region at the University of Oklahoma – Tulsa
NE Region at Rogers State University
SE Region at Seminole State College