

ANNUAL REPORT

of the

Student Advisory Board

to the

Oklahoma State Regents
for Higher Education

May 2015

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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

Sean Baser, Chair, Oklahoma State University

Austin Carroll, Vice Chair, Rose State College

Brooke Boutwell, University of Tulsa

Dillon Byrd, University of Oklahoma (Resigned April, 2015)

Chelsea Fiedler, Rogers State University

Eddie Puckett, Tulsa Community College

Haley Stiles, University of Central Oklahoma

Student Advisory Board

Recommendations and Counsel to the State Regents

Academic Advisement

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board considers that strong academic advising programs are imperative to a student's success in college. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should encourage all institutions to improve academic advising programs to enhance the propensity for students to complete their degrees in an efficient amount of time. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should encourage institutions to provide clear, concise procedures for academic advising which include pathways to completion. In addition to the procedures, the Student Advisory Board recommends that the institutions of higher education should strive to engage in national and statewide best practice professional development training for academic advisors.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board believes strongly that consistent and best-practice-based academic advising improves a student's educational experience and enhances degree completion. Not only will the financial burden of the student decrease due to clear degree and/or transfer pathways, students benefit from becoming more engaged and cognizant in their educational plan of study. Furthermore, a college student's success can be contingent on the level of professionalism received from academic advisors. Failure to maintain a consistent and best practice-based advising standards can result in students having to retake courses, remain in school for a longer period of time or become discouraged and drop out. 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 adhere to the recommended standards 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. In addition, OACADA serves as a network which allows for the sharing of best practices and innovation. The Student Advisory Board believes that the resources available through OACADA and related conference participation would substantially benefit academic advisors in guiding students through the educational process, and as a result lead to higher two- and four-year graduation rates, and enhanced student satisfaction.

Approval

Unanimous

Campus Safety

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recommends that the State Regents make campus safety a top priority and promote efforts to significantly enhance the safety of campuses in Oklahoma. Restructuring, expanding, and investing in campus safety is necessary for students to have a positive educational experience on campuses in Oklahoma. Providing Title IX compliant training on sexual assault and violence to all college students in Oklahoma is also an important step in improving campus safety. Educating students on the topics of campus violence and sexual assault could serve as a catalyst for an ongoing dialogue on being diligent in improving campus safety.

Background / Analysis

Campus safety is an issue that the Student Advisory Board feels is incredibly important to maintain as an ongoing priority for the Colleges and Universities subject to the Policies and Procedures of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. While the National Institute of Justice and United States Department of Education reported that one in five women are sexually assaulted on college campuses, very few believe that reporting their assault is worth the process and social stigma. Addressing the rape culture on college campuses could be a major step to reducing the social stigma around sexual assault. Keeping campuses in Oklahoma safe is also an issue that should take the forefront in higher education. A goal for all college campuses should be for students to be able to feel completely safe on campus at all times. Expanding campus security forces and increasing awareness for campus safety should be a measurable effort which college campuses can implement to make institutions a safer environment. Toward that end, the Student Advisory Board supports the mission of the Oklahoma State Regents Campus Safety and Security Task Force and encourages a renewed effort on student safety.

Approved

Unanimous

Diversity

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recommends that all public colleges and universities in Oklahoma actively promote diversity in terms of race, age, culture, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The Student Advisory Board also recommends that each higher education institution in Oklahoma develop a general academic recruitment plan that has an intentional focus on increasing the diversity of their student populations in an effort to have a state-wide higher education student population reflective of the demographic diversity of Oklahoma.

Background / Analysis

College and university student populations which are reflective of their state's demographic diversity and are inclusive of students from multiple backgrounds and walks of life are an essential requirement for an effective learning and socially responsible life experience. Such a culturally rich environment promotes better understanding and appreciation of societal diversity. Recruiting students from multiple backgrounds to pursue an education in Oklahoma not only impacts higher education economically, it provides an environment for education that is highly enriching. Increasing diversity awareness helps promote tolerance and acceptance, and aids in educating students in a more holistic manner for which a traditional classroom curriculum cannot provide alone.

Approval

Unanimous

Library Hours

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board supports institutions providing students with greater access to campus libraries. The Student Advisory Board recommends that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education work with institutions to develop a plan to increase campus libraries hours of operation.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board recognizes the important role that a campus library has on a student's success in college. The current college library hours at institutions of higher education do not meet the demands of Oklahoma students. Libraries provide students with access to a diverse amount of information in a variety of formats. Students struggle to stay current with the innovations in technology, but college libraries have the information technology infrastructure to keep up to date with technological advances in higher education. Furthermore, students require library access for myriad reasons, whether it's for a quiet place to study or do homework, or computer access to check email. With the requirements of a modern college student, including a full course load, a job, and possibly a family to care for, finding time to visit the library can be difficult. College libraries need to provide sufficient availability so every student can take advantage of everything the library has to offer. The Student Advisory Board believes that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should encourage institutions to adhere to the recommended standards of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL).

Approval

Unanimous

Oklahoma's Promise

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recommends that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education work with the state legislature to consider the most economically vulnerable students when proposing changes to Oklahoma's Promise. The Student Advisory Board supports an increase in the income eligibility requirement of Oklahoma's Promise to reflect inflation since the policy was adopted.

Background / Analysis

Oklahoma continues to be a leader in college affordability throughout the nation, but recent restrictions to Oklahoma's Promise have targeted the most economically vulnerable students. In addition to attending college full time, many students work 20 to 30 hours a week in an effort to pay their living expenses. Requiring Oklahoma's Promise students to take on a larger academic load, while not providing more scholarship support, seems counterintuitive when the students are required to pay for books and all additional living expenses. Institutions should be striving to increase access to higher education by protecting Oklahoma's Promise and doing everything we can to help Oklahoma's most at-risk students. It is vital that we keep increases to tuition as low as possible to ensure access to the benefits of higher education to the individual as well as to the long term economic health of Oklahoma. Substantial increases in tuition and fees challenge the Complete College America initiative and our ability to produce the highest quality workforce possible. The Student Advisory Board believes that protecting the high quality higher education available in Oklahoma is vital for the success of students in Oklahoma, but we encourage the board to keep in mind the most economically vulnerable students when acting on the tuition proposals.

Approval

Unanimous

Priority Enrollment

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board strongly supports any measure to encourage military student veterans and students with disabilities to continue their education. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should encourage all institutions to provide priority enrollment to student veterans and students with disabilities. Student veterans have served the United States and deserve our utmost support in their educational endeavors. The Student Advisory Board recommends that institutions provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in a college's courses and activities. The Student Advisory Board strongly encourages the development of more services to assist student veterans and students with disabilities.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board believes that every effort should be made to ensure that student veterans are able to earn a degree and enter the civilian workforce. Veterans learn many skills through their military service that are invaluable in the workforce, but many veterans exit the military lacking the degree necessary to acquire a sustainable job in the civilian workforce. As with student veterans, many students with disabilities desire to pursue a formal degree, but are faced with multiple barriers that do not affect traditional students. Students with disabilities will undoubtedly need accommodations for their path to a degree to be successful. The Student Advisory Board strongly encourages the development of more services to assist student veterans, including the consideration of academic credit for prior experiences.

Approval

Unanimous

Reach Higher

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board supports the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's Reach Higher initiative to help students complete their degrees. The Student Advisory Board recommends that the State Regents continue to work with participating institutions to ensure the success of those students closest to completing their degrees. The Student Advisory Board believes the goals behind the Reach Higher initiative help improve the education and the workforce of Oklahoma, and urges the State Regents to help provide more adults this opportunity by encouraging nonparticipating institutions to offer the program on their campus. Additionally, the Student Advisory Board encourages the Oklahoma State Regents to enhance the Reach Higher opportunities by developing more degree options.

Background / Analysis

The Reach Higher degree completion program began in 2007 with the intention of offering eight-week courses created to help adults complete associate's and bachelor's degrees with existing college credit. Just one person graduated through the program in 2007-08, but that increased to 109 by 2010-11, and 641 students graduated in 2013-14. The Reach Higher associate's and bachelor's degree completion programs are designed for working adults who require accommodating enrollment periods and courses that apply to career goals. With flexible schedules and caring faculty delivering a quality education, the program allows adults to combine already earned college credit with these short courses geared toward improving skills in the workplace to not only earn degrees, but also improve their career readiness and even earn raises at their current jobs.

Approval

Unanimous

Substance Abuse

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recommends the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education spearhead a program to provide access to substance abuse counseling for any of the state's college or university students. The Student Advisory Board also recommends a therapeutic approach to substance abuse, as opposed to a punitive approach, and supports the implementation of a peer group designed to provide support for students who are abusing alcohol, drugs, or other substances.

Background / Analysis

Substance abuse is a rising problem on college campuses. A recent Columbia University study reported almost half of all full-time college students binge drink or abuse prescription drugs, with almost a quarter of them meeting the medical definition of a substance abuse problem. Understanding that substance abuse is a mental health issue, offering treatment from a therapeutic approach - such as peer support groups and counseling - is more rational and effective than punishing students with classes, reflective essays, and ultimately expulsion. Higher education institutions in Oklahoma have an obligation to care for the mental well-being of their students, and the Student Advisory Board believes these institutions establishing new, therapeutic approaches will help students deal with substance abuse.

Approval

Unanimous

Sustainability

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board acknowledges that sustainability efforts in higher education are recognized as a crucial issue and creating a more sustainable college campus is vital for an economically viable future. The Student Advisory Board recommends the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education collaborate with institutions to develop innovative sustainability policies for college campuses. The Student Advisory Board encourages all institutional presidents to commit to a more sustainable campus and sign the Presidents' Climate Commitment. In addition to signing the commitment, the Student Advisory Board recommends that institutions of higher education strive to engage in national best practices when developing a sustainability plan.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board recognizes the colossal threat presented by the current level of greenhouse gas emissions on the environment. Climate change presents a variety of prodigious and adverse health, social, economic and ecological effects that deeply concern the board. The Student Advisory Board believes strongly that cooperative, best-practice-based economic policy improves a student's campus experience and enhances the future of the environment. Colleges and universities dedicated to enacting positive environmental policy acknowledge the role higher education plays in improving the knowledge and tools needed to create a sustainable future. The presidents at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Central Oklahoma have pledged to initiate a more sustainable campus by signing the Presidents' Climate Commitment. In addition to the pledge, the Student Advisory Board believes that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should encourage institutions to adhere to the recommended standards of the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN).

Approval

Unanimous

Weapons on Campus

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recommends that all firearms other than those possessed by campus security and properly certified law enforcement officials be banned from all institutions of higher education in Oklahoma. Permitting students, faculty, and staff to possess guns on campus fails to ensure that each person who chooses to bring firearms to an institution of higher education will be knowledgeable about their firearm and safe with its use. All campuses in Oklahoma have a police force specifically dedicated to promoting safety of their campus, and affording gun use to people who may not have the same intentions and/or dedication to campus safety in mind can have detrimental repercussions.

Background / Analysis

With suicide on campus being an issue for many college campuses in the nation, and most gun-related deaths being self-inflicted, permitting students to carry guns on campus could drastically increase the rate of suicides in Oklahoma colleges. While part of Oklahoma's culture involves hunting with firearms, having firearms in a densely populated environment such as a college campus does not make logical sense. College campuses have police forces dedicated to keeping a safe, peaceful environment for all students and permitting guns on campus could greatly compromise safety for all students, faculty, and staff. Leaving campus security in the hands of those who are trained is the safest option for all higher learning institutions.

Approval

Unanimous

Campus WiFi

Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board recognizes that Oklahoma institutions of higher education are incorporating the innovations in technology into enrollment and course work. To meet the growing demands in technology, the Student Advisory Board supports institutions improving the information technology infrastructure on their campuses to provide a better Wi-Fi service to students.

Background / Analysis

The Student Advisory Board supports institutions implementing wireless network upgrades on their campuses. With colleges and universities employing learning management systems to deliver educational content, the importance of having a stable, secure, and uninterrupted network infrastructure can now affect a student's opportunity to be successful in reaching a degree. With an ever-increasing amount of information being stored online, college libraries rely on a strong network framework to provide the services vital to students. The modern student requires Internet access around the clock to succeed; as professors move components of their classes, including homework, reading assignments and research, into the digital arena, colleges and universities need to accommodate students with a reliable Internet connection to achieve their full potential. Due to the substantial amount of data that courses require, ensuring that institutions have a sufficient network foundation is vital when developing multimedia-driven online curriculum.

Approval

Unanimous

2014-2015 Student Advisory Board Activities

Monthly Meetings. Beginning in May, 2014, 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.

Student Leadership Retreat. Four members worked in conjunction with the State Regents Council on Student Affairs and the Oklahoma Student Government Association to host and participate in the Fourteenth Annual Oklahoma Student Leadership Retreat that took place October 2-3, 2014 in Norman. As Chair of the Board, Sean Baser served on the Planning Committee for the 2015 Student Leadership Retreat.

Oklahoma Student Government Association Conferences. Several members of the Board attended the annual Oklahoma Student Government Association Fall Congress at the State Capitol in Oklahoma City, and Spring Congress at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah.

Higher Education Day at the State Capitol. Several members traveled to the State Capitol on February 10, 2015, 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. Student Advisory Board member Austin Carroll spoke in the general meeting.

State Regents Tuition Hearing. Three Student Advisory Board members attended the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Tuition Hearing in Oklahoma City on April 9, 2015. SAB Chair Sean Baser and member Chelsea Fiedler addressed comments to the State Regents on student concerns.

2nd Annual Oklahoma Quality Summit. Student Advisory Board Chair Sean Baser shared information from the student perspective on a panel dealing with online learning and teaching issues at this state academic event.

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 at the events listed above, and SAB member Chelsea Fiedler visited Northeastern Oklahoma A & M College to discuss student concerns.