

REPORT OF IMPROVED GRADUATION RATE COMMITTEE

December 2008

Charge

- Identify strategies for moving Auburn University into the top 25% of land-grant universities with regard to six-year graduation rates; aim for a rate in the 80% range.
- Identify and evaluate “best practices” in the literature related to improving graduation rates.
- Submit a report to the Provost, with recommendations and a timeline/budget, by December 2008.

Committee

- Bob Karcher, Assistant Dean of Student Services, College of Engineering
- Robert Lacy, Professor of Biological Sciences, College of Sciences and Mathematics; Chair, University Senate
- Nancy McDaniel, Executive Director, Educational Support Services
- Ann Beth Presley, Associate Professor of Consumer Affairs, College of Human Sciences
- Constance Rellhan, Senior Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts
- Marcie Smith, Associate Vice President for Business & Finance
- Beth Yarbrough, Academic Advisor III, College of Sciences and Mathematics
- Susan Villaume (Chair), Associate Dean, College of Education

The Committee wishes to extend a special thanks to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and Educational Support Services for their assistance in preparing this report.

What Our Graduation and Retention Data Show

- Our six-year graduation rate for the 2002 cohort is 64%.
- Over the past seven years, the six-year graduation rate has spanned a low of 61.9% (1999 cohort) to a high of 67.6% (1997 cohort).
- AU is currently ranked 14th among 24 SREB schools and 24th among the 50 public institutions with land-grant status.

- Females consistently have graduation rates 5-8 percentage points higher than males.
- Black, non-Hispanic students have graduation rates well below the SREB average.
- Over the past several years, the graduation rate gap between White, non-Hispanic students and Black, non-Hispanic students has spanned a low of 11 percentage points (1997 cohort) to a high of 22 percentage points (2001 cohort).

- Withdrawal rates in recent freshman and sophomore classes predict an increase in graduation rates for upcoming years.
- In the 1999-2001 cohorts, 63% graduated within six years, 34% left AU prior to graduation, and 4% remained enrolled after six years.

	A Review of the Literature
<p>No one strategy fits all students and no one “best practice” fits all institutions.</p>	

	Recommendations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment 2. Advising 3. Academic policies 4. Student engagement/commitment 5. Timely progression through programs 6. Teaching and learning 7. Pervasive use of data 	

Recommendation #1	
<p>Continue current emphasis on recruiting and enrolling a well-prepared and diverse freshman class.</p>	

Recommendation #2	
<p>Review and improve the current advising system, including development of an early warning system.</p>	

Recommendation #3	
<p>Review the impact of current academic policies on retention and graduation rates; recommend changes as appropriate.</p>	

Recommendation #4	
<p>Expand strategies for promoting student engagement and commitment to the institution.</p>	

Recommendation #5

Encourage students to proceed in a timely manner through a degree program; eliminate roadblocks related to course registration.

Recommendation #6

Provide data and resources to support faculty in the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning.

Recommendation #7

Develop a system for routinely collecting, analyzing, and responding to data related to retention and graduation.

Conclusion

Improving graduation rates is a complex and difficult task which must remain high on the University's agenda for a very long time.

Moving Forward

A successful initiative to improve graduation rates must proceed in ways that ensure the following:

- Integration with current efforts,
- Campus-wide commitment,
- Systematic and ongoing evaluation of existing and new strategies, and
- Coordination of efforts through the Office of the Provost in conjunction with the Office of Undergraduate Studies.

Questions and Comments