

# ENHANCING STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

## COMMITTEE REPORT (Excerpted)

### Committee Members

Ron Brown (co-chair)  
Jerry Herron (co-chair)  
Ethriam Brammer  
Victoria Dallas  
Daniel Drucker  
Joseph Dunbar  
Stephen Hillman  
Robert Kohrman  
Jennifer Sheridan Moss  
John Schiavone  
Matthew Seeger  
Howard Shapiro  
Judy Tatum  
Phyllis Vroom  
Regina Zibuck

## Executive Summary

**Background:** To help improve graduation rates and student success, President Gilmour requested that a Student Success Committee be formed. The committee was appointed and received its charge from Provost Brown in December 2010. The committee began meeting in February 2011, with subsequent meetings taking place weekly through April into May. At that time, the committee submitted a draft report, with additional analytical data requested from the Office of Budget, Planning and Analysis. A subsequent draft incorporating those data was completed in September, and submitted for review to Provost Brown and President Gilmour in preparation for final review by the committee. Since September, with the direction of the president and provost, additional data and programmatic components have been added.

**Student Successes:** Student success is the result of shared efforts across campus, with outcomes measured primarily through retention and graduation data. Over the past several years, Wayne State has implemented a number of successful programs to improve our results. These positive retention results should help inform our decisions when developing strategies for recruiting and admitting FTIAC students (First Time in Any College) to the University. We must be sure students are prepared to benefit from the opportunities of a research university so they will be retained well and graduate in timely fashion.

**Policy and Goals:** The overarching goal of enhancing the admissions process is ensuring student success. After a great deal of analysis, we propose an admissions policy based on academic success and a thorough understanding of what is required to succeed at a research university. The following report explains in detail the reasoning behind our recommendations, and the benefits to our students and the University that will follow. Fundamental to these recommendations is a commitment to academic standards. We are not proposing to alter those standards. What we are proposing is an admissions process that will better guide us in selecting students who are capable of meeting those standards. We owe this to the University; above all, we owe it to our students.

All applicants will receive a full assessment of their academic records. After this assessment, some students will receive regular admission. Those students who are not immediately admitted through regular admission will receive a more extensive, holistic analysis. This holistic analysis will include a review of students' high school curricula, grade trends, all components of their ACT scores, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and an optional essay submitted by students with their applications. As a result of this further evaluation, students may be granted regular admission, or be directed to special admissions programs that provide additional support, or be referred to outside resources such as community colleges, where they can prepare themselves for admission to Wayne State University in the future.

**Issues and Challenges:** We are committed to measuring our progress and holding ourselves accountable, just as we expect to be held accountable by students, parents, our community and our state government, upon whose funding we partially depend. Currently, WSU's graduation results place us at the bottom when measured against our peers. While progress has been made with retention, which eventually will improve graduation rates, current results are unacceptable and changes are essential. At the same time, we must not lose track of our historic commitment to providing educational opportunity for the communities we serve. If we are to honor this commitment, we must ensure that the students we admit are capable of both meeting the challenges and benefitting from the opportunities of a research university. This will require that we clearly state the requirements for readiness, admission and academic success at Wayne State.

**Recommendations:** Similar to Michigan's other two research universities Wayne State will announce average scores for the admitted FTIAC class as a general indicator of student preparedness for WSU. Furthermore, to guide admissions decisions, we will rely more heavily on data reflecting the initial enrollment characteristics of students who have successfully graduated from WSU.

**Further Considerations:** For students who do not receive regular admission, we will provide special programs and support to help ensure their success. We will carefully assess the performance of those programs in retaining students and moving them toward timely graduation. We will engage our community to ensure a clear understanding of our policies and our requirements for readiness to attend WSU, and how students might best prepare themselves, while still in school. We also propose revised standards for transfer admission. As with FTIAC admission, we should base decisions on student success.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of a research university is to share the benefits of a rigorous academic culture with the populations we serve. Success depends upon creating a community of students, faculty and staff that is ready to undertake this task. Success depends likewise upon understanding that a research institution is not an appropriate destination for everybody. If we are to live up to our mission statement, we must make informed choices, and bring into the University students who are ready both to meet the challenges and to benefit from the opportunities we provide:

As a nationally recognized urban, public research university, Wayne State's mission is to create knowledge and prepare a diverse body of students to excel in an increasingly complex and global society.

Concurrent with that mission, President Allan Gilmour has recently been quoted in The Detroit News: "We are going to find that there are students who do not have the wherewithal to succeed at Wayne State. It's [admittance] not fair to us and the use of our resources. More importantly, it is not fair to them because of the time and money involved in going to a place like this." It is essential, then, that we make wise and informed decisions not based on any single criterion, but on a full analysis of each student's potential to succeed at Wayne State University.

In developing our recommendations, we have sought to maintain the historic commitment of this University to the values of opportunity and excellence. Our objective is a more informed decision process that will achieve the equally important outcomes of providing an education of the highest quality possible, while also assuring improvements in student retention and timely progress toward graduation. Our retention efforts have already produced good results. The next important and necessary step is establishing an appropriate admissions policy for the University. We know a great deal about the students who succeed here; that knowledge will drive our decisions and help us better serve our students, faculty and staff.

### **ACTIONS TAKEN TO DATE**

In March 2011, the Board of Governors approved a proposal to enhance and expand existing retention efforts. We have made significant progress, and built a strong foundation to improve students' readiness to succeed. Among the highlights of our new retention plan is the implementation of our General Education Fellows, which will put more full-time faculty in entry-level classrooms to provide students a good start academically. We also recently hired a member of the faculty to serve as retention coordinator for the Office of the Provost. A draft plan is in process for enhancing the Advising Office, with more advisors to be hired. We will shortly be receiving a consulting report that will guide us in taking next steps to improve this vital student resource. Plans to enhance the Office of Teaching and Learning are in place. Our aim is to make clear that recruitment and retention are everybody's job at WSU, and to provide the resources for creating a culture of shared academic responsibility.

We plan to enhance our current assets, one of the most important being APEX (Academic Pathways for Excellence). The APEX Scholars program is responsible for providing services to students who are conditionally admitted to the University, and who may need additional support with academics as well as advising and success coaching. New in summer 2012 is the development of the APEX Prep for Success Bridge Program. The details of this plan are discussed later in this report.

Another academic program with a significant role in recruiting and retaining students is provided by the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies (formerly the Center for Chicano and Boricua Studies, or CBS). The Center's academic program is an integral part of its mission. Each fall approximately 50 students enroll in the academic program. Historically, CBS has admitted as many as 75% of all first-year Latino students attending Wayne State University. The program is a two-year academic program designed to develop a solid intellectual and motivational foundation for success in college based on a student-centered, community-grounded, self-empowerment model. The program offers courses in the history, literature, and culture of Latinos and Latin America. In addition, the Center operates a sophisticated advising, counseling and tracking program that includes an early-warning system, survival and success seminars, tutoring, personal counseling, and orientation to the university community.

WSU Latino/a Studies also manages the College to Career (C2C) program, a two-year professional and leadership development program for upperclassmen who participated in the CBS Scholars Program. The objective of the C2C program is to improve student persistence, graduation and career and graduate school placement. The program achieves its objectives by providing participants with a professional mentor based on major and professional interest; a capstone experience in community-based research and service-learning; and a venue for the presentation of student research projects at the Center's regional undergraduate and graduate Latino/a Studies conference, known as La Academia del Pueblo.

Closely related to the work of APEX and the Center are plans for enhancing resources for student success generally, starting with our recently-opened Student Services Center. The center provides a "one-stop-shop" for entering students, incorporating Admissions, Financial Aid, the Registrar, Student Accounting, and what is perhaps most important of all, the offer of one-on-one assistance with these essential services. In addition, we will be implementing plans for improved orientation and peer mentoring. As part of the newly approved retention plan, we will also expand our learning communities and initiate a more comprehensive first-year experience for freshman students, which will include such elements as service and service-learning opportunities and community engagement activities.

## **WHAT MAKES A STUDENT SUCCESSFUL?**

### **Effective Retention Programs**

The University had already undertaken measures to increase retention previous to those approved by the Board of Governors in March 2011. These include the use of learning communities, improved student advising and financial aid, and an enhanced orientation program for in-coming freshmen. Our data indicate a steady decline in retention from 2002 through 2006, before our initiatives were in place. Since 2006, the one-year retention rate has been increasing steadily, with a significant jump occurring with the fall 2008 cohort.

Our improved retention results are moving Wayne State into the range of other national universities, despite the fact that students at our peer institutions have stronger academic qualifications as they enter. Students admitted heretofore have not been as well prepared academically as the students at institutions to which we compare ourselves. However, for students who graduated in six years, the WSU averages are very close to the average for our peers. What this means is that when we compare "apples to apples," in terms of students who are prepared to succeed, WSU does a good job at retention.

## **First-Time, Full-Time, Degree Seeking Undergraduates**

The positive results we have seen in first-year retention are consistent with subsequent semesters as well, with recent improvements being visible beyond the first year. In each instance, improvement begins to show after 2006, when we started implementing our early initiatives. Once our new retention plans had time to take effect, positive results appear. The results already evident will be enhanced by the comprehensive retention initiative recently approved by the Board of Governors.

## **Adequate Preparation for Wayne State University**

Retention programming alone will not be sufficient to ensure students' timely graduation or their future success in the highly competitive world into which they will graduate. Students do well at Wayne State and graduate in timely fashion if they are prepared academically to take advantage of the opportunities a research university offers.

WSU students have lower GPA and ACT scores when they enter compared to most other MPU institutions and therefore the resulting six-year graduating rates are also lower. However, WSU has made significant progress in retention over the past several years, and in future years this should result in a moderate increase in graduation rates.

As President Gilmour noted, it is unfair to admit students who have little or no prospect of succeeding. It is unfair to them, to the University, and to the community we serve. Recruiting and supporting students who have little hope of success requires resources that could be deployed helping students with greater potential to succeed. The cost of student failure is high—both for the student, in terms of money, time and confidence, and for the University, in terms of resources and reputation. More than 50% of students with ACT scores lower than 15 drop out by their fourth term, compared with only 21% for students with ACT scores greater than 21. Further, the investment of public funds in financial aid awarded to students who do not succeed will be lost, and unavailable to students with both financial need and the potential to succeed. While enrolled, students who cannot meet the academic challenges of a research university are more likely to end up with “holds” (both financial and academic), which require staff time to process—an additional cost that is lost when students stop attending. As for the students, failure can result in both a loss of confidence—in themselves and the University—and significant debt.

Recently, there have been significant changes in federal regulations that require greater accountability on the part of students who receive financial aid. In order to comply with these regulations, Wayne State has implemented a set of standards based on Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). Students receiving financial aid are required to maintain SAP, according to the following measures:

- GPA: 2.0 for undergraduate and Doctor of Pharmacy programs; 3.0 for graduate programs.
- Completion Rate (Pace): At least 67% of all credit hours attempted must have been completed with passing grades.
- Maximum Time Frame: Students must complete a degree or certificate within no more than 150% of the required course work of their program (ex: within 180 credit hours attempted for undergraduate students in a 120 credit hour degree program).

SAP will be reviewed at the end of each semester; students not making satisfactory progress are placed on Warning status for the following semester. A student who fails to return to SAP status after the Warning semester will be denied financial aid. Students will have the option to appeal this decision.

The University disburses significant amounts of financial aid, with the total being over \$356 M in fiscal 2011. Loans make up a sizeable portion of our financial aid program. Students who fail to succeed academically will leave the University without a degree and—likely—with significant amounts of debt, which must then be repaid. This underscores the importance of our making informed admission decisions so that we bring into the University students who are capable of graduating in timely fashion.

## **PROPOSED ADMISSIONS AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES**

### **Revisions to Current Admissions Strategies**

Wayne State University has long been thought of as a school of opportunity, especially for students who might not otherwise have access to higher education. This is a proud legacy that we must uphold. At the same time, this institution has evolved over its history, emerging as one of the premier research universities in this country, and the world. WSU holds the highest Carnegie rating of Research University Very High research activity—a distinction achieved by only 108 of the more than 4,600 universities in the United States. The kind of opportunity we represent, then, is one that has evolved, just as the University has evolved, and it is contingent upon us to make good on our historic commitment by delivering to our students an education commensurate with the quality university we have become.

To honor our commitment to students who are academically prepared for a research institution, we must deliver to them the best possible classroom experience, which means placing them in the company of students who are likewise capable of succeeding. We owe it to our faculty to provide them with teaching experiences that bring out the best in their students, and make the most of a research-based career. And we owe it to our staff, who support the processes and people who create and pass on knowledge to our students and our community. These commitments are far more realizable if we admit students who can capitalize on the benefits of a research university, no matter their prior background.

Students with good academic preparation and high probability of succeeding will receive regular admission. Students outside this range will receive a further, holistic evaluation including factors such as:

- Advanced Placement courses taken
- Trending in grades
- High school curriculum (with GPA modified based on the number of academic courses taken)
- High school attended (with GPA being “weighted,” based on the WSU graduation results for students from that school)
- Score on an optional essay (with some students being requested to complete the essay if more information is needed to reach an informed admissions decision)
- Extracurricular activities

Those who lack the necessary preparation for success will be referred to other institutions such as community colleges, where they might prepare themselves for future admission to WSU.

Had WSU implemented the proposed admissions procedures in the five cohorts starting in 2006, on average, 67% of students would have received regular admission. If we were to project our holistic evaluation, hypothetically, onto the students who fall outside the regular admit parameters (28%), some of these would receive regular admission, some would be admitted to special programs (e.g., Prep for Success, which will be explained later in this report), and some would be referred to institutions outside WSU (5%).

### **Enhancements to WSU Recruitment Strategies**

Part of helping students succeed is making sure that the University is recruiting students who can be successful. Wayne State has recently redefined and enhanced its recruiting strategies. The four major changes in the WSU recruiting strategy include: territory management, new and enhanced recruitment activities, utilization of new tools and technology, and scholarship diversification.

#### **Territory Management**

In Fall 2011, the vast majority of all WSU undergraduates came from the Southeastern Michigan tri-county area which may see significant declines in high school populations. If we are to maintain or increase current enrollment levels, the University must reach out to other geographical areas, improve current recruiting efforts, and better deploy the admissions recruiting staff.

#### **New and Enhanced Recruitment Activities**

One of the major recruitment areas for WSU is the city of Detroit. WSU must continue to build upon its efforts to increase the quality and quantity of the students recruited from Detroit.

#### **Utilization of Tools and Technology**

Business process improvement and technology enhancements include the launch of a new application for admission that features “smart” questions based on residency and citizenship, and the electronic transfer of data from the online application into the university student information system to minimize data entry errors and eliminate manual work. These improvements will expedite admissions decisions.

#### **Diversification of Scholarships**

**FTIAC Scholarships:** The University’s commitment to merit-based scholarships has been enhanced to recognize various levels of academic achievement with an aim to increasing both the enrollment in the Honors College and also the number of students in general who come to the University with at least a B+ average in high school (3.5 GPA). This effort is in line with several of Wayne State’s key competitors and the timing of scholarship offers they make to their admitted students.

**Community College Transfer Scholarships:** In recognition of the greater importance of transfer enrollment, Wayne State has increased the scholarships available to transfer students from Michigan community colleges to mirror the awards available to FTIAC students.



## **ENHANCEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH ACADEMIC CHALLENGES**

### **Proposed New Initiative: APEX/Prep for Success Bridge Program**

As discussed earlier in this report, the University will be enhancing the current APEX programs. We know that there are students who need a hand up if they are to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by a research university. For those students whose commitment is strong but who may face challenges academically, we propose a new special admissions program, APEX Prep for Success Bridge Program. The new program will include the following elements:

- A holistic evaluation of each student's record, with those chosen for the program having good prospects for success even though their test scores indicate the likelihood of challenges ahead.
- An intensive summer bridge program consisting of two courses, together with success coaching and confidence building; coursework will be modeled on existing successful programs, such as the Rising Scholars Program (RSP) in math.
- Scholarship support for the required summer courses
- Housing provided for students living on campus
- Two full years of dedicated counseling support

We have developed academic assets that we can rely upon in implementing Prep for Success. For example, the RSP has proven quite successful. In fact, RSP is better at retaining students who are challenged academically and helping them understand algebra. Thanks to RSP, these students earn more credit hours, and with a higher average GPA.

Students who take the RSP version of introductory math not only earn more credit hours, they also enjoy a "halo" effect, which raises their cumulative GPA significantly. They learn math, in other words, and they also learn how to become better students. This is a good model to follow, with results we aim to achieve in all our special admissions programs.

The APEX program will report to the Office of the Provost; the program will have two parts, the APEX Bridge program and an enhanced APEX Scholars program. Students will be admitted to one program or the other, depending on a full evaluation each record, including test scores and high school GPA. Students with significant challenges in math, reading and writing will be considered for the Bridge. Those with adequate math, reading and writing skills, but whose academic performance indicates significant challenges, will be admitted to the Scholars Program.

### **The Bridge**

This program is designed to help special admissions students acquire the foundational skills they need to succeed at the University as well as providing them with personal coaching and support.

Students in the Bridge will enroll in designated sections of Math, English and Success Coaching (APEX 1000). Successful students are not only prepared academically; they also believe in themselves, they know how to overcome obstacles, how to manage time and finances, and how to develop good relationships with their peers. Those are the elements of the success-building part of the Bridge. Bridge students will follow one of routes into WSU.

- **Summer Bridge:** An eight-week intensive summer program; tuition and on-campus housing will be supported by full scholarships. This will be the primary route for students who receive special admission to the University.
- **Fall Bridge:** For students who are not able to enroll in the summer program, or who apply too late to join, the fall Bridge will provide similar academic and support services.

In both instances, successful completion of the Bridge (11-14 credit hours with a grade of C or better in each class) is required for students to continue in the Prep for Success program.

### **APEX Scholars Program**

These APEX programs—both the Bridge and the Scholars program—will provide support services to students until they complete the program, with completion requirements as follows:

- 24 credit hours with a B average, or
- 30 credit hours with a C average

While they are members of APEX, students will be presented with a curricular plan for each semester (including special Bridge courses), with ongoing participation in the program being mandatory. Students who successfully complete the Bridge program will become regular matriculants to the University.

### **Other students**

Students not chosen for either regular admission or special admission will be referred. These students will be advised of other WSU services that might be of use to them, such as the federally funded Educational Opportunity Center (EOC), which assists students with community college placement.

### **Ethnic Composition of Graduating Class, FTIAC Class and Projected Class**

In order to implement our new plan without significantly altering the makeup of our FTIAC class, a significant effort must be made to increase the yield of admitted students. A pro-active intervention plan will direct key stakeholders and service units to maintain continuous communication with admitted students to ensure they have sufficient information and encouragement to choose Wayne State University as their first choice institution. With this program in place, we anticipate no significant difference in the makeup of the actual Fall 2011 FTIAC class and the projected class for fall 2013, with admissions decisions reflecting our proposed new procedures.

Based on good results we have produced in retention programs already in place, and on the expansion of retention programming through Prep for Success, we anticipate a significant increase in the proportion of African American students being retained and graduating from WSU.

Our enhanced APEX initiative—and our admissions plans overall—will include an outreach program to inform our constituents, both internal and external, what our new policy is and why this policy is best for Wayne State University and for our students. We must help students who aspire to attend WSU understand how they can best prepare themselves academically for studying at a research university—what courses they should take, and in what sequence—so that they can make the most of their high school opportunities before they arrive on campus.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS STATUTES**

Implementation of the admissions plans outlined in this report will require changes in the existing Board of Governors statutes. In some instances, updating is required to reflect changes that have occurred since the present statutes were approved (e.g., the renaming of the Center for Chicano Boricua Studies). In other instances the proposed procedures will require that new language be approved, as is the case with the move from categorical minimum standards to an individual evaluation of each student's record against previously approved Board criteria as the basis for admissions decisions.

## CONCLUSION

At the heart of this effort is the goal of student success. Student success begins with our policy of admission. Can we afford to undertake a new admissions policy? It might be more appropriate to ask how we can afford not to. We have made significant progress in improving retention and providing additional support for students with financial and academic challenges. However, too many students lack the necessary preparation to succeed at a major research university, and fail despite this additional support. We must address this challenge through enhancements to our admissions policy that will:

- Provide a deeper analysis of each student's potential, rather than rely solely on numbers that may not tell the full story;
- Help ensure that students with the talent and drive will have a better chance to succeed, no matter their backgrounds;
- Create a more productive academic environment, with students of varying backgrounds and potential, but similar chances of success;
- Help create an accountable, sustainable institution capable of leveraging our strengths and shoring up our weaknesses.

The evidence supporting the proposal, beginning with our improved retention results, is strong, indicating that this vision for a different and more viable Wayne State is achievable. With respect to enrollment, we have likewise been successful at recruiting to the University the type of students we will need, in increasing numbers, if our proposals are to be viable.

The data show that WSU is capable of achieving the kinds of recruitment and retention results required if we are to position the University for a more successful, sustainable future. A new, more strategic admissions policy will help us build on our successes and produce results we can all be proud of — students, faculty, staff, and our community.