



▶ Governing Board Equity in Student Success Project

Board, Presidents, and Cabinets Partnering for Student Success:

Case Studies from Three Years of Work in Kentucky



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The Course Less Taken: The Project Behind This Publication and Why You Must Read This

Student success is one of the top priorities for postsecondary education governing boards today.

And too few boards are organized and supported to function with this priority in mind.

These were the two main premises that informed our thoughts as well as a request for support submitted to Ascendium Education Philanthropy (Ascendium) in 2019. Thanks to Ascendium's generous funding, and the ongoing sage guidance provided by the project's program officer, Dr. Amy Girardi, we were able to explore ways to address this dynamic. This support makes this publication's insights possible.

The activities described in this compendium share all the good, and perhaps some of the challenges, that can happen when members of boards work with presidents and their cabinets to intentionally organize governance for student success. We also show what is possible when this shared vision is directly tied to institutional action.

Specifically, this publication shares case studies and evaluation results stemming from the Governing Board Equity in Student Success project. Supported by a grant from Ascendium, the three-and-a-half-year effort brought together the Gardner Institute's talented student success team with some of the nation's foremost governance experts from the Association of Governing Boards (AGB).

Together, the Gardner Institute and AGB set out to: 1) build a community of practice in a specific state where postsecondary institution governing boards, presidents, and cabinets could work together to learn more about and then build a vision for appropriate college or university governance policies and practices to make sure that every student can graduate; and 2) offer a retention planning and improvement experience for staff at participating institutions that could take the vision created by their board and president and operationalize it through appropriate, context-specific actions.

We were fortunate to conduct this project in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. We did not go into the work with Kentucky as the pre-selected location. But in the early months of the effort, Kentucky rose to the top of the states where we wanted to conduct the project. This was due in part to the rurality and other demographic characteristics found in the Kentucky postsecondary ecosystem. The other major factor for selecting Kentucky was the excellent leadership provided at the statewide level by the Kentucky Council for Postsecondary Education (CPE). My colleagues and I would be remiss if we did not specifically name and thank Kentucky CPE President, Dr. Aaron Thompson, for his commitment to and advocacy for this project. In addition, Kentucky CPE staff Melissa Bell, Lilly Massa-McKinley, Nan Harnice, Heather Faesy, Lee Nimocks, and Travis Muncie also provided key leadership for the effort.

Kentucky CPE worked closely with the Gardner Institute and AGB to recruit seven institutions to take

part in the work. These included Bellarmine University, Berea College, Kentucky State University, Simmons College of Kentucky, Thomas More University, Transylvania University, and the University of Louisville. We are deeply grateful for the leadership provided by the boards, presidents, staff, and students at these institutions. Their long-term commitment to moving toward removing demographics as the best predictors of who gets to graduate is both laudable and a model for emulation for other institutions across the nation.

I would be remiss if I did not thank our AGB partners for their help in shaping, operating, and refining the work that is described in this publication. Whether it was through shaping content or helping disseminate findings from the work at their national convenings and in their publications, our AGB colleagues were wonderful co-collaborators in this shared cause. Special thanks go to AGB staff Merrill Schwartz, Mary Papazian, Cristin Toutsis Grigos, and Patti Kunkle, as well as AGB consultants Kemal Atkins, Kevin Riley, and Artis Hampshire-Cowan for all they did to make this effort a rich and rewarding learning opportunity for all involved parties.

Last, but by no means least, I want to thank my Gardner Institute colleagues whose creativity and commitment to creating more just and equitable postsecondary learning environments never ceases to amaze and inspire me. Specifically, I need to thank the organization's co-founder and executive chair, Dr. John N. Gardner, for the inspiration and energy he brought to this work. John was there at the conception of the effort, and he helped make it thrive. Gardner Institute board members Drs. Lou Albert, Scott Evenbeck, and Leo Lambert were also enthusiastic supporters of and participants in the work, as were Gardner Institute staff Ethan Campbell, Brent Drake, Vicki McGillin, Rob Rodier, Sara Stein Koch, Ed Willis, and Monica Flippin Wynn. Thanks as well to Gardner Institute Fellow, David Brightman, and Vicki McGillin (again) for their hard work in putting together this publication. This team made the dream work. I am deeply grateful for what they did and how they did it.

While the Ascendium grant that supported this effort has ended, the Gardner Institute's work with governing boards, presidents, and institutional leaders around student success has only just begun. We will draw on the lessons shared in this publication to shape ongoing and future initiatives at the Gardner Institute. We hope that you will do the same.

As I bring this foreword to a close, I want to remind you that higher education institutional systems today are largely designed so that many students won't graduate. This is both morally wrong and systemically unsustainable. While work to address this can and should be done in a wide array of areas, I hope this publication will inspire you to start where many institutions normally do not – with boards, presidents, and cabinets. It may be the course less traveled, but it can make all the difference.

In our common cause of student success,

Drew

Andrew K. Koch, PhD
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Case Studies



Bellarmino University



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Background

Bellarmino College was established on October 3, 1950, under the sponsorship of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Louisville and with the special assistance of the Conventual Franciscan Fathers. The Bellarmine campus of today stands on property that was a part of a royal land grant from King George III to James McCorkle for his service in the French and Indian War. In 1950, the year of Bellarmine's inception, the new school became one of the first in the Commonwealth of Kentucky open to all races. In 2000, the Board of Trustees voted to change the name of the institution from Bellarmine College to Bellarmine University to reflect its true status as a Master's I university. Today Bellarmine University is made up of Bellarmine College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Health Professions, the W. Fielding Rubel School of Business, the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education, and the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Bellarmine University enrolls 2,343 undergraduate students.



Mission

“We are an inclusive Catholic university that educates students -mind, body, and spirit—for meaningful lives, rewarding careers, ethical leadership, and service to improve the human condition.”

Governing Board and Institutional Goals

- Through Bellarmine’s Traditions and Transformation Strategic Plan, there is a commitment to increase the diverse representation of our faculty, staff, and student populations among the community and support them to achieve their full potential. Bellarmine University’s enrollment continues to increase in diversity, especially among our students of color/underrepresented minority students, first-generation college students, and Pell-eligible students. As the campus population continues to shift, there is an increased need to strengthen the community’s level of cultural competence and humility to fulfill students’ needs and expectations. Bellarmine also strives to offer curricula that incorporates content related to Thomas Merton’s values of inclusion, ethical and social responsibility, compassion, and community engagement. These goals have influenced the overachieving measurable retention goals set by Bellarmine Forward working committees and approved by the University leadership. The University established a goal to increase first-time full-time (FTFT) undergraduate student retention to 81% by 2028.

Seeking equity in student success, the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Steering Committee decided to focus on Underrepresented Minority (URM), First-Generation, and Pell-Eligible students as the primary focus populations for this project. The goal is to align each population's retention rates with that of the overall student population. Using the five-year average of retention rates from the 2017-2022 cohorts as the baseline, the disaggregated 2028 retention goals are as follows:

1. Underrepresented Minority students at 78.8%,
2. First-Generation College Students at 74.5%, and
3. Pell-eligible students at 75%.

There are several focal points for this initiative that include (a) maintain current and/or expanding services/supports/engagement for students that promote equitable success (b) intentionally engage current policies and procedures to insure they are holistic, equitable and promote student success (c) establish expectations and/or protocols for on-going disaggregated and inter-sectional assessment of student retention programs and student success practices, (d) reinforce the necessary resources to implement and support a comprehensive plan for equitable student retention, (e) intentionally connect these efforts with the strategic plan, (f) develop an accountability structure for equitable student success across the university with an identifiable lead on reporting to the campus community and the Board of Trustees (g) create or reinforce intentional pathways for students and provide educational opportunities for them to understand how to navigate it and (h) dismantle any silos related to student success.

The variables Bellarmine University uses to measure student success include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) First to Second Year Retention Rate;
- (b) Cohort Undergraduate Graduation Rate;
- (c) Graduate Job/Graduate School Placement;
- (d) Student completion of experiential learning;
- (e) Migration patterns (e.g., major changes, transfer patterns, etc.);
- (f) Academic Actions (e.g., probation, dismissal etc.);
- (g) Anchor Community Engagement (e.g., Early Arrival Programs, Mentor Program, etc.);
- (h) Grade tracking (e.g., midterm grades, DFWI Rates, etc.).

The metrics we plan to use to monitor progress and to assess the effectiveness of our student success initiatives are First-year students to Second-year Retention Rates, Cohort Undergraduate Graduation Rates, Student Satisfaction and Campus Climate Surveys.

Institutional Governing Board Plans

- Develop process to ensure systematic buy-in from campus;
- Develop a university-wide retention statement including vision and goals;
- Create KPIs on academic progress rate;
- Expand faculty and staff development;
- Develop a strengths/success model of retention;
- Incentivize/reward retention efforts;

- Address capacity/workload issues for faculty & staff;
- Address co-curricular programming and redistribute resources as needed;
- Identify and address student success gaps (academic and non-academic skills)

Retention Performance Management

Through a review of Bellarmine data, some equity gaps among our URM students were identified, specifically among Black/African American students, related to DFWI grades and academic dismissals. Consequently, there was a DFWI Task Force developed among our faculty and Academic Affairs administrators to begin a more in-depth analysis of policies, course sequencing, academic support, and other structural barriers that may influence these gaps.

The Domain Committees worked diligently through the KPIs and identified three headings for institutional barriers to retention and persistence to include:

- Establish and commit to institutional priorities that are resourced with the personnel, funding, and professional development/training needed for implementation;
- Disband institutional culture barriers. With the demographic shift of our student population and increased teaching/workload, the effort is to minimize competitive culture between programs, increase asset-based approach to working with students, and build capacity for offering tailored instruction, prevention, and intervention outreach; and
- Be strategic and intentional with change. An institutional response tendency whereby we “throw everything at everything.” We need to be very intentional about what we are doing, even more so because of the financial challenges the university is facing. These barriers were noted in the KPIs Synthesis Report.

The goal through the Retention Performance Management process is the same as those for the Governing Board Equity in Student Success project, to reduce the first to second-year retention gap of each identified student population with that of the overall student population. As the Bellarmine undergraduate student population continues to diversify, so will the responsibility of assessing their experiences, retention, and graduations while simultaneously striving to have a faculty/staff population that reflects the population of our students. Other goals include professional development to expand the skillset (skills) of faculty and staff in understanding and working with diverse student populations, greater representation of faculty in retention initiatives throughout the University, and ongoing assessment of retention programs that includes disaggregated reporting.

The evidence we have that supports the institutional barriers to retention and persistence include the following: (a) DFWI rates (b) Academic Dismissal rates (c) Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates (d) Six-year Graduation Rates (e) Stop-out Rates (f) Student Satisfaction, Climate Survey, Student Strengths Inventory, and NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) data (g) Course Evaluations. When reviewing our Student Integration, Persistence and Satisfaction Survey results we found:

- 46% - Considered leaving Bellarmine University because they felt unwelcome.



- 8% - Not satisfied with the teaching strategies used by instructors.



- 99% - Important to graduate from college.



- 91% - Important to graduate from Bellarmine University



Integrated Plan

There are numerous practices, considerable expertise, and much interest in doing this work. The focus on retention has been centered on the fiscal benefits. However, there is a need to be centered on students, their experiences, and success.

During the scope of this project, the Student Success Center presented student success, retention, and graduation data to the full Board of Trustees. This has not happened in at least five years at the institution and there is concerted interest in making this a part of the annual reporting process. There has continued to be faculty representation on each of the board committees. Therefore, an element of our institutional work on making retention a university-wide effort will need to be incorporated throughout the institution's fabric (e.g., Dean's Council, Faculty and Staff). Our specific recommendations include:

<p>Develop process to ensure systematic buy-in from campus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop committees with cross-sectional representation of faculty and staff for implementation of Retention Performance Management priorities. • Complete an audit of current retention practices with their assessment plans and outcomes. • Expand faculty representation on the Student Success Task Force for sustainability.
<p>Develop a university-wide retention vision statement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redistribute the domain committee KPIs and retreat information to create a synthesis of the work conducted for the vision. • Offer open sessions with the university community for sharing, input, and buy-in. • Present the vision and goals to the Cabinet and Board of Trustees for adoption.

<p>Create university-wide key performance indicators (KPIs) that inform departmental /programmatic retention indicators on academic progress outcomes and strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish shared data gathering and measures among our Early Arrival Programs for consistency in reporting. • Collaborate with Academic Affairs leadership on KPI dashboard on identifiable measures on university and departmental metrics if they do not already exist. • Construct a protocol on reporting to be included with program health reporting.
<p>Enhance faculty and staff development opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Campus Climate Survey as a source for faculty staff needs for training and development. • Secure institutional membership to the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) Belong community for additional access to training and development, resources, and opportunity to positively impact campus culture. • Coordinate campus partners on training and professional development opportunities for the Bellarmine community.
<p>Develop a strengths/asset-based model of retention (vs. deficit model)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infuse asset-based language and tracks within the Student Success Summit as a part of the plenary and concurrent sessions. • Develop resource library to for faculty to reframe asset-based teaching. • Provide context for the student cohorts through panel discussions, asset-focused presentations of student profiles, reporting on successes and challenges.
<p>Construct an award and reward structure that incentivizes retention efforts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight existing models for programs/colleges who incentivize innovative retention strategies to address equity in learning. • Coordinate with Academic Affairs, Faculty and Staff Councils on new award(s) that highlight exceptional work in equity and inclusion through teaching, research, and service. • Partner with Advancement and Strategic Partnerships on funding opportunities to launch the initiative and ways to make it a sustainable initiative.
<p>Address capacity and workloads for faculty and staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise increased teaching loads for faculty. • Create a committee/task force to examine faculty workloads and its impact on rank and tenure. • Collaborate with Staff Council and Human Resources to further examine staff workload and capacity constraints.
<p>Assess curricular, pedagogical, and co-curricular programming and redistribute resources, as needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Affairs and Faculty Council will create a program assessment model to implement across academic programs. • Specified programs for undergraduate student retention will construct a reporting template on student engagement, outcome measures, and student retention.

<p>Identify and address student success gaps (academic and non-academic skills)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed undergraduate student skill development through first-year experience courses and designate CORE courses. • Expand bridge and summer programs to identify and prepare students who may identify as elevated risk for attrition. • Expand academic support resources (e.g., placement test, Math Center, etc.) to assist with academic preparation for students.
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Retention Performance Management Highlight-Shining Moment

The Retention Performance Management created opportunities to engage conversations on retention with greater intentionality. One shining moment during the Retention Performance Management work involved two dedicated board members at the project launch and the Governing Board Equity in Student Success workshops. These two board members were champions of the work and helped to advance the project and elevate the visibility of student success throughout the Board of Trustees.

Another shining moment during the Retention Performance Management was highlighted by the intense dedication of the Domain Committees and their tireless contributions during the meetings and Retention Performance Management Retreat. The Domain Committees were vigilant in identifying key priorities to share with academic leadership, Cabinet members, and the President. The constructive interaction from this project created an opportunity for Bellarmine to continue its work with the Gardner Institute through additional Gardner Institute opportunities that include Teaching and Learning Academy and Transforming the Foundational Postsecondary Experience™. Through these efforts, we will continue to make progress on the areas identified through this Retention Performance Management/Governing Board Equity in Student Success Project.

Final Reflections

Bellarmine University has benefited from participating in the Governing Board Equity in Student Success and Retention Project Management by creating greater urgency and capacity to disaggregate student success and retention data for ongoing assessment and reporting. The timing of the project coincides with a significant growth in Bellarmine’s incoming underrepresented minority (URM), Pell-eligible, and First-Generation undergraduate students. Consequently, the project prepared the University to be more strategic in creating assessment protocols for existing programs and creating an infrastructure for accessing teaching and learning and student accountability within and outside of the classroom for new initiatives. The Retention Performance Management and Governing Board Equity in Student Success have also allowed greater opportunities for members of the faculty and staff to examine retention data, audit current initiatives, and begin exploration for meeting the gaps that negatively impact student retention. The long-term impact of retention planning and implementation establishes a meaningful assessment strategy that will maximize resources - time, personnel, and fiscal allotments, on projects and programs that have the greatest impact on student success and retention. It will also work to lessen the achievement gap between our majority students and target populations in this project.

Berea College



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Education Policies Committee

Labor & Student Life Committee

Campus Offices/Divisions:

Diversity Equity and Inclusion

Academic Affairs

Labor

Student/Residential Life

Student Success and Transition



Background

Berea College is proud of its history as the first interracial, coeducational college in the South, founded with the purpose to serve "blacks and whites, men and women" together. Today, our commitment to equity has been maintained and strengthened, resulting in a student body that is 47% students of color. Berea has extended that commitment to equity by emphasizing economic diversity; we offer admission only to Pell-eligible students and are ranked as #1 in the nation in economic access (NY Times College Access Index). Student success is central to all we do—we aim to provide our uniquely diverse student body with "wrap-around" support services, high impact practices in and out of the classroom, and extensive student engagement programming.



Mission

Berea College, founded by ardent abolitionists and radical reformers, continues today as an educational institution still firmly rooted in its historic commitment to interracial education. Adherence to the College's scriptural foundation, "God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth" (Acts 17:26), shapes the College's culture and programs so that students and staff alike can work toward both personal goals and a vision of a world shaped by Christian values, such as the power of love over hate, human dignity and equality, and peace with justice. This environment frees persons to be active learners, workers, and servers as members of the academic community and as citizens of the world. The Berea experience nurtures intellectual, physical, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual potentials and with those the power to make meaningful commitments and translate them into action.

To achieve this purpose, Berea College defines its mission through the moral framework of our eight Great Commitments:



- To provide an educational opportunity for students of all races primarily from Appalachia, who have great promise and limited economic resources.
- To offer a high-quality liberal arts education that engages students as they pursue their personal, academic, and professional goals.
- To stimulate understanding of the Christian faith and its many expressions and to emphasize the Christian ethic and the motive of service to others.
- To promote learning and serving in community through the student Labor Program, honoring the dignity and utility of all work, mental and manual, and taking pride in work well done.
- To assert the kinship of all people and to provide interracial education with a particular emphasis on understanding and equality among blacks and whites as a foundation for building community among all peoples of the earth.
- To create a democratic community dedicated to education and gender equality.
- To maintain a residential campus and to encourage in all community members a way of life characterized by mindful and sustainable living, health and wellness, zest for learning, high personal standards, and a concern for the welfare of others.
- To engage Appalachian communities, families, and students in partnership for mutual learning, growth, and service.

First articulated in 1962, the Great Commitments represent the historic aims and purposes of Berea College since its founding in 1855. The Great Commitments were originally adopted by the General Faculty and the Board of Trustees in 1969; they were revised and similarly approved in 1993 and most recently in 2017. These Commitments have been incredibly stable for Berea College although the commitments were slightly recast in the last decade. Notably for this work, the commitment to interracial education was modified in 2017 to be more inclusive of students beyond the black and white binary, and particularly for our growing numbers of Latinx and LGBTQPIA+ communities.

Berea College is consistently focused on equity and access for students from disenfranchised backgrounds. We seek to ensure that all cohorts of students:

- are engaged in high impact practices that enhance retention and deepen their educational outcomes;
- are retaining and graduating at rates equivalent to other students of greater financial viability;
- have positive student outcomes (employment and graduate school);
- are relieved of any financial burden to earn a degree at Berea College and are financially supported to participate fully in high impact practices equitably;
- feel a full sense of belonging at Berea College.

Ultimately, we seek to ensure that there are no cohorts with inequitable outcomes and that Berea is a place where students flourish despite the challenges of their economic situations.

Goals

The mission and history of the College dictates our day-to-day work at the College (and at the Board level) and we are sincerely proud of this commitment. To a large extent, the consistency of mission at Berea has allowed us to sustain our founding principle that "God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth" at all levels of the College. The mission makes bear that equitable student success remains at the heart of the work of the Board, Administrative Committee, and campus.

Nevertheless, we continue to consider how to develop processes that enhance our student equity focus at the Board and campus level.

Berea College student success goals are as follows:

1. To achieve a 90% retention rate with very little differential across cohort groups.
2. To achieve a 70% six-year graduation rate with very little differential across cohort groups.
3. To ensure students participate in high impact practices at similar rates across cohorts.
4. To ensure outcomes demonstrate equity across cohorts (graduate school and employment).

The Plan

Berea College's regular data collection on cohorts of equity-seeking students is strong and has access to most of the required information to engage deeply in equity work. However, in some ways, the data available is so extensive that it is not easily digestible for busy Board members. Berea College has developed an "Equity Highlights" sheet to regularly share with the Board to highlight areas of strength and challenge along with the full report. This summative sheet will help institutionalize the work of sharing equity-based data and outcomes. We hope to continue to refine this document and the process for engaging the Board in equity questions. Broken down amongst cohorts, Berea College collects enrollment, retention, and graduation data in the annual Enrollment, Retention, Graduation report. We also hope to develop new metrics that we do not yet report on. Accessible but not regularly collected are D/F/W rates, rates related to participation in high impact practices, financial/loan rates, and other relevant equity metrics. We also review Voluntary Leave Reports to uncover patterns that might explain departures.

Berea College will continue to track equity outcomes. It will also continue to develop new programs or approaches that we believe will improve those outcomes. Berea College underwent a Climate Survey with an outside agency in 2022-2023 and is currently responding to the results and has rolled out a set of specific actions in relation to students experience beyond the classroom that deeply impacts their experience and success. This work is known as "Students First".

Counseling Services:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch new Tele-Health Counseling Services: In progress, target date Fall 2024 • Hire Case Manager in Counseling Services to promote holistic student wellness programs: Mid-Spring 2024
Health Insurance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve health care plan by working with current provider Aspirant to expand health insurance to cover more health care costs. • Provide new educational workshops for students to have a better understanding of options available for health care: In progress, target date Fall 2024
Food Insecurity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piloted offering food sacks and meals to non-traditional students: Winter 2023 • Piloted new method of advancing food funding to student accounts over break: Winter 2023

Housing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to Gender Inclusive Housing (GIH) to further develop a residential climate that is positive, respectful, and inclusive for all residents. Currently 17% of our students live in GIH: In progress, 2023-2024
Student Engagement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new Student Engagement funding for Registered Student Organizations: 2023-2024 • Expand on-campus Student Engagement activities for students such as BlueChella, Drag Show, CAB Welcome Back Day, Involvement Fairs: 2023-2024 • Hire Assistant Director of Specialized Services to provide oversight of the Black Male • Leadership Initiative, which includes mentoring, advising, and programming for students: Fall 2023
DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Trainings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require implicit bias training for Public Safety staff, Residence Hall staff, Counseling Services staff, and other campus partners: February, March, April 2024 • Connect to trainings being launched as part of DEI Campus Climate work, including the Belong Community

The President and Provost will track student success successes and challenges and regularly report to the Board.

Final Reflections

Engaging our Board in questions around mission and the importance of equity in mission is vital for achieving equitable outcomes. Although equity is at the core of Berea College’s mission, many Board members will not have deeply considered equity in the context of academic institutions. We will find opportunities to deepen and improve our work in engaging the Board in our efforts. Measurement is crucial and it is vital that our Board is provided with accessible information allowing them to see the progress and challenges of achieving equitable educational outcomes. Our Board’s commitment to equitable student success outcomes is essential if the institution is going to meet its aspirational goals. This new approach of engaging the Board deeply in metrics, and disaggregated ones in particular, would lead to an improved institutional culture at Berea College and, ultimately, improved student equity, inclusivity, and success. We also hope our plan and outcomes would benefit other institutions seeking to understand the equity challenges and successes of various student cohorts and programs.

Kentucky State University



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Background

The Commonwealth needed more normal schools to train African American teachers for employment in its Black elementary schools. On May 18, 1886, legislators authorized the school's creation, and the University was chartered as the State Normal School for Colored Persons, the second state-supported institution of higher learning in Kentucky. Kentucky State became a land-grant college in 1890, and it became Kentucky State University and enrolled its first graduate students in the School of Public Affairs in 1973.

Kentucky State University continues to be committed to educating the Black community of Kentucky and beyond, while simultaneously encompassing all underrepresented minorities in the state. Ultimately, Kentucky State University will focus on completion goals for all enrolled students. More specifically, Kentucky State University will focus on the progression towards degree for Kentucky residents. As a publicly funded institution, it is important to focus on the economic impact for the Commonwealth of completers most likely to remain in Kentucky. Kentucky State University currently enrolls 1,610 undergraduate students.

Goals

The mission and history of Kentucky State University advances the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Research shows the economic impact of an educated Commonwealth. As the state's sole public HBCU, Kentucky State University must ensure equitable student success to push underrepresented minorities further. Through this process, Kentucky State University has examined the trends in data related to retention and graduation. While the retention rate remains steady for upperclassmen, the resulting graduation rate is not aligned. Students are being retained at the institution, but few are progressing toward graduation.

Specific Governing Board goals include:

- Ensure sufficient funding and oversight of student success measures;
- Regular engagement with the University administration to ensure the action plan is being fully implemented;
- Ensure that board actions align with equitable student success goals.

Specific institutional goals include:



**KENTUCKY STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Mission

Kentucky State University is a public, comprehensive, historically black land-grant university committed to advancing the Commonwealth of Kentucky, enhancing society, and impacting individuals by providing quality teaching with a foundation in liberal studies, scholarly research, and public service to enable productive lives within the diverse global economy.



- Develop and implement an action plan to increase student progress;
- Work collaboratively across academic and student affairs for a consistent implementation of action plan;
- Evaluate and adjust action plan as needed to achieve institutional goals, and;
- Develop specific metrics to monitor progress toward progression goals.

Governing Board Plan

Currently, the Kentucky State University Board of Regents has several sub-committees including the Student Affairs Committee. The Board is considering renaming this committee to the Student Experience Committee. It is believed this change will lead to greater integration of curricular and co-curricular experiences. To that end, the committee meetings will center the goals and action plan toward achieving increased progression across all classifications.

Board-level strategies include a review of all university policies ensuring compliance with a focus on effective and equitable student success impact. The guiding coalition requires organizational reports to include disaggregated data highlighting impacts on under-represented minorities (URM), first-generation, and low-income students. An additional focus will detail strategies and needed resource allocations to positively impact cohort(s) retention and progression rates. The Board will track fall-to-fall retention and progression as measures of success and utilize spring enrollment as a predictive analytics to guide resource allocation.

Currently, the institution measures the traditional student outcomes of retention and graduation. However, the institution plans to incorporate progression into the student outcome measurements. Kentucky State University plans to monitor each cohort by the number of students that enroll and earn 30 credit hours and 2.0 GPA each academic year. During the restructuring of the student affairs unit prior to the arrival of the new administration, a retention coordinator position was created. This role will focus on data and predictive analytics to provide ongoing, real-time support for students. This role should eliminate students falling through the cracks and enable a "circling of the wagons" to ensure students stay on track toward completion. This role and the "all hands on deck" environment of the student affairs unit and the University as a whole eliminates the need for additional budgetary allocations and human resources.

Specific institutional strategies include:

- Develop and implement 15 to Finish campaign (Fall 24);
- Develop and implement transitional support programming for upperclassmen (Fall 24);
- Provide Career Services programming designed to provide work-based learning experiences for upperclassmen (Fall-Spring 25);
- Develop an advising intervention program to assist students below defined progression rates (Fall-Spring 25);
- Provide supplemental wellness support to ensure academic success (Fall 24)

University administrators responsible for this plan shall provide to the Board's Student Affairs Committee a quarterly report on the progress of the plan's implementation. The Student Affairs Committee shall then provide, through its minutes, a report on the plan's implementation to the full Board. If the Board requires additional information, it shall request a discussion of the plan's progress at a full Board meeting.



Retention Performance Management Plan

This process allowed us to examine the student populations facing difficulty in navigating the institution. Like many HBCUs, Kentucky State University students tend to have lower incomes, test scores, and overall college readiness. For the future, our staff and administration will work to challenge and elevate the standard expectation for our student population. We know they can be successful. Rather than place the onus on the student, the institution must be committed to matriculating each student through the University successfully regardless of background.

Kentucky State University's retention philosophy is a living commitment to the success, well-being, and growth of every student. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and collaboration, we aim to create an educational experience that not only retains students but also prepares them for a lifetime of achievement and meaningful contribution to society. The consistency of a permanent administration has been the greatest barrier of success to Kentucky State Students. We believe with the consistency of a permanent administration will create the curricular and co-curricular supports necessary to ensure successful student outcomes. The fall to spring retention for Fall 2022 to Spring 2023 was 74%. The fall to spring retention for Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 was 85%. Going forward, the first fall to second fall retention goal is 90%. Kentucky State University encountered several issues with the data gathering process, which was not worked out until near the end of the project. However, the data reinforced many things we were already aware of. We will focus on creating seamless progression paths for our students to successfully complete a degree or credential.

Key finding from the administration of the Student Integration Persistence and Satisfaction Survey included:

- 49% - Considered leaving Kentucky State University because they felt unwelcome.



- 56% - Not satisfied with the teaching strategies used by instructors.



- 96% - Important to graduate from college.



- 91% - Important to graduate from Kentucky State University



From the Retention Performance Management retreat, the following were our key recommendations:

- Allocate resources for a retention specialist
- Train faculty and staff how to effectively use Beacon (early alert system) throughout the academic terms
- Update the Attendance Policy
- Facilitate a curriculum complexity discussion and streamline course offerings and programs:
 - Curricular Analytics to determine efficiency; and
 - Evaluate and revise high DFWI courses
- Cohort terminology, education, and literacy
- Developed and implement equitable wraparound student services
- Integrated tutor or academic coach in high DFWI courses
- Develop a customer-focused approach to providing quality services to promote an inclusive and sense of belonging to all of our stakeholders
- Institutional mission statement alignment to equity for all
- Reinstate mandatory service hours for all students.

Our guidelines and initiatives moving forward include:

- With the assistance of a private consultant, develop a student success model rooted in evidence-based best practices to support Kentucky State University admits from enrollment through completion. (Equitable Student Success)
- Redesign the first-year experience course to integrate career exploration, academic planning and transition support content and resources. (Equitable Student Success)
- Implement a predictive analytics model to develop a student recruitment profile and early warning system for enrolled students. (Equitable Student Success)
- Meet first- to second-year retention and progression targets to support completion goals such as graduation rates and degrees conferred. (Equitable Student Success)
- Review the current reporting and organizational structure across student success and enrollment management units to improve communication, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Develop a system to manage institution-wide and program student cohorts to improve retention, progression, and completion rates
- Factors that contribute to attrition and persistence should be acknowledged, defined and measured for use as retention data.



Simmons College of Kentucky



SIMMONS
COLLEGE OF KENTUCKY

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Board Committees:

Dr. Samuel Tolbert, Board Chair

Jill Horn, Board of Trustee Member

Institutional Divisions:

Division of Institutional Advancement and Engagement

Division of Academic Affairs

Office of the President

Institutional Effectiveness

General Counsel



Background

Founded in 1879 by formerly enslaved people, Simmons College of Kentucky was the first institution of higher learning in Kentucky for African American people. Dr. William J. Simmons, the school's second president, set the foundation for growth, which included the expansion of the liberal arts program and the attainment of university status. Since inception, the institution has been providing access to post-secondary education to marginalized communities. Today the college still has a student demographic of 90% African American/Black students. The college has expanded its academic offerings to include Master of Science in Medical Science, Computer information Systems, Applied Mathematics, Applied Psychology and Sociology. Simmons College of Kentucky is an institution of biblical higher education dedicated to educating people through strong academic and professional programs, in order that they may become productive citizens and agents of change in society.

Establishing a Foundation Board of Directors for the Simmons College of Kentucky Endowment Fund directly promotes equity in student success. The board can play a vital role in ensuring that resources from the endowment fund are allocated strategically to support initiatives that address systemic barriers and promote equitable outcomes for all students. By focusing on equity, the board can help create a more inclusive and supportive campus environment that enables students from diverse backgrounds to thrive academically and personally.

Institutional Goals

- **Equity and Inclusion Metrics:** Ensuring that success initiatives benefit all students, regardless of background. Tracking metrics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion is crucial.
- **Financial Aid Metrics:** Monitoring the impact of financial aid programs on student success. This includes tracking scholarship utilization, loan default rates, and financial literacy.
- **Participation in Co-Curricular Activities:** Assessing student engagement in extracurricular activities, internships, research, and community service.
- **Alumni Success:** Examining the achievements of alumni in their careers, leadership roles, and contributions to society.



SIMMONS
COLLEGE OF KENTUCKY

Mission

Simmons College of Kentucky is an institution of biblical higher education dedicated to educating people through strong academic and professional programs, in order that they may become productive citizens and agents of change in society.



Plan

The Simmons College of Kentucky Board shall develop a governance framework for the Foundation Board, including bylaws and policies that align with the college's mission and promote equity in student success. We shall collaborate with AGB and the Gardner Institute to leverage their governance and equity-centered practices expertise. We will establish committees within the board, such as finance, investment, fundraising, and equity committees, to ensure adequate oversight and decision-making. We shall develop a code of ethics and conflict of interest policy to ensure transparency and accountability. Simmons College of Kentucky Board of Trustees shall work closely with the Foundation Board to develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy to grow the endowment fund. We shall identify potential donors, including individuals, corporations, foundations, and alumni networks, who share a commitment to equity in student success.

Once policies and processes are in place, the Simmons College of Kentucky Board of Trustees shall create a Board Recruitment Committee of key stakeholders and individuals with expertise in governance and equity. We shall develop a board member profile that reflects diversity in race, gender, expertise, and professional backgrounds. We will utilize networks, partnerships, and targeted outreach strategies to recruit potential board members. We shall then define the board member selection and nomination process and implement a thorough vetting and selection process, including interviews, reference checks, and background screenings. Once selected, we shall provide an orientation and training program for board members to ensure they understand their roles, responsibilities, and the college's mission.

Simmons College of Kentucky employs a comprehensive approach to measure student outcomes and assess the effectiveness of its student success initiatives. Key metrics include:

- **Graduation Rates:** Tracking the percentage of students who successfully complete their degree programs within a specified time frame (e.g., four years for a bachelor's degree). High graduation rates indicate successful student progression.
- **Retention Rates:** Monitoring the percentage of students who continue their studies from one academic year to the next. High retention rates demonstrate student satisfaction and engagement.
- **Employment and Career Outcomes:** Assessing how well graduates transition into the workforce. Metrics include employment rates, job placement, and career advancement.
- **Academic Achievement:** Evaluating student performance through GPA, course completion, and academic honors. This reflects the quality of education and student engagement.

Monitoring Plan

The Board shall monitor implementation to ensure key milestones are met, including:

- Develop a governance framework for the Foundation Board, including bylaws and policies that align with the college's mission and promote equity in student success.
- Collaborate with AGB and the Gardner Institute to leverage their governance and equity-centered practices expertise.
- Establish committees within the board, such as finance, investment, fundraising, and equity committees, to ensure adequate oversight and decision-making.
- Develop a code of ethics and conflict of interest policy to ensure transparency and accountability.



What Other Institutions Can Learn

Participating in the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Project has been transformative for our institution. This process has underscored the critical importance of embedding equity into every facet of our governance and operations. Future participants can gain a profound understanding of equity by engaging deeply with the project's principles and practices, which emphasize the necessity of equitable policies and the impact they have on student success.

One of the key lessons we've learned is the value of intentional, ongoing education and dialogue about equity among Board Members. This has helped to foster a shared commitment to equity and a collective responsibility for student success. Moreover, the project has equipped us with practical tools and strategies to identify and address inequities, ensuring that our institution's policies and practices promote fairness and inclusion.

Other boards can learn from our experience that achieving equity is not a one-time effort but a continuous journey. It requires steadfast commitment, openness to change, and a willingness to challenge existing structures and norms. By prioritizing equity, boards can drive significant improvements in student outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Collaboration, transparency, and accountability are essential components in this endeavor.



Thomas More University



THOMAS MORE
UNIVERSITY

Authors:

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Dr. Joseph Chillo, President

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Dr. Judith Marlowe, Board Chair

Dr. Jay Langguth, Vice President & Chief Academic Officer

Annabelle Bautista, Dean of Student Diversity, Engagement, and Success

Board Committees:

Enrollment, Academic and Student Affairs

Finance, Business and Capital Planning

Strategy and Long-range Planning

University Advancement and Outreach

Governance

Retention Performance Management Leadership:

Annabelle Bautista, Project Lead

Kelly French, Vice President and Chief of Staff/ Project Lead

Units Involved in Retention Performance Management:

Academic Affairs

Enrollment Management

Student Affairs

President's Office

Board of Trustees



Background

Thomas More University was originally founded to serve northern Kentucky as a teacher preparation institution, and today it serves more than 2,000 students from across the U.S. and more than a dozen international countries. Thomas More is a regional Catholic, diocesan university with more than 40 undergraduate and graduate programs.

As a diocesan University, Thomas More focuses its mission and goals for equitable student success on the three tenets of its mission: "we challenge students of all faiths to examine the ultimate meaning of life, their place in the world, and their responsibility to others." Building off the tenets, the University is working to become a student-ready institution. This will require the institution to identify those issues and challenges that prevent every student from being successful (as defined by persistence and graduation rates). We have taken two significant steps. First, we have reduced our core from approximately 56 credit hours down to 42. And secondly, we have removed food insecurities by providing a meal plan for all students. We also pride ourselves on receiving feedback from our students to ensure we are addressing any of their challenges and/or issues.

Thomas More is continuing its work to advance equity in higher education by focusing its efforts on student success. It is imperative that we continue to remove barriers for students to earn their college degree within four-years. The University has been examining factors contributing to attrition along with making decisions to improve retention and student success by examining policies and data. The Retention Performance Management group examined institutional data and identified several key strategies to improve first-year and overall retention as well as the graduation rate. In the University's strategic plan, *Lighting the Way*, we have a first-year retention goal of 75% and have seen steady increases in recent years. We continue to implement High Impact Practices throughout our curricular and co-curricular experiences to foster a sense of belonging and community.

Board Goals

- Continued evaluation of the mission and values of the University at the September Board Retreat.
- Improve the student experience through high impact practices as well as an increased focus on campus climate and culture.



THOMAS MORE
UNIVERSITY

Mission

Thomas More University is the Catholic Liberal Arts University of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky. Inspired by the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we challenge students of all faiths to examine the ultimate meaning of life, their place in the world, and their responsibility to others.



- Ensure trustee understanding of the current composition of the student body and campus community to identify reasons for enrolling and completing as well as reasons for leaving.
- Carefully monitor institutional cost of attendance, while balancing net price and financial aid discount.
- Improve student retention and graduation rates when considering adding or removing programs.
- Align institutional resources to achieve the goals of the strategic plan and opportunities for students to exceed the tenets of the mission.

Institutional Goals

	Goal	Performance to Date
First Year Retention Rate	75%	66%
Four Year Graduation Rate	45%	38%
First Year Students feeling a sense of community	90%	71%
Graduating Students felt their experience fostered reflection on the mission	90%	86%
Credit Hours taught by Full-time Faculty Goal	75%	69%
Students felt that they learned content and skills in their course	90%	91%
Percentage of First Year Students participating in a high impact practice	100%	55%
Percentage of Seniors participating in a high impact practice	100%	85%

The Governing Board Plan

Approximately two years ago, Board Committees were revised and reorganized to align with the strategic plan. The Enrollment, Academic & Student Affairs Committee of the Board is tasked with student success; while all Board Committees review and recommend changes to improve equity in student success based on their divisional responsibilities.

Moving forward, the Board shall:

- Review an equity case study exercise during Board retreat.
- Set foundation with Board to help understand what equity and student success means for our institution along with what is currently available to support success and what needs to be added or changed.
- Bring education to the Executive Committee of the Board by creating focus groups with our students to assess the student experience and level of engagement.



- Hold a retreat for the Board of Trustees with the agenda structured around student success and discussion focused on steps to achieve it.
- Set a charge for each of the Board Committees to include equity in student success.
- Recruit Board members with support of student success in mind as well as its emphasis during on-boarding and orientation for new BOT committee members.
- Ensure that the by-laws framework demonstrates complete understanding of equity.

We shall accomplish this by engaging, through Board Committees, the executive leadership team, and Trustees in a conversation regarding high impact practices and ways to improve student success. We shall discuss which barriers prevent students from being successful at the University. There will be a quarterly review of our performance indicators of the strategic plan so that we develop corrective actions plans for underperforming indicators. We shall review budget allocations by academic programs and student services to determine how these investments align with our peer and aspirant institutions.

The Board shall review the following metrics:

- End of year survey for students
- Course evaluation data
- 10-day enrollment census
- Fall enrollment census in October
- Monthly review of the strategic plan metrics - identify and develop a plan for those metrics that are not achieved in a quarter
- Success Center quarterly data identifying visits for tutoring and support as well as GPA improvements.

The Institution shall adopt the following strategies:

- Engage the Retention Performance Management group to develop policies and procedures to implement strategies from the Board
- Review retention, graduation and high-impact practices data to develop operational plans that align with the goals of the strategic plan
- Review and revise First Year Experience to reflect identified areas for improvement.

The equity in student success plan is reviewed in detail by the Enrollment, Academic & Student Affairs Committee of the Board. Other Board Committees may review specific initiatives and/or policies as they may need to approve it as well. All Board Committees meet quarterly prior to meetings of the full Board. The Board of Trustees is kept informed through the Board Chair report at each of the quarterly Board meetings throughout the academic year.

Retention Performance Management

With the support of our advisors at the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, the steering committee and domain committees reviewed historical data, survey data, institutional policies, University retention programs and services, and best practices in retention offered through the Gardner Institute. Based on the engagement of the domain committees and regular conversations that occur across campus, it is evident that faculty, staff, and administrators care deeply about our students. The University community has developed and implemented many new strategies to help our students succeed and improve our retention rates. However, we have not seen an upward trend in retention nor identified a correlation between any specific initiatives and



improved retention. As evidenced by our IPEDS, PDP, and Retention Performance Management data, gender, race, and income impact retention at Thomas More. Students who enroll in college today do not have the same educational and socio-economic backgrounds, and it is important to address these obstacles. An integrated model focused on developing academic, leadership, and life skills for minority students is likely to improve retention and graduation rates. This would include training for faculty and staff to recognize potential barriers and provide encouragement and support (Gross & Daniels, 2023). Baldwin, Miles, and Foote (2021) provide a plethora of information and options to help first-generation students succeed that can be helpful in developing diversity initiatives. First, we need to be aware that even “diverse” students are not a uniform group. Students come to college with a variety of social/cultural issues, career readiness, parental knowledge, social class, etc. Second, intersectionality affects students in complex ways and influences their experiences and challenges.

Thomas More University’s retention rate over the past ten years has ranged from 59% to 71% with a median of 63%. For that same time period, the national retention rate for private, non-profit 4-year institutions has been steady at 81%. The current strategic plan, *Lighting the Way*, set a target of 75%. The source of fluctuations and the solutions are not entirely clear, but the University has implemented a variety of initiatives and strategies to improve retention. Our Student Integration, Persistence and Satisfaction Survey results included:

- 16% considered leaving Thomas More because they felt unwelcome



- 6% are not satisfied with the faculty teaching strategies



- 98% agreed that it was important to graduate from college



- 80% agreed that it is important to graduate from Thomas More University



Overall, the committee is not convinced that the campus community is aware of the retention rates and the University goals, especially at the level of knowing what they can do about it. Retention disparities are evident across multiple dimensions. For example, we retain women better than men, white students better than students of color, and athletes-who-play better than athletes-who-don't. The conversations about how we improve retention are somewhat dependent on which slicing of the population we happen to be viewing. Retention efforts across campus have been varied, focused on specific groups, and often uncoordinated. A number of initiatives have been developed, such as the first-generation student club, academic coaches, scholarship programs, and financial thresholds, but many of these programs have been driven by individuals and have not been systematically implemented or reviewed. Different groups on campus focus on students in the context in which they encounter the students: coaches focus on their team, faculty focus on their major, etc. Various

committees and positions have existed over the years to coordinate this work. Currently, a semi-formal committee is chaired by the Director of Advising that includes faculty representation and individuals from across administrative areas and is primarily focused on registering students for the next term. The technology to support this work has evolved over the years.

We have identified two important themes. First, we need to build a culture focused on equitable student success, becoming a student-ready university, and improving retention and completion numbers for all students. Second, it is imperative that we develop evidence-informed strategies, invest in implementation, and properly assess the impact of those initiatives over the coming three years. If we want to see change in retention and student success, then we must change some of the things we are doing. Our pace and progress are dependent on resource allocation for positions and programs. The recommendations for action are interrelated and grouped into five categories. Implementation Committees should be created with committee chairs serving on the Steering Committee. Leadership and oversight for each recommendation should be as follows:

Recommendation 1	Build culture focused on equitable student success, becoming a student-ready University, and improving retention and completion numbers for all students. Leadership and oversight of this recommendation should be provided directly by the Steering Committee and built into the other Implementation Committees.
Recommendation 2	Develop comprehensive first year experience program. Implementation of this initiative will require working groups as subsets of the Implementation Committee, primarily from academic and student affairs.
Recommendation 3	Ensure curriculum is student-ready, engaging, supportive, and ensures timely progress toward completion. Implementation of this initiative will require strong faculty leadership and working groups as subsets of the Implementation Committee.
Recommendation 4	Continue strengthening advising and academic literacy through full implementation of the QEP. The QEP group should continue leading this effort.
Recommendation 5	Evaluate financial aid program and develop a financial literacy program. This Implementation Committee should include academic and student affairs, athletics, financial aid, business office, and institutional advancement.

Based on this structure, the full Retention and Student Success Committee will include over 40 faculty and staff members. They will rely on the Retention Performance Management report and the plethora of resources we have received throughout this project. This level of broad-based input will maximize involvement across campus committed to this work.

Transylvania University



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Michael Covert, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students

Rebecca Thomas, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the University

Amanda Turcotte, Executive Assistant to the President

Board of Trustees Committees:

Student Experience Committee

Institutional Units on Task Force:

Faculty

Financial Aid

Retention

Student Life

Library

Athletics

Students

Retention Performance Management Leadership

Rhyan Conyers, Project Lead



Background

As the first college in Kentucky, Transylvania University is committed to educating Kentuckians. Thomas Jefferson was governor of Virginia when that state's legislature chartered Transylvania in 1780 as the first college west of the Allegheny Mountains. By the time Kentucky became a state in 1792, Transylvania had already earned the reputation of offering a first-class education. Now in its third century, Transylvania continues to draw inspiration from its history while embracing the present and future as one of the nation's top liberal arts colleges.

Our Fall 2023 enrollment was 1024. Our population is currently 80% KY and 20% Out of State/ International. "Transy" was initially established to educate students on the country's frontier; today, we serve primarily academically talented students coming directly from high school. These include first generation students, Pell-eligible students and students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The Transylvania population is more diverse in some ways than that of our state, according to data from the U.S. Census. Transylvania University's white population is 77.8% compared to 82.3% for the state. We enroll a slightly higher proportion of Hispanic students (5.4%) than the state (4.3%) and of Asian students (3.7% for Transy and 1.8% for the state). However, the percentage of students who are black is lower at Transylvania (5.2%) than the state (8.7%). Our population of Pell-eligible students is about 25%, which is higher than many other national liberal arts colleges, but below the statewide estimate of 40%.

Equitable student success is central to our mission and strategic plan. As the demographics of the student population continues to evolve, we need to ensure that we are an attractive and effective institution for students from diverse backgrounds. While the Supreme Court decision on affirmative action does not directly impact our admissions policies and practices, we are reviewing and revising some of our scholarship programs and activities. With limited budget and personnel resources, we will need to make determinations about which areas to prioritize for student support and success initiatives to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are being appropriately served.



Mission

Through an engagement with the liberal arts, Transylvania University prepares its students for a humane and fulfilling personal and public life by cultivating independent thinking, open-mindedness, creative expression and commitment to lifelong learning and social responsibility in a diverse world.

Goals

We need to work with the Board to determine Key Performance Indicators and other elements for which they will receive regular reports and which will be recurring agenda items. We need to improve awareness of outcomes for different student groups at the institutional and board levels. We also need to ensure that there are internal mechanisms not only for tracking and evaluating student success but also for making policy recommendations designed to improve their success. We wish to increase goals for student outcomes specifically related to retention/graduation rates for targeted populations.

The Governing Board Plan

We restructured the Board of Trustees Committees to create a “Student Experience Committee” intended to provide oversight and support for the entire arc of a student's time at Transy from prospective student to graduate. The Committee has oversight of Admissions, Student Life, and Athletics. While the Committee does not have direct oversight of DEI, the overlapping nature of those activities means that the Committee frequently receives reports and has discussions with DEI staff and students as well.

We currently use overall retention and graduation rates, probation/suspension data, and DFWI rates. These data have traditionally been reported for all students and not broken down by race/ethnicity except as required for IPEDS reporting. Going forward, we will disaggregate those data by selected populations.

In the Fall 2023 Board meeting we established key performance metrics and continued or will continue those reports/agenda structures in the Winter and Spring 2024 meetings.

Fall KPIs:

- First Year Retention;
- 4-Year Graduation Rate;
- 6-Year Graduation Rate (all students; students of color; first generation; gender; greek; athletic; Pell eligible);

Winter KPIs:

- DFW Rates;
- GPAs (all students; students of color; first generation; gender; greek; athletic; Pell eligible); Spring KPIs: Incoming Student Data;
- Graduate School Attendance Data (all students; students of color; first generation; gender; greek; athletic; Pell eligible)

Institutional reports, including those provided to the Board of Trustees, will be redesigned to include breakdowns for race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status, where appropriate. A new policy-driven student success workgroup will be formed that will pay special attention to diverse populations and their success. (This is to be differentiated from existing support networks that identify/assist individual students with support needs.) The newly reconfigured position of Senior Vice President for Student Success and Institutional Effectiveness will coordinate the activities of the workgroup and co-chair the new Strategic Leadership Team that will coordinate priorities

under the new strategic plan related to student success and the student experience. Establish reasonable, appropriate, and achievable metrics for student success, including quantitative goals related to retention and graduation rates for the identified groups.

Retention Performance Management

We identified potential policy barriers related to our academic probation policy for first-year students as well as our Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress policy. We are in the process of revising those policies so that we can be sure that we are extending reasonable second chances to students who may have had temporary academic setbacks. We also concluded that, although the institution does very strong work with individual student retention, we need to devote additional time on retention and student success policy at a macro level. A retention team is being re-formed to work on those types of issues.

Our overall first to second-year retention had slipped below 80% by 2021 and our five-year graduation rates had slipped to 69% in 2016/2017. Although we were aware that students from marginalized populations retain at lower rates, this was the first experience we had bringing all of those data together. The data showing that particularly students who are non-white, Pell-eligible, and/or first-generation all have meaningfully lower chances of being retained and graduating were compelling and are leading to a renewed, intentional focus on those students.

Our responses to the Student Integration, Persistence and Satisfaction Survey results identified the following:

- 45% - Considered leaving Transylvania University because they felt unwelcome.



- 19% - Not satisfied with the teaching strategies used by instructors.



- 97% - Important to graduate from college.



- 92% - Important to graduate from Transylvania University



We have three focus areas:

- Board of Trustees: Continue to work with the Board Student Experience Committee, repeating information to them and distilling attrition into financial terms that they can understand easily.
- Strategic Plan: The emerging strategic plan is focused, in part, on student success and this has been informed by the Retention Performance Management process.
- Internal Work: We are revising policies, reimagining our administrative structure, and re-forming a retention policy team.

The three steps mentioned above are not focused just on doing the work to improve retention, but also communication about the importance of this work. All three initiatives have strong internal and external communication strategies to ensure that student success and retention remain top priorities for the institution.

With our Board of Trustees, we have spent more time talking about retention in the past 18 months than at any other time in our history. Although we have much work ahead of us, we have also made a tremendous amount of progress in helping to direct their attention to these important topics. Likewise, we have made great strides with internal work and communication, as we have more faculty and staff engaged in retention work and conversations—particularly related to equity issues—than we ever have.

Final Reflections

This process allowed us to chart a path to determine if our philosophical support of equity at our institution is matched by our policies, practices, and resources. The work we did on this project allowed us to engage with external experts who helped us conduct that evaluation. Although we were proud of the progress we were making before engaging in this project, it became obvious that much more work lies ahead of us with opportunities for improvement and progress. The conversations alone generated both goodwill and compelling ideas.

This is particularly true for our work with our Board of Trustees. We have changed how we engage with our Board on equity-related topics and are much more explicit regarding both our progress and challenges. We are also growing more practiced and comfortable with how we translate discussions of equity into concepts with which Board members are more familiar. The result is that Board engagement on the topic is more robust than it ever has been, although we still look forward to making more progress. This is a process that requires patience and—for us—a commitment to incremental but meaningful change on the part of all involved.



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Trustee Committees:

Student Life and Mission Committee

Institutional Offices:

Provost's Office

Student Affairs (includes faculty)

President's Office

Enrollment Management

Student Success Task Force

The Retention Committee

Retention Performance Management Leadership Team:

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Institutional Units Involved in Retention Performance Management:

Student Services, Diversity and Equity, Arts & Sciences, Institutional Research, Analytics and Decision Support, Undergraduate Education, Athletics, Campus Recreation, Libraries, Education, Business, Nursing, Social Work & Family Science, School of Medicine, Counseling, Public Health

Background

The University of Louisville was founded in 1798 as the Jefferson Seminary with a mission to expand training in multiple disciplines. As an institution deeply embedded in local histories, the University of Louisville emphasizes service to our local community through increasing access to students who reflect the demographics of our city and state. University of Louisville actively fosters "town-gown" partnerships that engage cutting-edge researchers to enhance local, national, and global well-being. We are formed by our history, informed by our history, and strive to create futures for all.

The focus on advancing equity leads us to increase efforts to make higher education more accessible to underrepresented and marginalized groups. The University enrolls 16,397 undergraduate students (Fall 2023) with a 6-year graduation rate of 60.6% for the overall student body but only 51.6% for our URM population. Initiatives to address this gap include increasing financial aid, scholarships, and mentorship programs targeted at Pell-eligible students, Underrepresented Minorities (URM), and first-generation students. We anticipate that by addressing equity issues in support services and the student experience, we will narrow the graduation rate gap between different demographic groups. Through providing necessary support and resources, the University can improve retention rates for historically marginalized students, leading to more graduates from diverse backgrounds, enhancing the overall learning environment and providing role models for underrepresented students. We maintain that equitable practices in higher education can have broader social impacts, leading to greater economic mobility and reducing societal disparities.

Governing Board and Institutional Goals:

- to increase the sense of belongingness as expressed by all students
- to increase the number of faculty and staff drawn from underrepresented backgrounds
- to retain faculty and staff from under-represented backgrounds

Board level strategies are aligned with the Office of the President and include the complete strategic plan and its accompanying dashboard.



Mission

The University of Louisville pursues excellence and inclusiveness in its work to educate and serve its community through:

1. teaching diverse undergraduate, graduate, and professional students in order to develop engaged citizens, leaders, and scholars,
2. practicing and applying research, scholarship and creative activity, and
3. providing engaged service and outreach that improve the quality of life for local and global communities.

The University is committed to achieving preeminence as a nationally recognized metropolitan research university.

Governing Board Plan

Through engaging with the Gardner Institute initiative, the Board of Trustees has examined how it can best support the university's overall mission and its focus on increasing equitable outcomes. They have committed to focus on a process that requires the board to consistently and thoroughly engage real-time and historical data about equity in student outcomes. There will be no changes to the structure of the Board but equity will be the focus of all reporting and a key focus in every meeting. This process included defining student success and then making sure it was backed up with the appropriate key indicators that can be tracked, in real-time, to keep student success "top of mind" and accountable. All terms used included a reference dictionary to ensure everybody was on the same page. The process, led by the University of Louisville's incredible faculty and staff, resulted in a dashboard containing leading and lagging indicators of change which utilize quantitative and qualitative measures. As student success initiatives have to be funded and therefore budgeted, this is an important consideration that further ties the Board to these success goals. The final structural change will be the review and regular cadence to the student success dashboard where ongoing dialogue, transparency, and accountability is continued.

The full Board of Trustees met in retreat with their Academy Coaches and initiated a process whereby the Board, faculty and students defined student success for the University of Louisville. All constituencies identified the critical metrics of this success and directed the institution to create a dashboard. The Governing Board will regularly review and discuss the dashboard metrics to guide future budgetary decisions. Board level strategies are aligned with the Office of the President and include the complete strategic plan and its accompanying dashboard.

The following student data will be included as an appendix for every Board of Trustees meeting starting June 2023. Five years of data will be reported for each metric. (Note: some of this data will not change month-to-month or even semester-to-semester but will be included in the materials for every Board meeting as a reference document.):

- Enrollment for most recent semester
 - Undergraduate enrollment*: Headcount and credit hours
 - Graduate enrollment**: Headcount and credit hours
 - Professional (Medicine, Dentistry, Law) enrollment**: Headcount and credit hours
- Undergraduate Retention first-to-second semester*
 - first-to-second year*
 - first-to-third year*
- Undergraduate Graduation Rates
 - 4-year graduate rate*
 - 6 year graduate rate*
- Degrees Awarded for most recent semester and YTD
 - Bachelor*
 - Master**
 - Doctoral (Research)**
 - Professional**
- Undergraduate Student Success
 - % withdrawals, complete and course, each semester*
 - % DFW grades*
 - Number registered for courses next semester*
 - Average number of credits attempted and earned in first semester and year*



- o Average Grade Point Average earned in first semester and year*
- o 30, 60, 90 credit hour progression*

* data will be disaggregated by the following groups: URM, PellEligible, First Generation

**data will be disaggregated by the following groups: URM, International

All changes must be aligned with Kentucky state statutes regulating public universities. Additionally, they will be aligned with the university governing document, the Redbook. After review by the entire Board and university legal Counsel, recommendations from the Board of Trustees will be forwarded to the appropriate shared governance structure: Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Government Association, Senior Leadership.

Finally, the Vice President for Institutional Equity is developing a strategic plan that involves six key areas or "pillars":

- Education and Training
- Climate and Infrastructure
- Recruitment and Retention
- Research and Scholarship
- Strategic Partnerships
- Leadership Support and Development

Specific goals and measures under these areas of concentration are being developed in alignment with the university strategic plan and the office of the president.

The Provost's Office will present implementation updates to the Board of Trustees via written report and/or presentation to the Board of Trustees during a regularly scheduled Board meeting.

Retention Performance Management

Unfortunately, we were not surprised by the gaps we found. We continue to see unmet financial need as our highest retention risk factor. Historically, the institution has not been strategic about using an equity approach to retention. As cited in Principle 7, the university has historically focused on diversity rather than diversity, equity, and inclusion. The fact that we don't have a retention mission statement is reflective of the fact that we don't have a unified vision across units and departments of the importance of retention, much less and cohesive understanding of how we should promote retention.

There is evidence that there are many resources dedicated to promoting retention across units including: academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, affordability initiatives, cohorts/community building, intervention methods for students struggling academically/personally, curriculum mapping, reducing barriers to entry for courses through examining pre-requisites, course scheduling, and cohort schedules. However, there is not consistency across academic units. Some units integrate more of these initiatives and programs than others. This lack of standardization also contributes to a lack of shared understanding. We have begun to try to address these gaps through sharing data from central risk modeling that is 86% accurate in predicting retention. Institutional aid has been shifted from merit-based to need-based and we are increasing our emphasis on summer bridge programs, accurate placement in math courses, and enhancing our advertising campaign to normalize help-seeking behavior.



The Student Integration Persistence and Satisfaction Survey (SIPS) results highlighted several points:

- 33% - Considered leaving University of Louisville because they felt unwelcome.



- 31% - Were not satisfied with the teaching strategies used by instructors.



- 98% - Felt it was important to graduate from college.



- 91% - Felt it was important to graduate from University of Louisville



While not reflected in the SIPS, other data indicates that finances are at the heart of many of our students' problems. Often this tension comes through in a conflict in students' need to work part (or sometimes full) time to support themselves while also trying to complete coursework. Sometimes it is conflict between midterms or finals with work schedule, or UPSovernight shifts with class schedules. Given this tension, scheduling flexibility is important. Can students find a way to make it through the major with their work? Are they incentivized to do so? Every department should have at least one flexible degree plan (not a path with specialized courses offered only at certain times).

Our retention recommendations included:

- Add retention statement to strategic plan
- Foster institutional-wide ownership of retention
- Mandatory training of all faculty centered on fostering studentsuccess
- Standing and permanent university-wide student /success retention committee
- Work with Student Success Center (SSC) to coordinate unit-based initiatives, working in concert with Institutional Research, Analytics and Decision Support (IRADS) and Institutional Effectiveness (IE), gather and make available retention related data, coordinate policies and procedures related to retention
- Expand academic support services

Specifically, we intend to look more closely at disaggregated data within our risk models to identify which groups pool our students most at risk and plan targeted interventions, such as providing tutoring in the Cultural Center. We also hope to expand our summer bridge programs. Additionally, we plan to roll out a faculty engagement project that encourages all faculty to examine the grade distributions in their own classes disaggregated by priority populations. We are working with a dedicated team comprised of several units from within the Provost Office to work on the Equity in Teaching and Learning Outcomes dashboard with all faculty.

Highlights of our work on Retention Performance Management included:

1. Agreeing on and working through an institution-wide definition of student success;
2. Creating a transactional and contextualized Board of Trustees dashboard with disaggregated and benchmarked data, and;
3. Creating the Equity in Teaching and Learning Outcomes Dashboard with accompanying faculty development support to address any potential equity gaps identified.

University of Louisville Student Success sites include:

<https://louisville.edu/student-success>

<https://reach.louisville.edu/>

The Cards Analytics site includes student, faculty/staff, and budget interactive data reports. These reports are available to the public and can be found here:

[Cards Analytics — Office of Academic Planning & Accountability](#)

Final Reflection

Working through this process concretized several things for the participants at University of Louisville. One: that while retention is “everybody’s job”, there must be a group that focuses on it specifically in order to make sure that everyone on campus has the tools and the resources they need in order to do retention work in their own units/offices. Two: that a mutually derived and therefore shared definition of student success creates buy-in to support the work of retention across campus. Three: that Boards of Trustees are comprised of community leaders who dedicate significant time to the university and, as such, need to be fully invested in the mission and vision to support this work. Keeping retention in front of the board quite literally through dashboards, presentations, and handouts at every board meeting keeps all our board members, our community at large, and our campus constituent partners focused on the larger goal of student success.



Final Reflections: What We Learned



The Governing Board Equity in Student Success Process Evaluation

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Introduction and Methodology

One of the goals of the Governing Board Equity in Student Success (Governing Board Equity in Student SuccessA) project was to incorporate evaluation of the process itself to allow for continuous improvement of the resources, activities and content. To advance that effort the Gardner Institute engaged the Evaluation and Learning Research Center (ELRC) at Purdue University to conduct an evaluation of the process. The evaluation effort was driven by three key objectives. Those objectives were to examine the perspectives and experiences of participants to determine:

1. What progress had been made addressing the problem of practice targeted by Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy?
2. What challenges were encountered by participants in the process?
3. How could the process be improved to address challenges or gaps in progress?

Based on these evaluation objectives the ELRC created four research questions to examine within their evaluation of the process. Those questions are:

1. To what extent did the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy project contribute to outcomes that engage governing boards in working towards equity in student success?
2. What aspects of the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy process and project design served as strong contributors to the project's impact and positive progress?
3. What challenges or threats to progress were encountered by the project participants and partners?
4. What adaptations should be considered to the design or approach of the work to enhance its success?

To examine these four questions ELRC conducted focus group interviews with 31 participants from the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy project in September of 2023. The participants included professional and executive staff, executive leaders, and governing board members from the participating institutions. In addition, ELRC did two follow-up interviews online with participants who expressed interest but were unable to participate in the focus groups. Thus, in total, the data consisted of 33 participants within the process. All the focus groups and interviews were recorded, with the participants' assent. ELRC transcribed the recordings and conducted qualitative thematic analysis of the transcripts. The primary themes that emerged from that analysis along with some representative quotes are grouped by the research question they addressed in the following results.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent did the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy project contribute to outcomes that engage governing boards in working towards equity in student success?

Six primary themes emerged around the first research question. The first of those themes is that participants felt executive leaders and board members developed a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the role of governing boards in promoting equitable student success via their participation in the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy project. As one participant stated:



“But the first takeaway is that it is the business of the board to be very personally interested and invested in the success of each and every student, not just the numbers that show us how many are going to graduate or the net tuition revenue figures or anything like. It has to be a personalized thing.”

The second theme that emerged was that institutions were realizing that their governing boards need to possess more diversified skill sets and backgrounds as demonstrated in this participant's response:

“Our board truly does have some very well-meaning people who aren't attuned to these equity issues at all...It's just not the information that they've ever really been exposed to. Certainly, isn't part of their life. And so, we need to make it part of their life, at least as trustees.”

The remaining four themes that emerged related to research question 1 are that participants felt the process:

1. Helped boards approach issues of equity in student success strategically;
2. Helped deepen institutional leaders' understanding of and commitment to student success in general, and equity in student success strategies specifically;
3. Helped the institutions that were already implementing strategies on equitable student success to work across organizational silos and foster buy-in;
4. Helped institutions change the way they do business to focus on equity in student success.

Research Question 2: What aspects of the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy process and project design served as strong contributors to the project's impact and positive progress?

There were three themes that emerged relating to research question 2. These themes are:

1. The institutions valued the learning community approach that allowed them to learn from each other;
2. The alignment between the state's higher ed goals and the individual institutions' goals enhanced the success of the efforts;
3. The reputation and complementary expertise of the Gardner Institute and the Association of Governing Boards contributed to the success of the project. An example of a comment about the benefit of the learning community structure is:

“...having the opportunity to hear the progress that other institutions have had in this particular setting has been helpful because we can bring that back into those conversations.”

Research Question 3: What challenges or threats to progress were encountered by the project participants and partners?

Four themes were identified with research question 3. The themes are:



1. Turnover of leadership and board members is a challenge to continuing and sustaining the work;
2. Lack of buy-in and trust among different roles on campus is a challenge to advancing the work;
3. Institutions need guidance and concrete examples of successful implementation of strategies that foster equitable student success;
4. Many board members approach the issue of equitable student success with entrenched deficit mindsets.

An example of that deficit thinking can be found in this participant's statement:

"I think one of the most difficult realizations is that by the time we see these 18-year-olds they've already got behind them 12 years of good, bad, or indifferent educational experience. And so sometimes we're sort of in Mr. Fixit mode of somehow, we've got to straighten all of this out...And they're actually being expected to participate in classes and actually write essays and not just do multiple choice tests and things like that. And they're just completely not equipped to deal with that."

Research Question 4: What adaptations should be considered to the design or approach of the work to enhance its success?

Five themes emerged from analysis in response to research question 4. Those themes are:

1. Institutionalize the training into recurring practices and stable roles adjacent to the leadership or the governing boards;
2. Expand upon the learning community structure to benefit the individual institutions;
3. Streamline and clarify communications and processes;
4. Incorporate additional outside expertise on various topics to assist institutions' ability to learn and apply the knowledge;
5. Improve the structure of the communication and technology platform to simplify the process.

Conclusion

The themes that emerged from the process evaluation indicated that the participants felt the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy program assisted the work at institutions on equitable student success as well as helped to incorporate the institutions' boards into the work. Several of the challenges that were identified are common in large scale work on student success including leadership turnover, resistance to buy-in at the local level, and the need to overcome deficit mindsets about students. However, there are several clear themes that can help the Gardner Institute and the Association of Governing Boards improve and expand upon this work in the future including emphasizing and expanding upon the learning community structure more, incorporating more concrete examples and case studies of successful implementations, and streamlining the platform and communication around the work to clarify it better for the participants.

The Governing Board Equity in Student Success Plans: A Cross-Institutional Analysis

Author:

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Seven Kentucky institutions participated in the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Project. Nearly every team that participated in the Academy was led by the president/chancellor of the institution. Each institutional team included Trustees, cabinet members or senior staff and institutional research staff. Five institutions were selected to participate in the task-force-based Retention Performance Management “deep dive” into institutional evidence and principle-based retention planning. Throughout both the Academy and the Retention Performance Management process, the teams continuously worked on plans that would ultimately shape the future work of these institutions. The following is an analysis of those plans and a summary of the steps either already initiated or forthcoming by these institutions.

Identification of the Challenges and the Evidence

Every single institution and governing board involved in this process adopted a principles-based approach to the challenges of student success and, specifically, equitable student success. Whether they rooted their identification of the challenge in their institutional mission statements, their institutional vision, their strategic plans or their history, every participating institution identified their commitment to the success of all students (and their reasons for participating in this demonstration project) as a core part of the institution’s identity. In some cases, this commitment shaped their goals coming into the project. In all cases, it shaped the steps they took in their plans.

A second factor, consistent across all participating institutions, was the team’s identification of critical student success gaps among cohorts of students. All institutions had previously reviewed (and reported to their Boards) overall retention and graduation success rates of students. Few institutions disaggregated the data beyond comparing “under-represented minorities” to all others. When the institutions disaggregated the success outcomes data by gender, race/ethnicity, Pell-eligibility and/or First-Generation status, every institution/governing board identified gaps in the outcomes data for selected populations of these historically resilient students. It was striking to read in many of the plans that this was the most in-depth discussion of their disaggregated equity in student success data that they had held at the governing board or institutional level in a considerably long time. This close investigation of the connections between their institutional principles and their evidence helped to create an institutional sense of urgency for change.

Governing Board Plans

Board Data

Given the connection between the institutional principles and their disaggregated student success evidence identified above, it was not surprising to read that every single college/university identified the need to change the way that student success data was reported to their governing boards. If the boards are to act upon their responsibility for mission oversight of institutional success and the success of all populations of students, they need evidence that will enable them to ask the critical questions that oversight requires. In most cases, this involved the identification of key performance indicators and a determination of the frequency and specific committee/s to which this would be reported (quarterly, twice-yearly or annually). Most institutions identified a specific set of retention, graduation and/or post-graduation success metrics that would now be disaggregated for their governing boards. One institution (Kentucky State University) added some critical “leading indicators” of student progression, such as the percentages of students enrolling/earning 30 credits and earning a 2.0 GA each year. One institution (Berea College) recognized that the voluminous amount of evidence they shared with their governing board each year needed to be focused into “Equity Highlights” so that their governing board members could concentrate on the key data elements for the institution.



Board Structure

Four institutions (Transylvania University, Thomas More University, Kentucky State University and Bellarmine University) had recently, were in the process of, or planned to change their governing board committee structure or responsibilities to better address the student experience. This involved the combination of committees (most frequently the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Committees), the assignment of responsibility for student success/equitable student success to a specific committee and/or the renaming of a committee to ensure oversight for this work for the Board as a whole. Thomas More University, in contrast, chose to advance this work by having each governing board committee identify their specific role/responsibility for equitable student success. They also planned to ensure that the governing board by-laws framework documented an understanding of equity. Bellarmine University noted with pride that their faculty representation on each governing board committee would help with the process of making this work university-wide.

In one of the most dramatic plans to emerge from this project, Simmons College of Kentucky plans to establish a Foundation Board of Directors for their endowment fund to directly promote equity in student success. They plan to create a governance framework, a committee structure and a code of ethics and conflict of interest policy. Their governing board plans to create a foundation board recruitment committee to recruit, vet and select their foundation board. Once selected, the governing board will offer orientation and training to these new board members. Once established, the two boards will work collaboratively to set a foundation board comprehensive fundraising strategy to build an endowment that will prioritize equitable student success.

Strategic Plans

Four institutions (University of Louisville, Kentucky State University, Berea College and Transylvania University) specifically addressed the importance of aligning this work with the institution's strategic plan or an emergent equity plan under development (University of Louisville).

Board Education

Three institutions (University of Louisville, Thomas More University and Transylvania University) completed or planned to initiate a process of educating their board about equitable student success. The entire governing board of the University of Louisville participated in the Governing Board Academy. They also held a board retreat where they began an institution-wide conversation to define student success at the university. While Transylvania University planned an ongoing education process for their Board, Thomas More University set out a specific set of plans to hold a retreat, establish a foundation of board-wide understanding of equitable student success and review an equity case study. They are also planning a specific program of education for their executive committee of the board.

Board Budgeting and Finance

Four teams (Thomas More University, Kentucky State University, Simmons College of Kentucky, Berea College) identified budgeting, finances and cost among the Board level actions/plans. Most teams alluded to the fact that their principled plans would entail revisiting these themes with the Board around budget approvals, as in Thomas More University's full engagement with high-impact practices. Berea College, in their Board approved strategic plan is taking steps to address wellness, food and housing insecurity while Thomas More University had allocated resources to give every student a meal plan to address food insecurity. Berea College also noted that they were seeking to address the financial burden of attending the institution and participating fully in high-impact practices. Thomas More University's governing board committed to specifically reviewing the budget



allocations by academic programs and student services to determine how well they aligned with the plans and compared to their peer and aspirant institutions. Several institutional governing board plans also identified monitoring the cost of a degree from their institution as part of the work of the board.

Board Policy Review

While most institutions identified policy review as part of the planning work of the institutions, two plans raised this in conjunction with their governing boards. Simmons College addressed this in their steps to create their foundation board. Kentucky State committed to their governing board reviewing all policies to ensure compliance with the goal of equitable student success.

Additional Options

While a number of plans at the institutional level spoke about the importance of changing/shaping institutional culture, Bellarmine University also tasked their governing board with approving an institution-wide vision and goals for equitable retention and with developing a process to ensure full campus-wide buy-in to this initiative.

Institutional Plans

While the five institutions that were selected to participate in the Retention Performance Management process were expected to also create a plan for institutional change, the institutions that participated in just the Academy also raised institutional goals and plans for change, some already underway.

Institutional Culture

The need to address institutional culture was raised explicitly by five institutions (University of Louisville, Thomas More University, Kentucky State University, Berea College and Bellarmine University). Several institutions, such as Kentucky State, addressed the need to institutionalize the priority of equitable student success across the institutions. Kentucky State also plans to develop a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and collaboration. Some institutions (such as the University of Louisville and Thomas More University), observed that many initiatives taking place across the institution were often “boutique” in nature – built upon the passions and drive of one individual to address the needs of one specific constituency. These institutions noted that there was a lack of standardization across the units and programs, and that there was a need to build institutional ownership for this work. Thomas More University also built into their institutional plan the need to institutionalize the goal of equitable student success and to become a “student-ready” institution while Bellarmine University recommended that the institution work to make the culture more inclusive, their interventions more intentional and the focus more “strengths-based” rather than deficit-focused. Berea College wrote about how their Great Commitments, developed in 1962, have been updated to address the changing profile, diversity and needs of their students.

Institutional Data

Three institutional plans (Bellarmine University, Kentucky State University, University of Louisville and) built specific recommendations concerning institutional data in their plans. In many cases, as at the University of Louisville, this would involve looking more closely at disaggregated data to plan targeted interventions. The University of Louisville and Bellarmine University were also planning to use their disaggregated evidence to build stronger predictive analytics for students who may be at risk. Louisville and Kentucky State planned to introduce an initiative whereby faculty could examine their grade distributions through various disaggregated lenses, the better to determine pedagogical and curricular redesign possibilities. Kentucky State was also going to target curricular analytics to identify curriculum that may have evolved into unnecessarily complex models.



Institutional Policy / Structure Reviews

Another frequently cited element in the institutional plans (Transylvania University, Thomas More University, Bellarmine University, Kentucky State University) was the intent to complete a review of selective or all institutional policies, the better to determine which may inadvertently create inequities in student success. While Transylvania University is already underway with their revisions in their academic probation and Satisfactory Academic Progress (Financial Aid) policies, they have also committed to engaging in a systemic review of policies and structures. Thomas More University will engage their Retention Performance Management team to develop policies and procedures for the recommendations from the board while Kentucky State is updating their attendance policy. Bellarmine University faculty and academic administrators developed a DFWI Task Force to evaluate policies, procedures, structural and curricular barriers at the institution and the institution will review policies on workload moving forward.

Professional Development

Four institutions (Bellarmine University, Kentucky State University, Thomas More University, University of Louisville) targeted faculty and staff development in their institutional plans. Most frequently cited was professional development for faculty and staff to deepen their understanding about their critical role in student success and the strategies that they can employ to promote student success (University of Louisville, Thomas More University, Bellarmine University). Other institutions planned to ramp up training in critical software that can help institutions better identify and intervene with students at risk (Kentucky State University). Bellarmine University also identified the need to reach out and engage more faculty in this critical work and, to that end, planned to review both workload and recognition and reward structures that would incentivize this work.

Institutional Strategic Plans

As also noted at the governing board level, several institutions (Berea College, Thomas More University, Transylvania University) built into their plans the need to align this work with institutional strategic plans, either already existing or under development.

Institutional Staffing Supports & Services

While nearly all institutions built into their plans the intention to align and expand (evidence based) supports and services with their larger equitable student success goals, a number of institutions had already identified some specific targeted programming. Thomas More University and Kentucky State were going to invest in their First Year Seminar/First Year Experience programming for new students. The University of Louisville planned to expand overall academic support services and their summer bridge program while Thomas More University was going to specifically target academic advising, financial aid and financial literacy.

Several institutions had or were in the process of adjusting staffing, such as a newly reconfigured Senior Vice President for Student Success and Institutional Effectiveness (Transylvania University), the creation of a standing, permanent student success and retention committee (University of Louisville) and the addition of a retention specialist (Kentucky State University).

Conclusions

The collective work of the Governing Board Academy and Retention Performance Management teams was exceptional. Each institution, drawing upon their distinctive institutional history, mission and evidence, developed a unique plan to both address the current work of their governing boards



and to put into place structures to ensure that the ongoing work of their boards would prioritize student success for all. Neither institutional size, Carnegie Classification, nor public/private designation differentiated the institutional responses. In fact, the participants spoke about the value of the conversations that took place across institutional teams that enriched the subsequent conversations they held as a team. The diversity of Governing Board plans also demonstrated the range of innovations that institutions can initiate once their governing boards commit to this plan of action. As each board examined their institutional mission and how that mission defined success for their students, they connected this work to the fiduciary and mission-driven responsibilities of the board. Some common themes that emerged included prioritizing what and how disaggregated data on student success would be presented to and discussed by board committees, reviewing board structure and policies, and tying this work to institutional missions and strategic plans.

While not every participating institution engaged in the Retention Performance Management process “deep dive” into their institutional evidence, policies and practices, each institution created a plan or connected this work to an existing plan developed to enhance student success. Institutional culture, data driven decision making, policy reviews and professional development emerged as powerful themes across the schools, regardless of sector. Like their board plans, institutional retention plans prioritized the importance of using disaggregated student success data in all their future student success initiatives and employing an equity lens to review policies and practices that could inadvertently disadvantage populations of students. Institutional actions were shaped by their distinct evidence of patterns in student success and reflected the unique evidence of performance gaps at each institution.

We shall be following the progress of these institutions with great interest over the coming years!



Additional Governing Board Project Resources

Gardner Institute

- Transforming the Foundational Postsecondary Experience

Engage in a rigorous transformation of the most crucial touchpoints during a student's first and second year of college. We guide you through a transformative experience that is tailored to your specific needs and most pressing challenges. Working together with your institution's leaders, faculty, and staff, we create a unique roadmap and support you through the journey.

<https://gardnerinstitute.org/service/transforming-the-foundational-postsecondary-experience/>

- Retention Redesign

Institutions engage in a task force-based assessment model to drive your structured planning and implementation processes forward. Your campus will have a shared commitment to achieving success, along with improved student success outcomes and stronger retention efforts.

<https://gardnerinstitute.org/service/retention-redesign/>

- Workshops, Retreats & Site Visits

The Gardner Institute is available to deliver tailored presentations to support your institutional goals. The Gardner Institute is available to work with your institution by sharing expertise on a wide range of topics.

<https://gardnerinstitute.org/service/workshops-retreats-site-visit/>

- Retention, Persistence and Student Success Academy

The Retention, Persistence and Student Success Academy is a structured and intentional five-week Academy that will prepare institutional teams to conduct an evidence-based, comprehensive student retention and persistence planning process at their institution with the goal of improving retention for all learning populations to ensure that race, ethnicity, family income, and geographical location are no longer the best predictors of retention, persistence, and student success.

<https://gardnerinstitute.org/service/retention-persistence-and-student-success-academy/>

- Building and Sustaining a Data-Informed Organization

Building and Sustaining a Data-Informed Organization is a year-long community of practice. Institutions will progress through the necessary stages to build and sustain a data-informed institutional culture. Teams will participate in a six-module "academy" to start the community of practice, followed by one meeting per month for the remainder of the twelve months.

<https://gardnerinstitute.org/service/building-and-sustaining-a-data-informed-organization/>

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

- Access Engagement & Belonging Resources

The Council's access, engagement and belonging (AEB) efforts are foundational to providing students the opportunity to receive a rich and fulfilling educational experience enhanced by exposure to the different perspectives and cultures of those around them

<https://cpe.ky.gov/ourwork/aeb.html>



- Best Practices in Diversity Equity & Inclusion

The purpose of this report is to review statewide and institutional progress made in fostering diversity, equity and inclusion from 2015-16, the first year of implementing the policy, through 2020-21, the most recent year of data available.

<https://cpe.ky.gov/data/reports/2023DEIAssessment.pdf>

- Board Training

To prepare citizens for their roles on college boards, the Council provides training to new appointees to increase their understanding of their responsibilities and the structure of postsecondary education in Kentucky.

<https://cpe.ky.gov/ourwork/boardtraining.html>

- The Kentucky Student Success Collaborative

An initiative of the Council, the KYSCC facilitates innovative and collaborative approaches to student success leading to increased economic mobility of all students in Kentucky.

<https://kystudentsuccess.org/about-us/>

- Why Equity in Student Success?

Slide deck from a presentation by the Gardner Institute, Ascendum Education Group, AGB and the Council on why this topic is critical for Boards.

<https://cpe.ky.gov/trusteeship/2022trusteeship/slides-equitystudentsuccess.pdf>

Association of Governing Boards

- AGB Consulting

As the leading authority on higher education governance for over 100 years, AGB Consulting draws on research and leading practices to tailor support for the unique needs and challenges of institutions and their related foundations, helping strengthen their boards and position them to successfully meet the moment.

<https://agb.org/agb-consulting/>

- AGB Board of Directors' Statement on Justice, Equity, and Inclusion and Guidance for Implementation

The AGB Board of Directors recognizes the urgency for governing boards to examine and address barriers to justice, equity, and inclusion (JEI) in their own work, at all levels of the institution, and beyond the borders of the campus. Undertaking this work will be challenging and complex and the AGB Board of Directors' Statement on Justice, Equity and Inclusion serves as a critical resource for boards in their efforts to implement this important governance work.

<https://agb.org/product/agb-board-of-directors-statement-on-justice-equity-and-inclusion-and-guidance-for-implementation/>

- Board Fundamentals – Justice Diversity Equity & Inclusion

Boards are uniquely positioned to enact the substantive changes students, stakeholders, and communities are demanding; they are also accountable for ensuring their institutions support the success and safety of students, faculty, and staff equitably. The principles of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (JDE&I) can inform discussion inside the boardroom and throughout the campus community.

<https://agb.org/knowledge-center/board-fundamentals/justice-diversity-equity-inclusion/>



- Board Responsibility for Equitable Student Success

Our effort is to provide learnings, tools, a playbook, and experiences that enable strategic transformation for boards in their need to understand and lead... This guide seeks to enable institutional approaches to plans to achieve greater justice, equity, and inclusion embedded with goals for improved student success.

<https://agb.org/student-success-initiatives/board-oversight-of-equitable-student-success/>

- Justice, Diversity & Equity Toolkit

To support your board and institution in addressing these issues, AGB has developed this Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (JDE&I) Toolkit. It includes materials you can customize to work with your board to develop a common understanding of JDE&I issues, assess institutional needs, and prioritize and pursue your goals.

<https://agb.org/agb-consulting-old-2/justice-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/toolkit/>



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