Minnesota
STATE COLLEGES
& UNIVERSITIES

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 26, 2016

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Ron Anderson, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs

SUBJECT: College Completion: Report to the Legislature

Attached is the *College Completion: Report to the Legislature* developed in response to 2015 Minnesota Session Law Chapter 69, Senate File 5, Article 3, Section 23.

The Minnesota legislature passed legislation during the 2015 session to address completion rates for all of Minnesota's public colleges and universities. They required that by January 15, 2016, MnSCU submit a report that details the system's comprehensive plan to encourage students to complete degrees, diplomas or certificates in their chosen field of study.

Please let me know if you have any questions about the report**.**

cc: Chancellor Steven Rosenstone
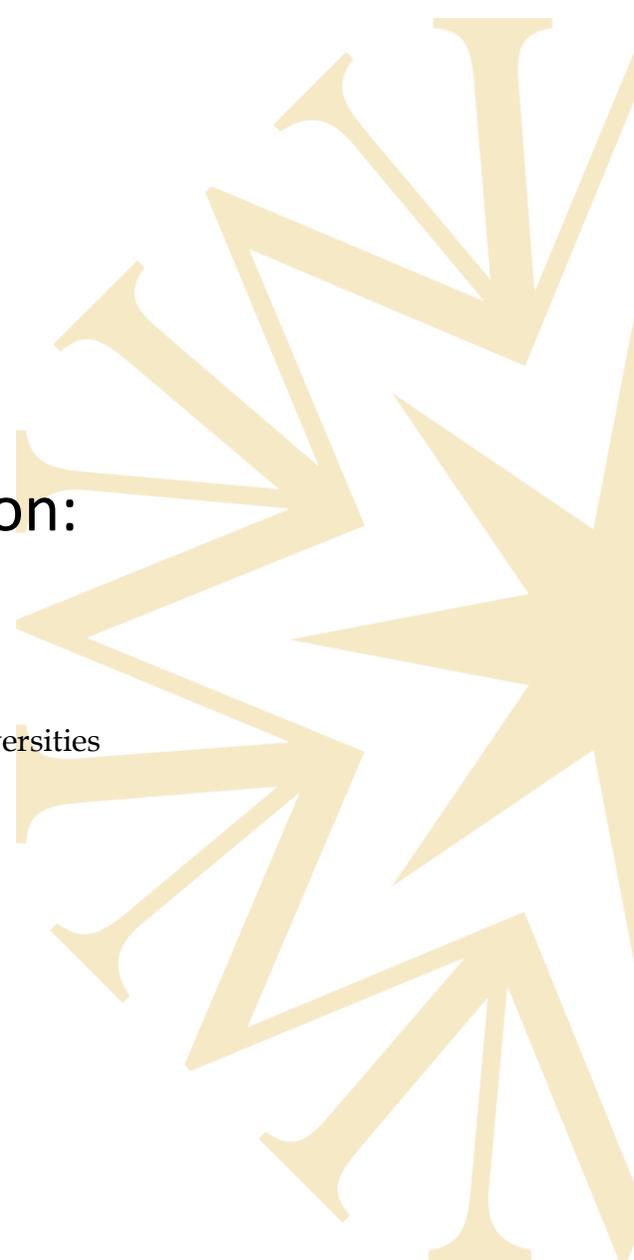   Leadership Council
        Toyia Younger

College Completion:

Report to the Legislature

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

January 2016

Introduction

In 2015 the Minnesota legislature passed legislation to address completion rates for all of Minnesota's public colleges and universities (see appendix A). The Minnesota Legislature required that by January 15, 2016, MnSCU submit a report that details the system's comprehensive plan to encourage students to complete degrees, diplomas or certificates in their chosen field of study.

Providing access to higher education for all Minnesotans has long been a core commitment of the 31 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. By this standard, although acknowledging that there is still work to be done, MnSCU has been very successful. In Fall 2015, over 395,000 students enrolled in Minnesota State College and University schools in both credit and non-credit courses. MnSCU schools continue to be the first choice in higher education for the majority of Minnesotans and especially students of color, low-income students, adult learners, and those pursuing technical careers. MnSCU educates more college graduates than any other provider of higher education in the state, and its graduates include the majority of the state's K-12 school teachers, law enforcement professionals, and healthcare professionals.

While MnSCU continues to strive toward promoting access to higher education, there is growing awareness that too many students are leaving colleges and universities without earning a credential. With the goal of advancing degree completion, MnSCU has implemented efforts to improve graduation rates, at every level of award from certificates and diplomas to associate, bachelors and graduate degrees. The system's commitment is evident in completion rates being a metric in the evaluation of all its college and university presidents.

Problem Statement

More than 20 million adults were enrolled in America's colleges and universities in the fall of 2015. Based on current estimates, fewer than 60% of these students are likely to earn their sought after credential within a 150% benchmark of their expected timeframe[1]. For students who enroll in one of the 31 schools within the MnSCU system, 26% of community college students and 49% of university students are expected to complete within the measured timeframe (Minnesota Office of Higher Education).

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[1] The 150% time frame is six years for fulltime students seeking a bachelor's degree and three years for fulltime students seeking an associate's degree

Table 1

MnSCU and National Graduation Rates: Percentage of students who complete in 150% time frame
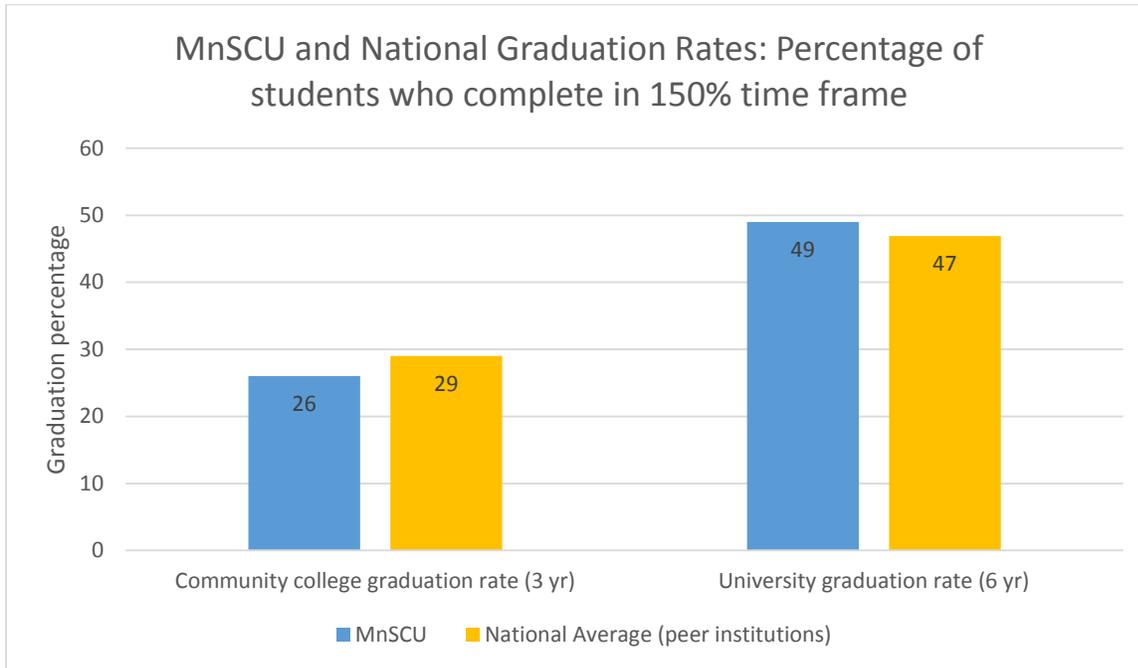
The failure to earn a credential has significant negative consequences for the student, the college that enrolled him or her, and our national economy as a whole (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015). When a student drops out, it is not only the college that loses revenue (a concern that is especially critical for career and technical programs with "lockstep" curriculum where seats left empty by students who drop out cannot be filled for the subsequent semesters due to course sequencing), but also for individual students who may experience negative financial impacts and other undesirable outcomes associated with delaying or derailing their life's aspirations (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2001). Students who fail to complete a college degree "are the big losers in the higher education lottery because the college wage premium[2] does not benefit them" (Shaffer, 2014). In contrast, those who do complete college face significantly lower levels of unemployment than those who have only a high school diploma, a gap that has widened from 2.8% for those with a bachelor's degree to 5.7% for the adult population as a whole. On a national level, students who do not complete college contribute to current and predicted undersupply of skilled labor (The White House, 2015). Current estimates indicate that 74% of the jobs in Minnesota will require some postsecondary education by 2020 (Georgetown University, 2014). Minnesota simply must have more graduates in order to meet the state's talent needs.

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[2] The college wage premium refers to the fact that, historically, those who have earned a college degree are likely to earn more money over the course of their lifetime than those who have earned only a high school diploma or less. According to recent estimates the wage premium is said to be just over $17,000 a year **Invalid source specified.**

Challenges

While there is wide-spread agreement that current completion rates must be improved, MnSCU faces several challenges as we seek to assist more students in reaching their educational goals in a timely manner. An examination of national trends and existing literature makes it clear that these challenges are not unique to MnSCU, but are significant variables that must be addressed in order for a comprehensive completion plan to be successful.

Prior to discussing the current state of completion for MnSCU students it is critical to note that current standards used to measure completion offer a limited and sometimes skewed picture:

> Graduation rates reported to the U.S. Department of Education are based on a cohort of first-time, full-time students, which represents a small share of enrollment at public two-year institutions. Furthermore, graduation rates reported by the U.S. Department of Education exclude students who enrolled into an institution as a transfer student. This limited cohort also hinders policymakers from reliably creating policy for all students using only data on first-time, full-time populations. Students enrolling part-time are less likely to persist, so policies focused on one-size fits all strategies are short sighted. Additionally, due to Minnesota's public two-year institutions' open enrollment policy, they are likely to have students with lower levels of academic preparation than other sectors. This is the distinguishing characteristic of Minnesota's two-year institutions. This is also the situation the less selective four-year state universities face when compared to four-year institutions in other sectors. ***The MnSCU institutions' main purpose is to serve all Minnesotans, including those who did not complete high school earlier, enroll in college immediately post-high school, or who are low-and middle income.*** (Emphasis added) (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2015)

Put simply, the access and inclusiveness that MnSCU prides itself in means that we enroll a substantial population of students who face financial and academic challenges that lead to lower rates of college completion. Current data indicate that among the MnSCU student population:

- 36% are Pell grant eligible, a rate that has increased 13% in the last 10 years
- 51% of students are part-time, up 8% since 2006
- The average age of our students is 26 and 37% are 25 or older
- 54% are first-generation by the federal definition (e.g. a student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have not earned a four year degree).
- 24% of our students are American Indian or students of color (see Table 2 for historical enrollment trends)
- 51% are from underrepresented groups (student of color or American Indian, first generation, and/or low income)
- Over 10,000 students seek educational accommodations related to a physical or cognitive disability
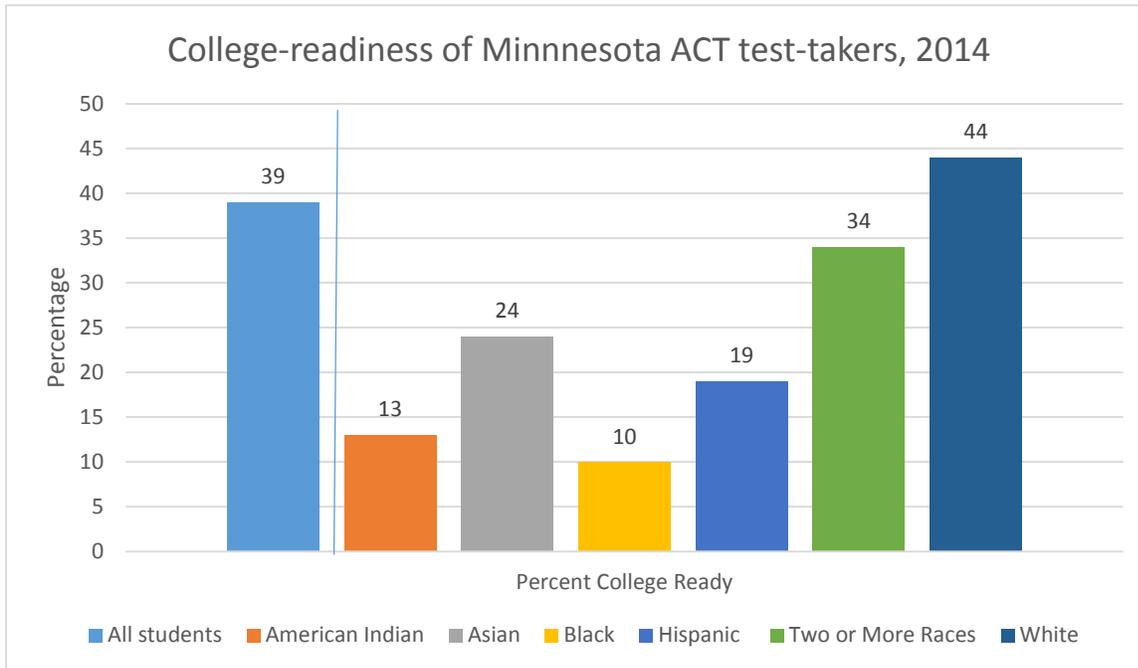
- Our students are highly mobile. Over 20,000 will transfer from one MnSCU institution to another in a given year

Table 2
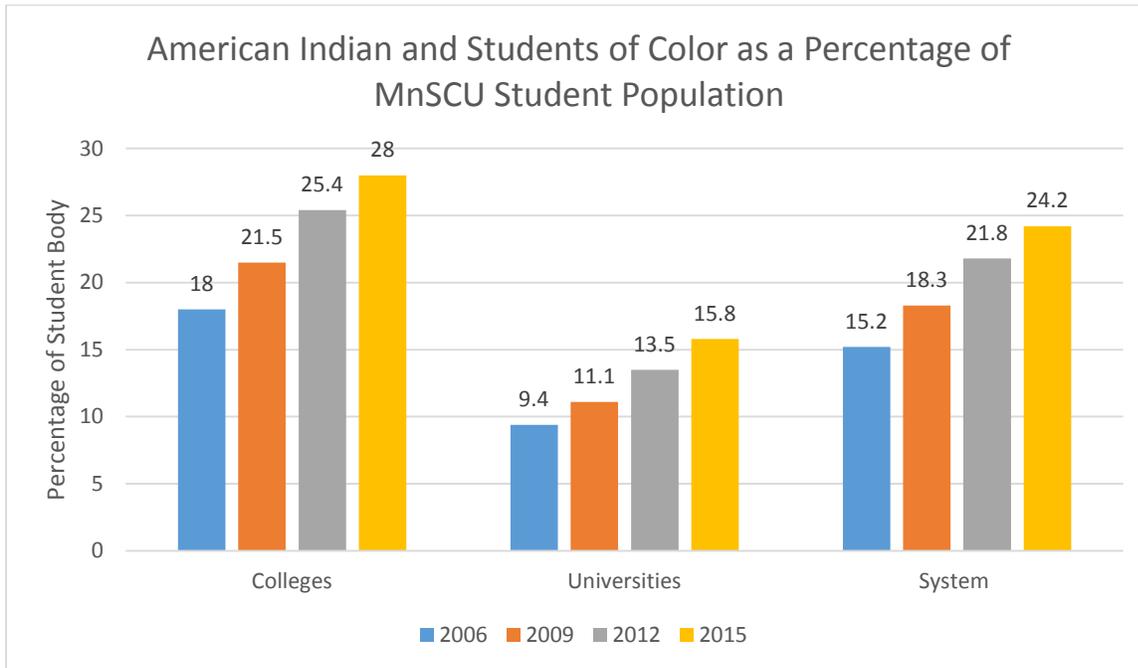
One of the other challenges facing MnSCU institutions is the reality that too many students graduate from or prematurely drop out of Minnesota high schools without being prepared to succeed at the college level. 2014 ACT results for the state of Minnesota indicate that only 39% of ACT takers earn scores that indicate that they are college ready.

Table 3

College-readiness of Minnnesota ACT test-takers, 2014

Category	Percentage
All students	39
American Indian	13
Asian	24
Black	10
Hispanic	19
Two or More Races	34
White	44

Recent system data indicate that 42.5% of new, first time undergraduate students will require at least one developmental education class in their first year. This number does not include those students who also require assistance in English language learning.

In addition to demographic factors, the cost of obtaining a college credential continues to be a barrier for many students. 62% of our students received some form of financial aid (2014) but often that aid amount does not cover the full cost of attendance. Although the Legislature has frozen tuition at the community college level for the last four years and has permitted a modest increase in university tuition, the estimated cost of tuition, fees, and other supplies exceeds the maximum federal Pell grant award of $5,775. The majority of MnSCU students will exit our colleges and universities with some modest debt. As debt accumulates, the pressure for students to leave school to find paying jobs increases. Although it is usually not in their long-term interest to seek employment before obtaining a credential or diploma, too often immediate needs and tight labor markets that lead businesses to recruit our students before they have completed their programs cause school departure.

Both the level of financial need and the strength of academic preparation have a significant effect on the likelihood of completion at both MnSCU colleges and universities, as seen by data provided by the System Office of Research in Tables 4 and 5. Students with both high levels of financial need and lower levels of academic preparation face significant challenges on their path to graduation and are less likely to complete than their more affluent, better prepared peers.

Table 4: Minnesota State Colleges Students Entering in Fall 2004 through Fall 2010

Completion Rates at Third Spring After Entry	Less Academically Prepared	More Academically Prepared	Highly Academically Prepared
Low Financial Need	49%	56%	57%
Moderate Financial Need	44%	52%	54%
High Financial Need	35%	41%	42%

Table 5: Minnesota State Universities Students Entering in Fall 2002 through Fall 2006

Completion Rates at Third Spring After Entry	Less Academically Prepared	More Academically Prepared	Highly Academically Prepared
Low Financial Need	51%	53%	57%
Moderate Financial Need	45%	49%	56%
High Financial Need	40%	45%	51%

MnSCU also serves a sizable population of students who enroll to take credit bearing courses, but indicate that they do not plan to seek a certificate or a degree. Fully 12% of our students indicate that graduation is not their goal.

Finally, it bears noting that the comparative strength of Minnesota's economy and lower than average unemployment rates, especially in the Metro area, is good news for the state but a challenge to increasing college completion rates. Given that most MnSCU students are working adults, many with families, the ability to find gainful employment can mean that they will opt to take fewer credit hours or stop-out entirely because they have found a job. From the students point of view, they have been successful.

Current Completion Efforts

MnSCU has been actively working to improve completion rates through a variety of wide ranging efforts, including the "Charting the Future" initiative, expanded K-12 collaboration and PSEO and concurrent enrollment programs, the on-going availability of grants for federal TRiO programs like Student Support Services, and through a variety of campus based initiatives that have demonstrated promising outcomes, including:

- Minnesota State University, Mankato's robust offerings of learning communities, which have been shown to increase six year graduation rates by 3.4%.

- Central Lakes College, Hennepin Technical College, Normandale Community College, Pine Technical and Community College, Riverland Community College, Rochester Community and Technical College, South Central College and Vermillion Community College have all been identified as colleges who have shown "extraordinary commitment to helping students facing a financial crisis stay in school" (OHE) and have been selected as recipients of the Dash Emergency Grant Program.

- Minnesota State University, Moorhead has utilized a variety of interventions, including an early alert system (Mapworks), developing a lead advisor program, increasing participation in learning communities and implementing a first year experience course to improve first to second year retention rates by 5.8% from Fall 2012 to Fall 2014.

- Metropolitan State University's intrusive advising model and cohort model for their social work program, which has had graduation rates that range from 91-100% for the last five years.

- Century College, Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College, Metro State, Pine Technical College, St. Cloud State and Winona State College provide support to parenting students via services funded by a Minnesota Department of Health Grant.

- North Hennepin Community College's Early Alert Program which allows advisors to quickly identify and assist students who are risk for failing particular classes or withdrawing from the college.

- The Power of You program at Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Saint Paul College which offers intrusive support services and financial support for students from targeted high schools.

Our comprehensive completion plan seeks to capitalize on the initiatives that are already demonstrating success while also promoting a wide range of practices and policies that have been shown on a national level to have a positive impact on student graduation rates.

Comprehensive Completion Plan

MnSCU's comprehensive completion plan begins by recognizing several critical factors:

- There is tremendous variation in MnSCU schools in terms of size, location, available program offerings, student populations, and available resources. Recognizing this means

acknowledging that a prescriptive "one size fits all" model would be unlikely to succeed. Instead, our plan will present a menu of options all drawn from recognized best practices with the understanding that not every school will or should attempt to implement every element.

- Our students' lives are complex and many will fail to persist for non-academic reasons. In light of this, our plan is designed to be holistic in nature, addressing student's academic, financial, and social needs.

- Although moving toward a more selective admissions model would likely increase graduation rates, we empathically reject that idea and affirm our commitment to providing access to all Minnesotans who wish to pursue higher education.

- Elements of the plan come from proven practices that are designed to create positive, measurable outcomes. MnSCU must take a critical look at its current practices regarding data collection and program assessment in order to ensure that successful practices are promoted and unsuccessful practices are discontinued.

Our comprehensive completion plan is organized into three areas: pre-enrollment and college entry, academic and student support, and financial support.

Pre-enrollment/College Entry

MnSCU seeks partnerships, programs, and policies that are designed to ensure that all students graduate high school college ready. To that end, our actions include:

- Increased K-12 collaboration. Minnesota has a significant K-12 achievement gap for students of color and American Indian students and this achievement gap influences MnSCU enrollment and completion trends. MnSCU colleges and universities shall work with their local school systems to support efforts to ensure that students of color and American Indian students are given resources, information, and support in terms of college planning.

- Continued efforts to develop robust concurrent enrollment and PSEO options that will result in a shorter time to degree for participating students.

- Work with our K-12 partners to increase college readiness of students at the secondary level prior to high school graduation. Increase data sharing on student outcomes and identify persistent skill deficits that could be addressed in the K-12 system.

- Limit late registration for new students. Students who enroll at or after the start of the semester have lower GPAs, lower levels of credit completion, and are less likely to persist than students who register in a timely fashion.

- Enact mandatory new student orientation for all new students, including part-time students.

Academic and Student Support

- Create campus environments that ensure all students feel safe, welcome, and ready to succeed. This includes efforts to curb sexual violence and promoting a culture that celebrates diversity.

- Ensure culturally relevant pedagogy.

- Incorporate strategies identified by the Charting the Future strategic planning process that provide measurable outcomes and structured frameworks for ongoing assessment and evaluation of supports and interventions related to student success.

- Implement early alert programs with the desire to prevent student withdrawal as students who stay continuously enrolled are more likely to persist to graduation.

- Provide academic completion plans to all students to prevent students from taking courses that are not required and to assist them with developing a realistic time line to graduation.

- Improve outcomes for students who require developmental education by exploring and implementing accelerated courses, and co-requisite models where appropriate.

- Ensure that all students have access to appropriate academic advising, delivered in a timely manner.

- Make the transfer process user friendly through well-defined transfer pathways and pre-transfer advising.

- Create "graduation specialist" roles based on model from California State University Fullerton model (Straumsheim, 2015)

- Ensure that counseling services are available to all students and develop relationships with community mental health providers to ensure that students with chronic mental health needs are able to get the support they require.

- Develop learning communities designed to help students form connection with fellow students and to integrate curriculum from different subject areas in a way that promotes critical thinking and active learning.

- Provide support for parenting students. This may include offering on-site child care, campus social activities that are family friendly, food or clothing pantries for students in need, and parenting support groups.

- Encourage program selection for undecided students through career counseling, job shadowing, and offering tools for degree program comparison so that students can see how their current credits will be applied to programs of study they might be considering.

- Use a universal design model for developing online class offerings to ensure that the learning environment is inherently accessible for all students, including those with disabilities.

Financial Support

- Continue with a banded tuition model at system universities to allow full-time students to take 15 or more credits for the same cost as taking 12, which has been shown to improve speed to graduation.

- Pilot the "Aid Like a Paycheck" model of financial aid disbursement. As part of this model, students are given financial aid refunds in bi-weekly increments which appears to promote financial stability and reduce the number of hours students work (MDRC).

- Develop tools to encourage part-time students to consider attending full-time as part-time attendance is negatively correlated with student success. Tools could include informational letters to part-time students showing them the financial advantages of attending full-time and how their financial aid package would assist them.

- Continue to secure scholarship supports

Resources Required

As previously noted, MnSCU has been actively working to improve completion rates through a variety of wide ranging efforts. At this juncture, such activities have been absorbed by local budgets or funded as part of community, state or federal programs. We are unable to project additional resources required specifically for this work until we are able to analyze the effectiveness of the current initiatives and create the framework that will continue that work into the future.

2015 Minnesota Session Law Chapter 69, Senate File 5, Article 3, Section 23

Section 1. **COLLEGE COMPLETION; MNSCU.**

The Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities shall develop a comprehensive plan to encourage students to complete degrees, diplomas, or certificates in their fields of study. The board must consult with students, faculty, and administrators of the state colleges and universities and the Office of Higher Education to create a plan that would increase program completion at each state college or university. Components of this plan may include, but are not limited to:

(1) replacing developmental or remedial courses, when appropriate, with corequisite courses in which students with academic deficiencies are placed into introductory credit-bearing coursework while receiving supplemental academic instruction on the same subject and during the same term;

(2) expanding intrusive advising, including the use of early alert systems or requiring the approval of an advisor or counselor to register for certain classes;

(3) developing meta-majors in broad academic disciplines as an alternative to undecided majors;

(4) making available alternative mathematics curriculum, including curriculum most relevant to the student's chosen area of study;

(5) implementing "opt-out scheduling" by automatically enrolling students in a schedule of courses chosen by the student's department but allowing students to disenroll from such courses if they wish;

(6) facilitating the transfer of credits between state colleges and universities; and

(7) strategies to encourage students to enroll full time, including the use of financial assistance to reduce a student's need to work.

The development of the plan required under this section shall not discourage the development or delay the implementation or expansion of existing programs to encourage college completion.

The Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities shall submit a report describing the plan developed under this section and an implementation schedule to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education policy no later than January 15, 2016. This report must include identification of the financial and other resources needed by state colleges or universities to implement the plan
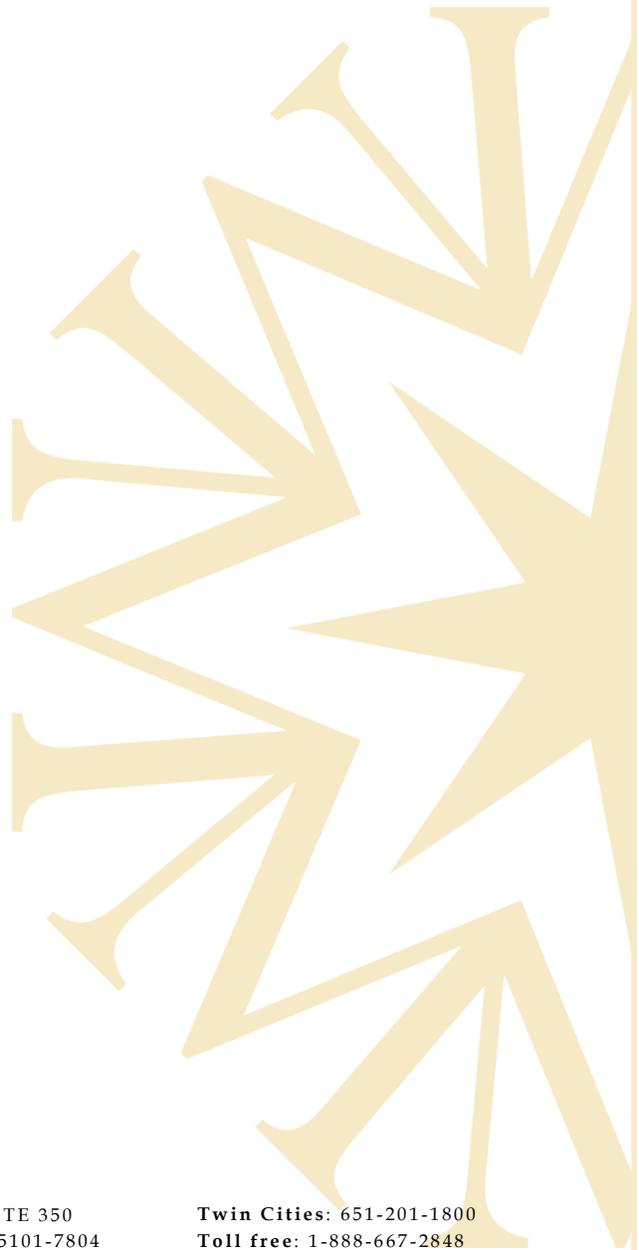
Appendix B

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