

TO: Office of Higher Education, State of Minnesota

FROM: Robert B. McMaster
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DATE: January 11, 2016

RE: College Completion Plan: University of Minnesota

From the 2015 Law

2015 Minnesota Law Ch. 69 Article 3

Sec. 23 **COLLEGE COMPLETION; UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA.**

(a) The Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota is requested to develop a comprehensive plan to encourage students to complete degrees, diplomas, or certificates in their fields of study. The board is requested to consult with students, faculty, and administrators of the University of Minnesota and the Office of Higher Education to create a plan that would increase program completion among University of Minnesota students. Components of this plan may include, but are not limited to:

- (1) offering interdisciplinary courses that encourage students to think across disciplinary boundaries and take advantage of the university wide intellectual expertise;
- (2) expanding undergraduate academic advising, including intrusive advising, and the use of online advising tools;
- (3) assisting undecided students with personalized services to help them develop a plan for major and career selection;
- (4) requiring all students to fill out, and regularly update, their four-year degree plans;
- (5) facilitating student transfers to the University of Minnesota through support of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum and other transfer tools;
- (6) developing strategies to encourage students to enroll full time and graduate in four years; and
- (7) enhancing financial literacy programs that focus on low-income students.

(b) 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.

(c) The Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota 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 to implement the plan developed under this section.

The University of Minnesota Plan

1. Offering Interdisciplinary Courses

Starting in the fall of 2015, the University of Minnesota began offering a Grand Challenge Curriculum (GCC) to encourage faculty to work together on interdisciplinary courses. All GCC courses require faculty from multiple departments who provide different perspectives on a topic.

The Grand Challenges Curriculum (GCC) addresses important global issues through a solution-driven, interdisciplinary approach to learning. GCC courses are taught by cross-disciplinary instructors who bring unique perspectives to the Grand Challenge being explored. Each course focuses on a particular global issue while also developing a foundational set of knowledge, skills, and values that can be applied across a range of potential grand-challenge topics.

Courses offered in fall semester 2015 included:

- GCC 3001 Grand Challenge: Can We Feed the World Without Destroying It?
- GCC 3002 Grand Challenge: Beyond War and Atrocity - Reconciliation and Justice
- GCC 3004 Grand Challenge: The Fracking Boom - Promises and Challenges of the Hydrocarbon Renaissance
- GCC 5003 Grand Challenge: Seeking Solutions to Global Health Issues
- GCC 5005 Grand Challenge: Global Venture Design: What Impact Will You Make?

Courses offered spring semester 2016 will include:

- GCC 3006 Grand Challenge: Climate Change – Myths, Mysteries, and Uncertainties
- GCC 3007/5007 Grand Challenge: Toward Conquest of Disease
- GCC 3009 Grand Challenge: Rivers and Cities: Meeting Future Demands on Urban Water Systems
- GCC 5008 Grand Challenge: Policy and Science of Global Environmental Change
- GCC 3010/5010 Grand Challenge: The Global Climate Challenge - Creating an Empowered Movement for Change
- GCC 3011/5011 Grand Challenge: Pathways to Renewable Energy
- GCC 3012/5012 Grand Challenge: Structural Violence and the Medication Experience
- GCC 3013/5013 Grand Challenge: Making Sense of Climate Change – Science, Art, and Agency

Plans are to continue expanding the offerings within the GCC curriculum to allow a high percentage of undergraduates to participate.

2. Expanding Advising Services

The University continues to develop and expand advising services for undergraduate students. Recently, the University completed a comprehensive advising report as the result of an advising taskforce, and we continue to develop and implement the APLUS advising tool.

Academic Advising Task Force: Recognizing the importance of academic advising in degree completion, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities convened a task force to review advising, and recommend improvements to support and enhance academic advising for undergraduate students. This committee recommended a common framework for academic advising to provide a seamless, consistent advising experience across campus. This recommendation is anchored in an advisor-to-student ratio that allows for more accessible and proactive academic advising as students progress through their undergraduate experience. The University will be implementing recommendations from the task force report over the coming years.

Advising Tools: Academic advising is greatly supported by an online advising dashboard system called APLUS, and developed at the University of Minnesota. This tool provides advisors with the academic information they need to provide seamless, accurate and holistic support for students as they progress through their education. Indicators and flags alert advisors when an advisee is off-track or a retention risk. APLUS is now a campus-wide tool used by all academic advisors. A critical component of APLUS is the ability to document and share detailed notes on students among advisors.

3. Assisting Undecided Students

The University of Minnesota established the Center for Academic Planning and Exploration (CAPE) in 2010 to help those students who were having difficulty identifying a major. CAPE provides personalized services to help undergraduate students develop an Action Plan to aid in their major and career decision-making process. CAPE works closely with undecided undergraduate students as they explore major and career options. CAPE provides timely and intensive support to help students develop a fitting major and career plan while ensuring students stay on track to completing a degree. CAPE offers individualized coaching, workshops, courses and online resources for students to assist in this process. Of those students who have successfully worked with CAPE, 95% were enrolled at the U of M the following academic year, demonstrating a high success rate for a population that is typically at-risk. CAPE is a recipient of the Outstanding Institutional Advising Program Award from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA).

CAPE services to students include:

- **Coaching:** Integrated, one-on-one academic and career coaching.
- **Online Course:** OUE 2100, a 1-credit hybrid online course customized to each student's needs.
- **Workshops:** Day-long intensive exploration workshops, and customized workshops for groups.

- **Major Exploration Lab:** Hands-on sessions designed to help students work on academic goals and major exploration.
- **Major Network:** Connects students interested in a major with other students who have already declared that major.
- **Drop-in Hours:** Students meet with a peer coach to begin their major exploration; no appointment needed.

CAPE has been extremely successful in its first years and has assisted hundreds of students.

4. Four-Year Graduation Plans

Graduation Planner is a planning tool for undergraduate students on all campuses. Students use this tool to explore majors and minors, plan for the courses needed to graduate, and work with an advisor to plan a degree. Students initially create a plan when arriving on campus and then regularly update the plan in cooperation with their advisor. Students may generate multiple plans, and this feature allows them to explore many options for majors and minors.

With Graduation Planner, students are able to access all current course information and program requirements in one easy-to-use program, and to create customized plans that will help them stay on track for timely graduation. The tool is useful for those students who have declared their majors or minors, and it also allows for detailed major exploration. With the ability to create numerous plans in a consistent format, students are able to compare different options and choose among different plans.

Graduation Planner also helps academic advisors to assist students with planning, and serves as a communications tool for advisors and students. Advisors are able to view students' plans and comment on specific issues within the application, or request that students bring printed plans to appointments, making for more productive advising sessions. With course-selection issues tackled early and up front, advisors and students have more time to discuss students' potential life and career paths.

The goal of the Graduation Planner is to simplify the degree-planning process for students, provide them with clear expectations, and allow for focused and meaningful interaction with advisors. Graduation Planner is an exciting tool that helps students to achieve their goal of graduating in four years.

During the 2014-15 academic year, 21,500 Twin Cities undergraduate students used Graduation Planner to create plans.

5. Facilitating Student Transfer

Many programs and resources are in place to assist transfer students during their transition to the U of M. These include a transfer student mentor program, student organizations specifically for transfer students, on-campus housing opportunities, and centralized communications aimed at the unique needs of this student population.

The U of M participates extensively in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum and provides a web site that enables students to determine how their liberal education (general education) courses will transfer. In collaboration with MNSCU, we have purchased a package called "transferology," a web-based program that allows students and advisors to determine how specific courses will transfer from other institutions to the U of M.

Recently, the U of M hired a full-time transfer coordinator to assist in developing new programs to promote transfer student success.

Other activities in support of transfer students include:

- **Maintaining and updating transfer tables** to provide detailed information on how courses transfer and if they fulfill liberal education requirements.
- **Participating in MnCAP**, a guaranteed admission program between metro area community colleges and several of the colleges on the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus.
- **Coordinating system-wide transfer recruitment fairs** at Twin Cities metro (and Rochester) community colleges.
- **Visiting metro community colleges** throughout the year to provide transfer advising
- **Participating in Student Success Days** at local community colleges, providing in-depth information about how to transfer.
- **Hosting transfer students for on-campus visits**, including STEM Exploration Day, Design Open Houses, and regular campus tours to recruit transfer students and help orient them to the University of Minnesota.

6. Facilitating Full-time Enrollment and Timely Graduation

U of M undergraduate tuition is structured as a tuition band that requires students to enroll full-time (defined as 13 or more credits). All credits above 13 are "free," and students need permission from their advisor to take fewer than 13 credits. The U of M uses a 13-credit minimum since students will often take 13-14 credits in one semester and 15-17 in another, which allows for some curricular flexibility. A recent analysis shows that, for the first time, at all levels (Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior) our undergraduate students are taking an average of 15 credits. Students know from the time they arrive on campus that the expectation is that they need 15 credits per semester to accumulate the 120 credits needed to graduate in four years. From Orientation to Welcome Week to interactions with advisors, the importance of four-year graduation is emphasized. At the annual new student Convocation, students are given a tassel with their expected graduation date to reinforce this message. The U of M Twin Cities most recent four-year graduation rate is 63.3%, which indicates the messaging is having a very positive effect.

7. Enhancing Financial Literacy Programs for Low-income Students

Building off the highly-successful "Live Like-A Student Now, So You Don't Have to Later" financial literacy campaign, the U of M has started to focus efforts on low-income students. The programs around financial wellness include:

- **Providing one-on-one financial wellness counseling.** Our One Stop Student Services office has implemented one-on-one financial wellness sessions to assist students in their budgeting, planning, and understanding of financial aid to support retention and graduation. They have focused specific marketing and promotion of these sessions to RaOS (Pell Grant recipients and first-generation) students. These new sessions are possible because of the One Stop counselor financial wellness counselor certification.
- **Providing group student financial aid sessions.** Our President's Emerging Scholars (PES) program worked with One Stop to implement financial aid group sessions in fall 2015. These sessions were promoted to all PES students and were also opened to all non-PES Pell grant recipient students.
- **Implementing financial wellness workshops.** In spring 2016, sessions targeted to PES and Pell Grant recipients will be implemented by One Stop in partnership with PES. These are a new series of financial wellness sessions for spring 2016 specifically targeting Pell students with two objectives in mind: (1) support of overall financial wellness and understanding of financial aid, and (2) information about work study, including what it is, how to use it, and how to obtain a work-study job.
- **Sending targeted financial aid communications on an ongoing basis to enrolled Pell Grant recipients.** Targeted messages are now sent every semester to Pell recipients to provide key information about financial aid, to emphasize important financial aid next steps, and to encourage students to work with One Stop counselors if they need assistance.

All of these programs have enabled the University of Minnesota to significantly improve our Twin Cities campus graduation rates (the four-year rate has risen from 15% to over 63%), first-year retention (now at nearly 93%), and student satisfaction (as measured by our surveys). Our plan is to continue the investment in these and other initiatives, such as the President's Emerging Scholars (PES) program, which enrolls a high percentage of students-of-color, first-generation, and low-income students.

Financial Resources

The coordination of resources to implement these initiatives has been managed by the Office of Undergraduate Education within the Office of the Provost. Calculating an exact fiscal investment on all of these initiatives is difficult, for several reasons. Some initiatives began several years ago and have continued to develop; many of these initiatives are infused throughout the entire university community (e.g., messaging the importance of four-year graduation and expanding fiscal literacy programs to low-income students); and undergraduate colleges and support units such as Housing, Student Unions, and others have been important collaborators in these efforts. For others, there is an identifiable, separate annual budget; for example, CAPE is allocated about \$400,000 annually for its operations, and the PES program is allocated about \$540,000 annually. Development of the Grand Challenges Curriculum courses, to date, has required an investment of over \$250,000 by the University. It would be safe to say that, in total, the initiatives described in this document would represent, at a minimum, a several hundred thousand dollar annual investment.