4.C - Core Component 4.C

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Argument

Retention, Persistence, and Completion Goals

Student retention, persistence, and completion have been prominent foci of the university's **current** and **immediate past** strategic plans.

Evaluation of retention and graduation in the 2006 strategic plan was vested in the President's Committee on Undergraduate Retention, which led to **recommendations** for the Retention Implementation Task Force, chaired by the Provost. Its **final report in 2010** established an implementation strategy, and in response the Provost called for leveraging institutional data to understand the university's retention and graduation patterns and the role of student characteristics in those patterns.

A 2011 analysis of historical and current data and comparison of the university's performance with its peer institutions yielded the following observations:

- The WSU six-year graduation rate (31%) was the lowest of 15 Michigan public state universities.
- The university's entering 2010 freshman class ranked 11 of 15 Michigan public universities as measured by median composite ACT scores, and 15 of 15 as measured by mid-50% ACT composite scores
- The percentage of the university's 2010 entering freshman class with a GPA of 3.0 or higher (62%) ranked 11 of 15 public state universities.

- Compared to its national peer institutions, WSU ranked 14 of 16 in one-year retention, and 16 of 16 in its six-year graduation rate.

WSU students with an ACT score lower than 15 and/or a GPA lower than 2.5 had less than an 8% chance of graduating within six years. Twenty-three percent of the 2010 entering freshman cohort fell below this threshold.

Planning, analysis, and feasibility studies conducted during 2011 led to development of a comprehensive strategy for student success, which was presented to and endorsed by the BOG in February 2012 as the Student Success Initiative.

Among actions of the Student Success Initiative was establishment of the Graduation Action Committee (GAC), which, in early 2013, established a six-year graduation rate goal of 50% by 2021 (up from a baseline of 26% achieved in 2011 by the 2005 cohort).

The established goals are ambitious given that the 50% six-year graduation rate targeted for 2021 is nearly twice the rate of 26% achieved in 2011 by the 2005 cohort, yet they are achievable. The university has already improved its six-year graduation rate by nine percentage points between 2011 and 2015 (from 26% to 35%) and has devoted substantial investments to academic advisors student self-service systems, data systems to monitor student progress, the APEX Bridge Program, the Academic Success Center, and the Office for Teaching and Learning. These goals are appropriate for the student populations because similar rates are observed in peer institutions with similar student populations.

President M. Roy Wilson took office as WSU's 12th President on Aug. 1, 2013; among the President's early actions was initiation of a new strategic planning process (Section 5.C.) that would address retention and graduation goals with new rigor. To accelerate progress, the Provost on Aug. 31, 2015 issued a memo calling on deans to develop four year degree templates for every undergraduate program to enable completion of a bachelor's degree within four years of matriculation (example).

At the graduate level, policies place a limit on the allowable time for degree completion for master's and doctoral students. The time-to-degree goal for Ph.D. programs is seven years, and six years for Master's programs.

Collection and Analysis of Data

The Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (IR) calculates student retention and graduation rates based on student record data stored in the Banner system in accordance with Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) definitions.

Data are disaggregated by cohort, school/college, program or major, race/ethnicity status, and gender; and monitored longitudinally. FTIAC student retention rates are monitored at points of 1-8 years, and graduation rates at points of 3-10 years; transfer students are monitored at similar points after transfer. Data are made available to academic administrators and other users through the online IR Reporting Dashboard, which enables users to view data by cohort, as well as by

multiple variables. Other reports to academic administrators are also available through the Student Tracking, Advising, and Retention System (STARS).

Annual progress on retention and graduation is monitored by the Associate Provost for Student Success, the Graduation Action Committee, and the schools and colleges. These retention and graduation data are frequently updated and shared with senior leadership and disseminated to faculty via college councils and the Academic Senate. The university also routinely monitors the number of undergraduates who are asked to leave the university for failing to meet the criteria for good academic standing or disciplinary matters, the rate at which students drop courses, and the rate of credit attainment.

Use of Retention, Persistence, and Completion Information to Make Improvements

The university has studied and invested in student retention in a sustained manner.

The 2006-08 Faculty Task Force on Student Retention included recommendations that inform current efforts, including culture, data monitoring, faculty involvement, orientation, high expectations, expert teaching of remedial courses, advising, financial aid, and peer mentoring. The administration responded to this report in 2009 with a summary of administrative actions taken in response.

The work of that task force led directly to the Retention Implementation Task Force Final Report, the Student Success Report, and the endorsement of the Student Success Initiative by the Board of Governors.

The BOG authorized funding of a Strategic Retention Initiative, committing $4M in FY 2012, increased to $9.9M by FY 2015. The primary recommendations include improving the following areas:

1. Curriculum, especially general education;
2. Academic advising;
3. Support for teaching and learning;
4. Support for under-prepared students;
5. First-year experiences and learning communities; and
6. Financial aid

Specific examples of the use of data to inform and guide retention and student success initiatives include:

1. **Development of learning communities (2006):** In the first year, learning community freshmen had first- to second-year retention rates 10% higher than other freshmen. By 2010, more than 40% of FTIACs were in learning communities, and first- to second-year retention jumped to 76%, driven in part by increased retention among learning community students. In 2016, more than 4,000 students are participating in more than 40 learning communities.

2. Development of an alternative mathematics competency path **(2007; 2016)**: High failure rates in the developmental basic algebra course (MAT 0993) and college algebra (MAT 10150) led to development of a course for non-STEM majors (MAT 1000), and establishment of the Rising Scholars Program (RSP). As a result, the number of students successfully completing the math competency requirement increased threefold in a five-year period. Further, the RSP has eliminated the outcome gap for African-American students in Elementary Algebra. Since RSP students have higher retention rates for at least seven semesters after taking the course, RSP has also contributed to the 2009 jump in retention.

3. Outreach targeted to at-risk students: Early academic alerts enable advisor intervention by identifying students who, at mid-semester, are projected to receive a course grade of C- or lower; and by identifying at mid-year students who have not enrolled, or who have active holds preventing registration. Significant university investment in technology and tools (WAMS, SMART Check, Degree Works, Change of Major Program (CHOMP), EAB Advising Works) has increased the depth and breadth of student information available to faculty and advisors. Based on the Graduation Action Committee's review of **evidence** that students were facing unnecessary barriers, the university dropped the computer literacy exam requirement, changed scoring for the critical thinking exam, and offered a new schedule for basic composition.

4. Development of a new course scheduling protocol (January 2016): The protocol, which includes an efficient, student-centered course scheduling matrix and improved final exam schedule, launched in winter 2017; an interactive tool to analyze course schedules will enable exploration of areas for improvement.

5. The Undergraduate Advising Initiative doubled the number of academic advisors on campus in response to inadequate advising capacity.

6. Development and implementation of new, student-centric online tools:

- The Wayne Advising Management System (WAMS), which enables students to schedule advising appointments 24/7 through mobile devices;
- SMART Check, which informs students how dropping or withdrawing from a class will impact time to graduation and financial aid; and
- Degree Works, a degree audit and academic planning tool.

The university continues to support more traditional opportunities for student success as well. These take the form of a first-year seminar, tutoring, and supplemental instruction in the Academic Success Center, various workshops, ongoing support through Learning Communities, a summer bridge program, and the APEX Scholars program. In 2015, the university established the Office of Multicultural Student Engagement, created to develop and implement initiatives that promote student success, outreach, and awareness for underrepresented and historically marginalized students. Significant investments have also been made to support students experiencing financial difficulties (e.g., the Helping Individuals Go Higher program), those requiring counseling services, and returning veterans (by the university's award-winning Student Veteran Resource Center). Furthermore, the Student Disabilities Services Office offers a comprehensive suite of support services, including expanded support for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Processes and Methodologies Reflect Good Practice

Institutional Research (IR) extracts, reconciles, and analyzes university data and is the primary source of the university's internal and external official statistics. It also oversees university participation in several national studies of higher education (e.g., NSSE, LSSE, UCLA/HERI Freshmen Survey, U.S. News Rankings, Delaware Study, and CUPA-HR) while complying with external reporting mandates from state and federal governments and other regulatory entities such as the Higher Learning Commission, bond agencies, and the National Student Loan Clearinghouse. IR primarily relies on completion and use of the Common Data Set for nearly all external reporting.

IR relies on standard data collection techniques (survey, focus, field, secondary, etc.) and the use of standard parametric and non-parametric statistics for analyses and predictive modeling utilizing a multitude of statistical software options. Every attempt is made to include trend analyses and comparative results (benchmarks, peer comparisons, and national norms). Also, IR attempts to integrate research from multiple studies, such as retention research, NSSE, and internal student surveys. IR maintains a comprehensive student database for tracking, reporting, and analyzing student progress toward degree completion, on a semester-by-semester basis. Analysis of trends drives strategic action through development of targeted strategies to achieve goals.

In collaboration with the [Data Governance Committee](), IR establishes and maintains university data definitions and protocols for information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs. Integral to university metrics are the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Graduation Rate Survey protocols, with select extensions and additions for internal reporting and tracking purposes. Base cohorts represent fall term first-time, full-time new entering freshman students, defined as having no post-high school, college-level completed credits (excluding summer in the year of high school graduation) and referred to as FTIACs. These cohorts derive from official enrollment files that are snapped and frozen each semester on the last day to add classes or drop with tuition refund (census day). Retention and persistence are generally measured by tracking fall-to-fall semester enrollments as of the census day, which generally falls at the end of the second week of the term. Graduation rates measure baccalaureate degrees received by year, with each year defined as fall-through-summer semesters of that year. For example, the category of degrees granted in 2014-15 includes fall semester 2014, spring semester 2015, and summer semester 2015. In addition, cohorts of new transfer students are defined and tracked for persistence and graduation following the same basic rules used for freshman students, while controlling for additional variables such as number of transfer credits earned, and transfer institutions. Also, enrollment information for all semesters, including spring and summer, is collected and tracked to enable more detailed analyses.

Several additional variables allow for more detailed analyses and modeling, including demographics such as home location, first generation status, financial aid data, and others; enrollment indicators such as college of enrollment, first college choice, majors, and minors; and performance measures such as grade-point averages, credits attempted, credits completed, and grades received. These additional data support statistical modeling to identify predictors of graduation and persistence and to inform policy and procedure development. In addition, many

professional program processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs are specified by accrediting bodies and reflect national standards.

For public reporting, IR creates a set of web-based aggregate graduation/retention reports. Another set of more detailed reports for internal users are also created, including numerous custom, on-request reports that factor in other variables such as entry test scores (e.g., ACT Composite), Pell grants, and various student activity flags. As an example, the American Institutes for Research posts various performance rankings and trends online.

Student-facing tools include the implementation of Salesforce® in the Student Service Center to facilitate recruiting, admissions, and case management for financial aid support services, and the utilization of STARS and Degree Works for undergraduate advising.

The university also participates in several consortia and data exchanges to benchmark and extend its knowledge of the retention, graduation, and educational attainment of students, including the consortium of higher education agencies advancing the Student Achievement Measure, in which universities report the four-year and six-year graduation rates for all students. The university utilizes a publicly-articulated list of benchmark, peer institutions that were last formally reviewed in AY2011-12.

Robust reporting regularly takes place across the university. Regular budget reports are published, as well as regular reports to the Board of Governors, senior staff, Council of Deans (from which information is then cascaded), directors, and academic support staff (e.g., academic advisors). Institutional Research produces analyses for the Student Success Office as well. Advisors share information through the annual Advising Summit and an advising implementation team that meets monthly to improve access and outcomes. At the graduate level, student success dashboards report on career outcomes, including graduation rates, persistence, and time-to-completion of degree and certificate programs. Recent discussions and action items have focused on new outreach to newly admitted students, required orientation attendance, changes in drop/add policies, and a new "rolling" course registration policy.

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