FIRST RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RETENTION TASK FORCE

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This document summarizes the work of the Task Force through July 20, 2011, organized into four broad categories. Each section on the following pages outlines both relevant data considered as well as recommendations endorsed thus far by the Task Force. These recommendations are proposed for immediate implementation. Those with proposed effective dates of Fall 2011 are indicated, while for others it is recognized that additional work (proposed to begin immediately) will be necessary before the recommendation can be fully enacted.

Rationale:

Fewer than half of the students admitted to WKU graduate within six years; more than 30% do not persist beyond the first year. Moreover:

- the number of students incurring loan debt has increased from 40% to 52% within the last five years alone;
- the average annual loan debt over the same time period has risen from $2,750 to $5,938, an increase of 116%;
- an estimated 26.5% of our degree-seeking students leave WKU with debt but without a degree;
- the debt burden of this group exceeds $5.1 million annually, an increase of 197% since 2004.

While WKU is graduating more students each year as a result of growing enrollments and increased retention and graduation rates, it is also the case that also that more students are leaving WKU with little to show for their effort than an increasing mountain of debt. In an era of shrinking state, institutional and personal budgets, it is imperative that we aggressively confront the twin issues of student retention and degree completion, so as to (1) responsibly serve and support the students we choose to accept, (2) efficiently steward the public resources we receive, and (3) effectively target the work of the faculty and staff we employ. At all levels, timely degree completion is rapidly becoming the key indicator of success in public higher education, and a fundamental component of our mission as a public institution.

Goals and Objectives:

1. Apply data-driven decision-making principles to identify and strategically intervene with at-risk students
2. Expand retention efforts and strategies beyond the first year
3. Identify and reduce barriers/constriction points that prevent students in good standing from graduating within six years
4. Engage the university community in advancing a comprehensive emphasis on student persistence and graduation

GETTING STUDENTS IN

Admission and enrollment criteria

Data derived from the most recent three entering cohorts indicate that high school GPA is a better predictor of first-year retention than is composite ACT score. Moreover, the formula SCORE = ACT * GPA^2 provides a stronger prediction of retention rate than does either variable alone (Spearman r = 0.727 vs 0.688), and generates a set of isolines that better reflect probabilities of success than do existing admit status criteria.

Over the past three years, 201 students holding GEDs have been admitted to WKU. First-year retention rates of these students are on average 18 percentage points lower than that of high school graduates admitted to WKU (50.8% vs. 69.2%); among baccalaureate students, the difference is nearly 22 percentage points (73.0% vs. 51.3%), and is 3.8 percentage points among associate degree students (54.6% vs. 50.8%). Similarly, 150%-time graduation rates are markedly lower among GED holders as compared to high school graduates; among baccalaureate degree seekers, the average difference is over 39 percentage points (48.7% vs. 9.3%), while the graduation rate among associate degree seekers is 44% that lower (3.9% vs. 1.7%).

Comparison data from Fall 2006 and 2007 entering cohorts indicates that students participating in the STEPS program had higher retention rates and GPAs than did similar students who opted out of STEPS participation (opt-outs represented 40-60% of the total referred to STEPS). STEPS participants from the Fall 2006 cohort showed retention rates approximately 3-5 percentage points higher than non-participants across the first two years. Semester GPAs of 2006 participants ranged showed means of between 2.01 and 2.57, compared to means of 1.90 and 2.25 for non-participants. Data for the 2007 were not as conclusive; however, the developmental needs of both participants and non-participants were higher than those in the 2006 cohort.

Goal:

Establish admissions/enrollment criteria and conditions that reflect available data on retention and performance, so as to maximize students' chances for success.

Fall 2011 Action Items:

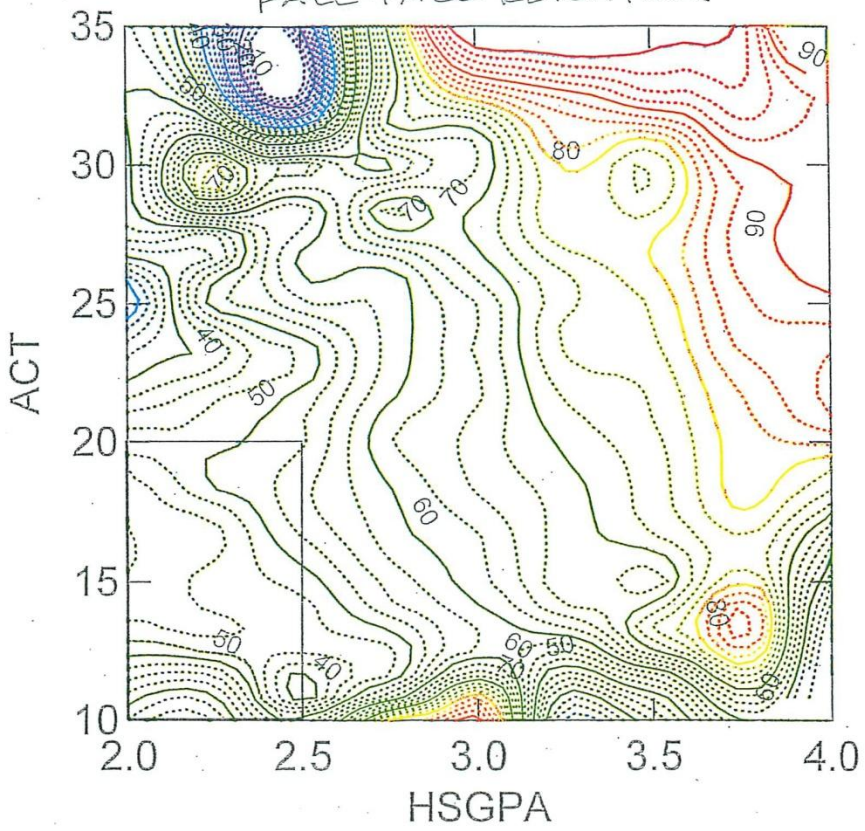
1. Have each directed- or conditionally-admitted student sign an enrollment contract that outlines the steps the student must follow to address college readiness needs.

Longer-term Action Items:

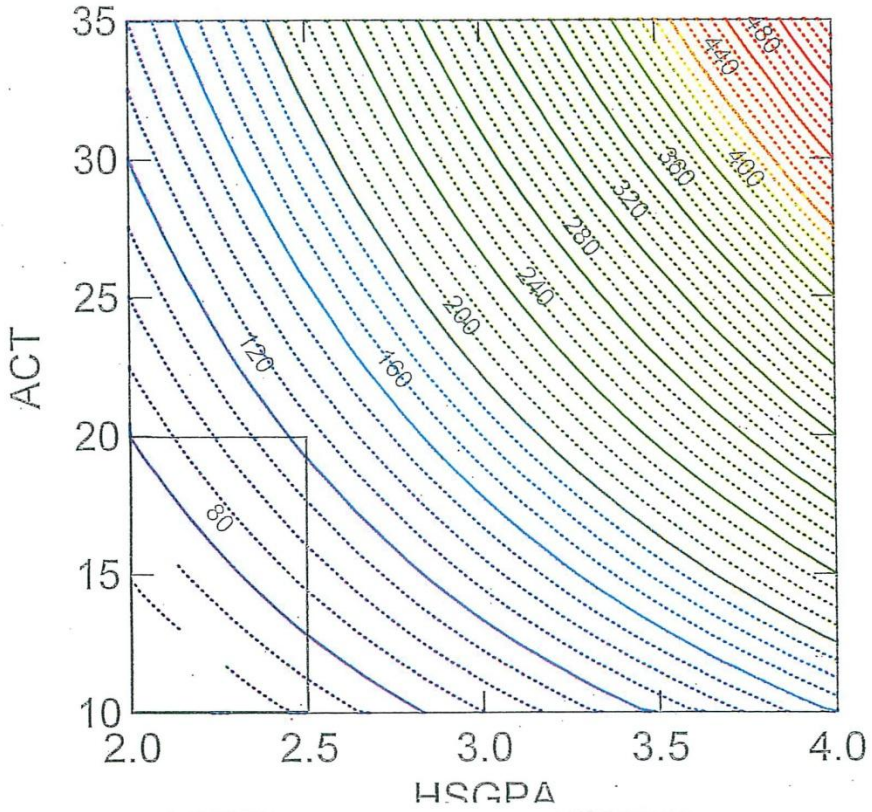
1. Move to an admit category system based on a formula that combines ACT and GPA, and reflects empirical data on probabilities of retention of students with particular combinations of scores.

2. Require students admitted with GEDs to complete ACT/SAT/placement tests to determine appropriate enrollment status (full, direct, conditional).

FALL-FALL RETENTION



SCORE = ACT × GPA^2



GETTING STUDENTS THROUGH

Placement and support of admitted students

Between Fall 2007 and Spring 2011 (4 academic years), over 4,900 students were unnecessarily placed in developmental math courses (DMA 055C and/or 096C); these students were undeclared upon entry or majoring in programs that do not require MATH 116 or above (for which DMA 055C and 096C are developmental prerequisites).

Data from the Fall 2002-2004 entering cohorts indicate that students tend to move among majors with similar math requirements. Among students whose declared major upon entry required MATH 109, only 14% end up graduating with majors requiring MATH 116; similarly, just 13% of students entering with majors that require MATH 116 subsequently graduated with majors requiring MATH 109.

There is some limited evidence of reduced first-term success among students who take (1) three developmental courses in their first semester, including (2) a developmental math course that is not required. Students testing into MATH 109E but taking DMA 055C or DMA 096C had lower first-term GPAs (when calculated to include developmental courses); in the case of students taking DMA 055C, this difference is significant. In addition, students testing into and taking DMA 055C as one of three developmental courses also show significantly lower first-term GPAs. In general, these differences are enough to put students in jeopardy under Satisfactory Academic Progress criteria.

Goal:

Place students in developmental math courses based on major upon entry, and develop data-driven plans to remediate students' readiness needs within the first year while maximizing their chances for success.

Fall 2011 Action Items:

1. Place students in developmental math tracks according to their declared major upon entry; place undeclared students with developmental math needs in appropriate sections of MATH 109.

2. Extend pre-registration system through two semesters or until all college readiness needs are met.

3. Require students with college readiness needs to take at least one, but no more than two, developmental courses in their first semester.

4. Enroll students with readiness needs in at least one appropriate, college-level general education course each of their first two semesters.

Longer-Term Action Items:

1. Encode in iCAP the university math requirement for each major. Modify Student Profile Sheet to indicate which students need to pursue developmental math in preparation for MATH 116 vs. those for whom MATH 109 (with or without supplemental component) is satisfactory.

Students taking DMA 055C or DMA 096C While Enrolled in Majors Not Requiring MATH 116
Includes 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 Academic Years

College	Dept	Major	055	096	All
PCAL	PCAL	184	13	32	45
	ART	509	.	4	4
		514	7	18	25
	COMM	792	7	15	22
	ENG	561	.	6	6
		662	1	11	12
	FLKA	608	.	5	5
	HIST	592	2	10	12
		695	2	10	12
	SJB	716	.	1	1
		716P	.	8	8
		725P	1	3	4
		726	.	2	2
		726P	9	34	43
		727P	.	10	10
		750	.	1	1
		750P	3	14	17
	MLNG	665	.	3	3
		683	1	1	2
		778	1	5	6
	MUS	583	4	.	4
		593	1	9	10
	PHIL	745	.	2	2
		769	2	7	9
	PS	686	2	13	15
		702	.	3	3
	SOCL	775	13	23	36
	THEA	588	.	1	1
		588P	2	1	3
		630	2	3	5
		798	2	2	4
	TOTAL		**75**	**257**	**332**
CEBS	MIL	733	2	.	2
	STE	526	7	3	10
		527	26	42	68
		553	5	12	17
	TOTAL		**40**	**57**	**97**

College	Dept	Major	055	096	All
CHHS	CHHS	177	20	94	114
	AH	524	2	2	4
		524P	7	30	37
		564	6	12	18
	CD	595	.	1	1
		595P	4	21	25
	FCS	249	9	4	13
		536	2	10	12
		563	3	12	15
		707	3	21	24
	KRS	587	8	36	44
		589	1	9	10
	NURS	596	1	3	4
	TOTAL		**66**	**255**	**321**
UC	AS	181	1054	655	1709
		183 (P)	165	44	309
		187 (E)	155	79	234
		246	16	19	35
	BUS	245	3	3	6
		276	1	.	1
		276P	28	11	39
		291	28	9	37
	CIT	729	1	8	9
		729P	2	13	15
	HS	171 (H)	250	143	393
		265	3	4	7
		273	7	11	18
		273P	269	132	401
	TOTAL		**1982**	**1231**	**3213**
OCSE	AMS	296	2	1	3
	TOTAL		**2**	**1**	**3**
EX	AARC	180	135	471	606
		225 (S)	129	237	366
	TOTAL		**264**	**708**	**972**
	GRAND TOTAL		**2429**	**2509**	**4938**

KEEPING STUDENTS AROUND

Non-academic dimensions of retention and persistence

A 2005 study of first-year students who were not retained to the second year indicated that only 15.6% of students (152 of 977) were dismissed for academic reasons; the remainder (825 of 977) chose to leave WKU.

Of those voluntarily choosing to leave WKU, only eight cited grades as a reason.

Homesickness, financial issues, desire for a different major, and various aspects of 'fit' were by far the most frequently-cited reasons given for students' failing to return to WKU; these same factors were cited by students as the primary reasons for transferring to another institution.

The results of the 2005 study were effectively the same as those from a similar study done in 1991.

At this point, we have no comprehensive means of identifying students at risk of dropping out or transferring for non-academic reasons. Moreover, as a consequence of our inability to identify at-risk students early on, we have no means of intervening on behalf of those students (unless they take the initiative to seek out help on their own).

Goal:

Develop the capacity for early identification of students at-risk of dropping out or transferring for non-academic reasons, and implement targeted intervention strategies to assist these students in addressing their specific needs or issues.

Fall 2011 Action Items:

1. Adopt a retention support software package to provide data on at-risk students based on non-academic reasons.

2. Adopt the theme of 'The Value of a College Degree' for the Fall 2011 Freshman Assembly.

Summary of 2005 Survey of Non-Returning Students

Reasons Cited for Not Returning to WKU						
Reason	**N**	**%**		**Reason**	**N**	**%**
Transferred	183	35.3		Disliked social life	8	1.5
Homesick	82	15.8		Had child/raising family	8	1.5
Financial reasons	43	8.3		Got married	7	1.4
Wanted different major/degree	25	4.8		Health	7	1.4
Wasn't ready for college	22	4.2		Left to play sports	7	1.4
Work	18	3.5		Stopout/needed a break	7	1.4
Poor college fit	15	2.9		General dissatisfaction	5	1.0
Disliked residence halls	13	2.5		Interpersonal conflicts	5	1.0
Family problems	10	1.9		Partied too much	5	1.0
Joined armed forces	10	1.9		Curriculum too hard	3	0.6
Personal reasons	10	1.9		Family moved	3	0.6
TN lottery	10	1.9		Other	4	0.8
Grades	9	1.7		**Total**	**519**	**100.0**

Reasons Provided for Transferring						
Reason	**N**	**%**		**Reason**	**N**	**%**
Homesick	74	38.1		Grades	6	3.1
Wanted different major/degree	25	12.9		General dissatisfaction	5	2.6
Financial reasons	12	6.2		Family problems	4	2.1
Disliked residence halls	11	5.7		Wasn't ready for college	4	2.1
Poor college fit	11	5.7		Interpersonal conflicts	3	1.6
TN lottery	9	4.6		Partied too much	3	1.6
Disliked social life	8	4.1		Other	12	6.2
Left to play sports	7	3.6		**Total**	**194**	**100.0**

Cells in yellow represent dimensions of risk for which at least one retention support software package can provide early alerts

Values in underlined red represent dimensions of risk currently identified by Fifth-Week Assessment

GETTING STUDENTS OUT

Reduced time to degree

Each year, a substantial portion of the first-time, full-time degree-seeking cohort remains enrolled, but not yet graduated, after 150% of the normal time to graduation. For the FTFTB cohort, this represents an average of 5.35% after six years (approximately 120 students per year). For the FTFTA cohort, an average of 29.54% remains enrolled after three years (approximately 170 students per year).

Current policy requires academic advising for all degree-seeking students until they have achieved 90 and 48 earned hours (for baccalaureate and associate's degree-seeking students, respectively) AND have filed an Application for Graduation. Policy also requires students to file for graduation (which includes self-declaring an expected graduation date) after attaining 90 hours in order to register for subsequent terms.

Six-year graduation rate of the Fall 2008 entering cohort is a key accountability measure in the 2011-2015 CPE Strategic Agenda. Moreover, graduation rate will almost assuredly be an element of the new performance funding model being developed by CPE. Reducing the percentage of students not yet graduated after 150% of the normal time is the most expedient and efficient way to increase this metric.

Goal:

Decrease the percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students not yet graduated after 150% of the normal time to graduation, with particular emphasis placed on the Fall 2008 entering FTFTB cohort

Fall 2011 Action Items:

1. Implement processes in the IR Decision Support System to allow departments, advisors and other appropriate individuals/groups to dynamically track progress of their students.

2. Broaden the role of WKU Finish to retrieve students who have stopped out for a relatively short period of time and encourage them to complete degrees, as well as provide support to students who are not on pace to graduate within six years..

Persistence of First-Time, Full-Time Baccalaureate Degree-Seeking Students
Pooled Fall 2000 through Fall 2004 Entering Cohorts

Upon Entry			After 1 Year	After 6 Years	
College	**Department**	**Pooled Cohort Size**	**Percent Retained**	**Percent Graduated**	**Percent Not Yet Graduated**
PCAL	Undeclared	386	67.10	43.90	6.49
	Art	190	71.58	48.15	5.82
	Communication	89	79.78	61.80	5.62
	English	157	73.89	48.72	6.41
	Folk Studies and Anthropology	19	78.95	57.89	5.26
	History	150	74.67	48.57	7.33
	Journalism and Broadcasting	1,127	77.28	56.26	3.19
	Modern Languages	29	82.76	62.07	13.79
	Music	189	74.60	47.87	9.57
	Philosophy and Religion	28	82.14	51.85	0.00
	Political Science	134	79.10	51.49	2.24
	Sociology	54	77.70	35.29	0.00
	Theatre and Dance	152	81.58	50.00	3.29
CEBS	Undeclared	228	75.33	51.98	6.17
	Psychology	379	65.70	41.42	5.80
	Teacher Education	782	74.78	52.75	4.61
GFCB	Undeclared	545	72.48	49.17	5.14
	Accounting	223	72.65	53.60	6.76
	Computer Information Systems	126	71.43	40.00	5.60
	Economics	135	78.52	47.41	6.67
	Finance	68	75.00	55.88	2.94
	Management	162	62.72	48.77	5.56
	Marketing and Sales	156	69.87	48.87	5.13
CHHS	Undeclared	87	68.97	34.88	5.81
	Allied Health	69	72.46	49.28	4.35
	Communication Disorders	58	71.19	51.40	7.02
	Family and Consumer Sciences	187	71.12	46.52	5.35
	Kinesiology, Recreation and Sport	108	71.30	43.52	3.70
	Public Health	41	78.05	58.54	2.44
	Nursing	543	71.09	35.74	5.93
	Social Work	68	70.59	32.35	7.35
OCSE	Undeclared	1,095	77.05	49.03	5.80
	Agriculture	336	79.75	59.58	2.99
	Architectural and Manufacturing Sciences	73	82.19	58.33	2.76
	Biology	244	79.51	52.26	7.41
	Chemistry	85	70.59	44.71	4.71
	Computer Science	216	75.93	43.72	6.51
	Engineering	313	74.12	48.06	6.39
	Geography and Geology	71	84.51	52.11	7.04
	Mathematics	59	81.03	58.62	5.17
	Office of the Dean	11	72.73	70.00	0.00
	Physics and Astronomy	51	80.39	50.98	9.80
UC	Interdisciplinary Studies	13	84.62	53.85	15.38
None	Undeclared	2,257	72.82	46.59	5.25
Total		**11,493**	**74.42**	**48.75**	**5.36**

Values in underlined red are below the university mean for that metric

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND DO AT THIS POINT

While we need to implement practices and strategies that will increase retention and graduation of all student cohorts, **the Fall 2008 entering cohort is one to which we must pay special attention** – the 2011-15 CPE Strategic Agenda uses this cohort as a target for several key accountability measures, including six-year graduation rate and achievement gaps of under-represented minorities, low-income students, and students with college readiness needs. The target graduation year for these students is 2013-14; they are now rising seniors.

- Actively track the progress of your majors, and think strategically about ways to ensure that students can complete their degrees within six years. The goal is to reduce by half the percentage of Fall 2008 entering cohort not-yet-graduated after six years – this equates to graduating an additional 60 or so students per year university-wide through these interventions.

- Consider what you can do to provide an alternate path to timely graduation for students who drop out of your majors (or, for selective admissions programs, fail to gain entry into). Is there a logical fall-back or alternative degree program for these students, for which a good proportion of the credits they have earned might apply?

The greatest opportunity for WKU to increase retention and graduation rates lies in increasing first-year retention. While first-year retention rate is currently just above 70%, retention rate increases to 87% from second-to-third year, and to over 90% in subsequent years. First year success is key.

- Be thoughtful in advising students during ATP. For students needing developmental math, place them in an appropriate section of MATH 109 if that will meet their intended degree program. Don't enroll them in more than two developmental courses that first semester. Do find at least one college-level general education course to enroll them in – one that piques their interest and will be accessible to them given their college readiness needs.

- Identify one or more 100-level, general education courses that would be accessible to students with college-readiness needs, and consider how best to place such students in these sections.

- Consider how best to structure advising for first-year students.