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DESTINATION GRADUATION: A PATH TO ENHANCING STUDENT SUCCESS

REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
"IMPROVING GRADUATION RATE TASK FORCE"

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Destination Graduation: A Path to Enhancing Student Success

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Executive Summary

Two metrics are most commonly used in academia to evaluate universities' performance in regard to enabling student success. The first is the six-year graduation rate among a cohort of freshmen and the second is the percentage "gap" between the actual graduation rate and a predicted rate. The predicted rate is determined by a third party (*U.S. News and World Report*) that is based on a variety of parameters that represent the preparedness level of the incoming students shown to strongly correlate with student success. A positive gap (actual graduation rate exceeds the prediction) is indicative of over-performance, and a negative gap (predicted graduation rate exceeds actual) is indicative of under-performance.

From the freshman class that entered the University of Arkansas in 1995 to the freshman cohort of 2003, the six-year graduation rate increased from less than 45% to 59%. This success is attributed to the improvements in the ACT scores and high school GPAs of incoming freshmen and strategies employed by the university to improve graduation rates starting in the mid to late 1990s. However, the gap between actual and predicted graduation rates continued to fluctuate between six and nine percentage points during these years. Further, recent trends show that the graduation rates at the University of Arkansas have reached a plateau. We might thus argue that while the university has made big improvements in retention and graduation rates, so have our benchmark institutions, causing our negative gap between actual and predicted graduation rates to remain significantly unchanged. The plateau is indicative of saturation trends in the benefits from the strategies put in place more than a decade ago. Therefore, the time is right for im-

plementing new strategies to raise the graduation rate to the next level and simultaneously reduce the gap between the predicted and actual graduation rates.

The vision that has guided the Improving Graduation Rate Task Force over the past seven months is "to become the public research university known for its commitment to helping students develop into college graduates". The ultimate goal is for the six-year graduation rate among the freshman cohort of 2014 to rise to 68% with significant increases beginning from the freshman cohort of 2010. These goals are consistent with graduation rates of several of our peer institutions.

Based on extensive study (see Appendix B: Resources Consulted) of the reasons some University of Arkansas students never complete their degrees, the task force recommends five strategies to improve graduation rates that must be fully implemented over the next five fiscal years starting from FY2011 to yield the desired returns. These are:

Strategy 1: Coordinate university-wide efforts that can impact graduation rates

Strategy 2: Address financial barriers to graduation

Strategy 3: Create a "Culture of Success" thinking among students, faculty, and staff

Strategy 4: Chart a road map to completing a degree

Strategy 5: Increase a sense of community to engage and retain students

The objectives and detailed action items supporting these five main strategies are described in the main document. The task force was acutely aware of the current economic climate in drafting its near-term action items and therefore has highlighted in yellow initial recommendations that are no cost. In addition, Appendix G: Organizing and Funding the Strategies, provides a first look on continuing with a low-cost approach to implementing the top recommendations of the task force as well as the potential return on investment that can accrue.

In addition to focusing on action items initially that are low cost, the task force wishes to emphasize those items that can impact the academic and financial reasons students leave because these two categories of reasons account for the bulk of our attrition. Undergirding all, however, is the view of the task force that we have to change the culture of the university to one of “student success first” if any of the strategies and correlating action items are going to take root.

From among the action items detailed under Strategy 1 (coordinate efforts) in the report, we recommend for initial consideration:

- 1.1.1 Inventory the college and department advising activities to document current efforts and identify areas of success to be duplicated and areas of concern to receive attention.
- 1.1.3 Continue expanding the use of AdvisorTrac across colleges so that when students change colleges or majors their advising files automatically transfer with them.
- 1.2 Create a highly visible university-wide Student Success Network, first by reorganizing existing

resources and later by adding other crucial elements.

- 1.2.4 Offer re-orientation sessions early in the spring semester with one-stop-shop answers on money management, academics, choosing majors, and requirements for graduation.
- 1.2.5 Increase supplemental instruction and tutoring for courses with a D, F, or W rate over 30%.
- 1.3 Create a permanent university-wide Destination Graduation Committee, chaired by associate deans, to monitor progress and oversee the implementation of the strategic plan.

In initial support of Strategy 2 (financial barriers), we recommend the following:

- 2.1.1 Use late payments as a warning system to automatically refer students to the Financial Learning Center.
- 2.1.3 Provide advice to students about balancing work and school and show them the consequences of losing financial aid or scholarships.
- 2.2.1 Use the new hiring software in HR to create a system for students to apply for on-campus jobs.

In support of Strategy 3 (culture of success), we recommend:

- 3.1.1 Let students know when they enroll our expectations of them: hold a one-day academic orientation for new students the Friday before classes begin.

3.1.2 Create an honor code for students, including a pledge of intention to graduate, to sign during orientation or academic convocation.

3.2.1 Create Web-based utilities to allow students to monitor on their own what a low grade will do to their GPA, what dropping/changing in their courses will do to their graduation path, and what changes in their major might do to their graduation date.

In support of Strategy 4 (road map), we recommend:

4.1 Help every student define his or her education and career goals and develop a road map to success.

4.2 Designate a small team of transcript specialists to hold advertised walk-in sessions for juniors to review transcripts for unmet course and university graduation requirements.

4.3 Counsel juniors and seniors who encounter a roadblock to graduation when they cannot

enter upper-level or professional programs. Work with these students on optional degree programs.

In support of Strategy 5 (sense of community), we recommend:

5.1.1 Regularly hold professional development workshops on positive customer service.

5.2.4 Reconvene a university-wide FYE course committee to coordinate all FYE classes across campus, insuring that all new students have access to an FYE course and receive a common set of information taught by instructors trained to work with new students.

5.3.2 Expand number and training of peer mentors, allowing mentees the opportunity to continue the relationship beyond the first year.

Introduction

Vision

The University of Arkansas will be the public research university known for its commitment to helping students develop into college graduates.

Goals to increase the six-year graduation rate

-  Of the 2010 freshman cohort to 62% in 2016
-  Of the 2011 freshman cohort to 64% in 2017
-  Of the 2012 freshman cohort to 66% in 2018
-  Of the 2013 freshman cohort to 67% in 2019
-  Of the 2014 freshman cohort to 68% in 2020

In addition, the freshman cohort of 2009 will continue to provide us with a stretch goal of a 66% six-year graduation rate as reported in the Chancellor's Administrative Policy Council *Leadership Principles, Goals and Accountability Measures* (2009).

Why is increasing the University of Arkansas graduation rate important?

Students First

The chancellor's message is clear--students are "the lifeblood of our work," the central focus of our mission as a university. If we have committed to these students by enrolling them, then helping them find their paths to graduation is the right thing to do.

Reputation of the University

A high graduation rate indicates a quality student body and a value-added education that graduates will be proud to earn and that future students will aspire to obtain. This enhanced reputation will attract additional students to the university who have the potential to be successful.

Economic Development

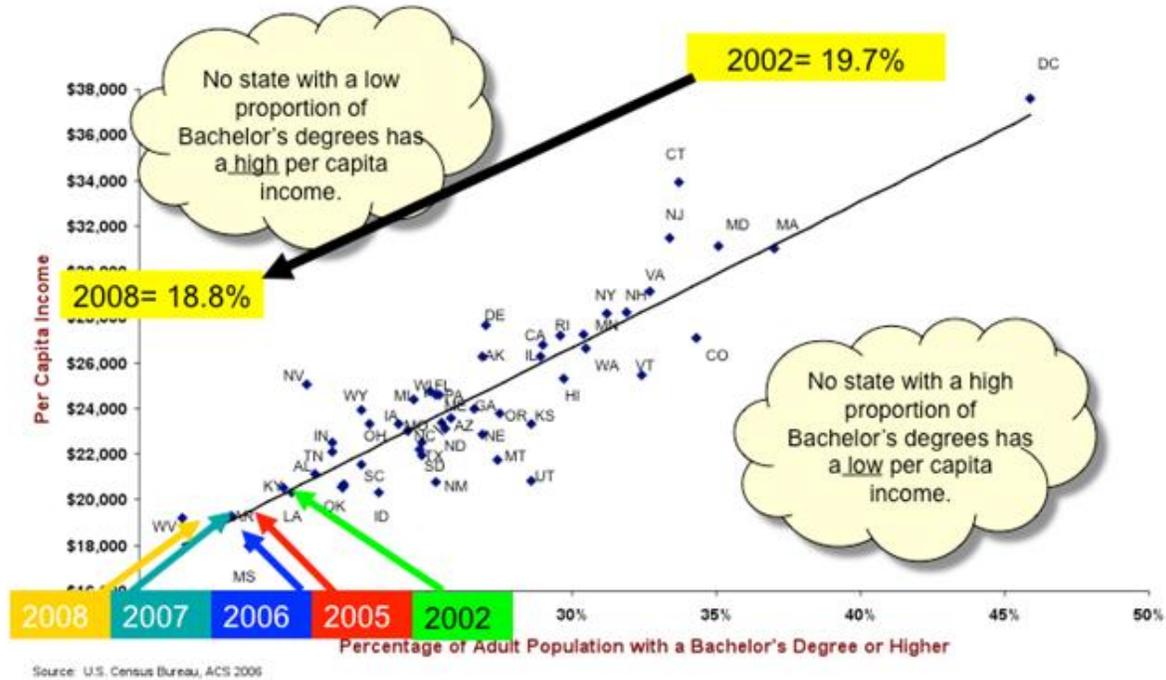
Numerous studies have shown that economic growth and prosperity are linked to educational attainment. This correlation holds true for individuals, states, and nations. In 2007 the U.S. Census Bureau reported that only 19.3% of adult Arkansans held bachelor's degrees, a rank of 48th among the states. Related to the educational ranking is Arkansas' 46th rank in per capita income as seen in **Figure 1**, developed by the director of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. **Figure 2** illustrates the related correlation among education, employment, and salary.

Economics and Stewardship

Students completing a baccalaureate degree from an Arkansas college or university in 2008 left school with a diploma and an average debt of \$18,947. In fact, 57% of those who graduated that year incurred debt. That same year, according to the United States Census Bureau, the average family income in Arkansas was \$37,000. Because Arkansans invest significantly in the University through payment of tuition, fees, room, and board, for students, the University must be a good steward of those investments by providing programming that supports students all the way through to graduation.

Figure 1

State Per Capita Personal Income v. Share of Adult Population with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2008)

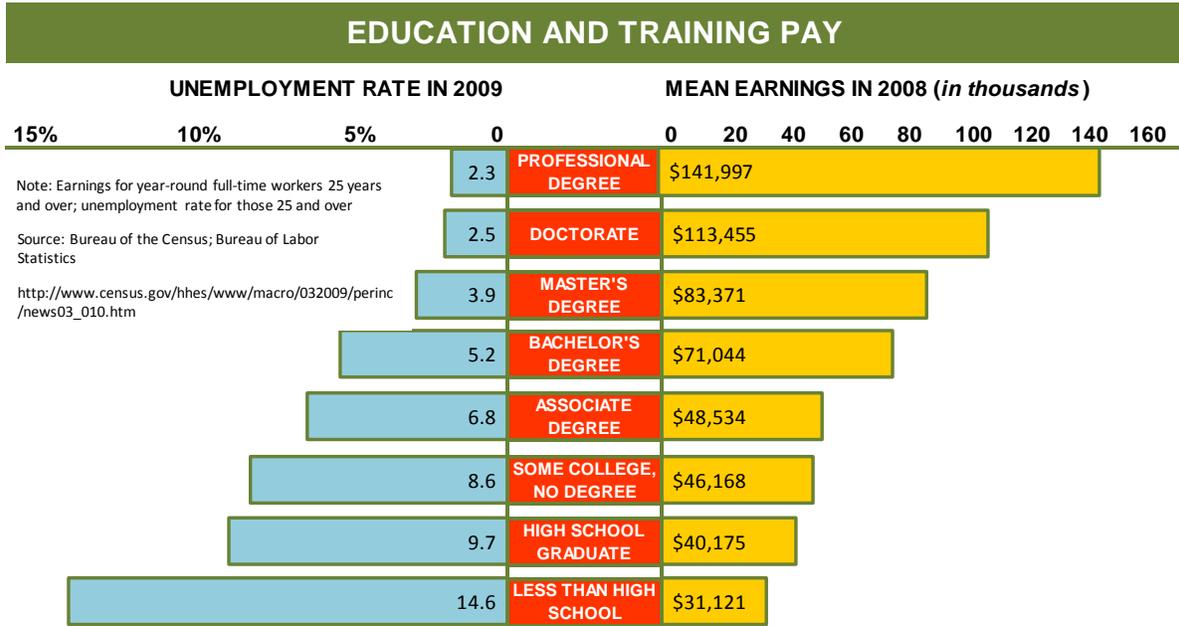


The state of Arkansas is also investing substantive resources in higher education. According to the 2009 Fact Book produced by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, in FY 2008 the state invested \$709,485,000 in its universities and colleges. It is, thus, no small wonder that there are committees of the General Assembly studying the gap between college access and college graduation. We recognize that others do invest significant resources into the students and the university, and we want to be proactive at generating the highest return on that investment.

Building the Future of Arkansas

Because only 19.3% of Arkansans hold bachelor's degrees, too many young Arkansans grow up in homes lacking an "insider's" knowledge about how to apply to college, obtain financial aid, register for courses or find campus resources. Add a low family income to this limited information about how college "works" and these potential first generation college students may decide against enrolling.

Figure 2



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This situation will be exacerbated by the changing demographics of public high school graduates. In 2004-05, for example, 66% of the graduates were white non-Hispanic and 14% were Hispanic. Projections for 2014-15 are that 57% of public high school graduates will be white non-Hispanic and 21% will be Hispanic. As a group, Hispanic families hold fewer college degrees and earn less than white non-

Hispanic families, resulting in potentially more first-generation, limited income college students. (WICHE, *Knocking at the College Door*). As a land-grant institution, the University of Arkansas needs to support from admission through to graduation particularly those students and their families new to higher education.

Situation Analysis

Background on Graduation Rate Tracking

The University of Arkansas began tracking retention and graduation rates annually in 1985. The accepted methodology is to capture the percentage of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students returning to the university in their second and third years, and graduating or remaining enrolled in the fourth, fifth, and sixth years. During the course of the six-year time frame for graduation, students who drop out for a semester or longer are recaptured upon returning to the University if they return during the six-year tracking period. Over the past twenty-five years, the data sources have been revised to coincide with both state- and federally-reported data. The enhancement of data accuracy allows us to review the past ten years of graduation data with a significantly higher confidence level in the consistency of the definitions and data sources.

The U.S. Department of Education began tracking graduation-rate data in 1991, using the standard definition adopted by the University of Arkansas and other schools in the mid-nineteen eighties. The availability of the federally-mandated graduation rate data has allowed for benchmarking the performance of University of Arkansas students against those of a variety of comparable institutions.

National Data

The University of Arkansas has participated in the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) almost since its inception in 1994. The consortium, coordinated by the University of Oklahoma, provides national comparative data on retention and graduation by types of institutions,

allowing for comparisons among peer four-year doctoral research universities across the country.

The table in Appendix C shows an average of multiple cohorts for retention and graduation rates for both the University of Arkansas and for the comparison institutions. The gap between the U of A rates and those of national universities is apparent in the comparative data.

University Benchmarking

From 1998 through 2008, the Office of Institutional Research (IR) provided benchmark data on 54 national universities (including Arkansas) on a number of variables on which comparable data were available. Included among these variables are measures that illustrate the academic preparation of traditional freshman students entering the University. IR has worked with the Provost to revise the benchmarking efforts during the past year allowing for a more focused look at both peer and aspirant schools for comparative data.

To focus the benchmarking data more closely on institutions with characteristics in common with the University of Arkansas, IR collected an extensive array of data on student body characteristics, resources from state, research, and private sources as well as tuition and fee revenue.

Identifying curricular similarity through the reporting of degrees awarded in various disciplines was factored into the selection of a comparison group. Based on the similarities of size, students, programs, and resources, the following institutions along with the Southeastern Conference schools were selected for deeper comparisons (**Table 1**).

Table 1

Selected Benchmark Institutions	SEC
Auburn University	Auburn University
Clemson University	Louisiana State University
Iowa State University	Mississippi State University
Louisiana State University	University of Alabama
University of Alabama	University of Arkansas
University of Kansas	University of Florida
University of Kentucky	University of Georgia
University of Missouri	University of Kentucky
University of Nebraska	University of Mississippi
University of Oklahoma	University of South Carolina
University of South Carolina	University of Tennessee
University of Tennessee	Vanderbilt University

A factor that is often questioned when assessing the issue of retention and graduation rates is that of the qualifications of the incoming students. Since the admission standards for automatic admission to the University of Arkansas were increased in 1998, there has been a steady increase in the ACT scores and high school grade-point averages of the incom-

ing freshman classes. **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** illustrate these trends. By comparing the scores of University of Arkansas students to those of the group of Selected Benchmark institutions, it is clear that UA cohorts are comparable to, and in some cases better prepared than, those entering other institutions.

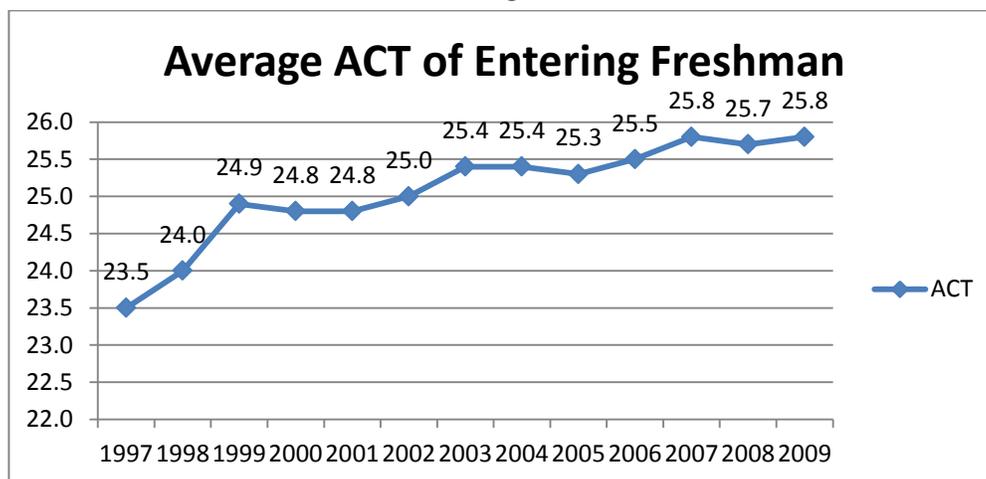
Figure 3

Figure 4

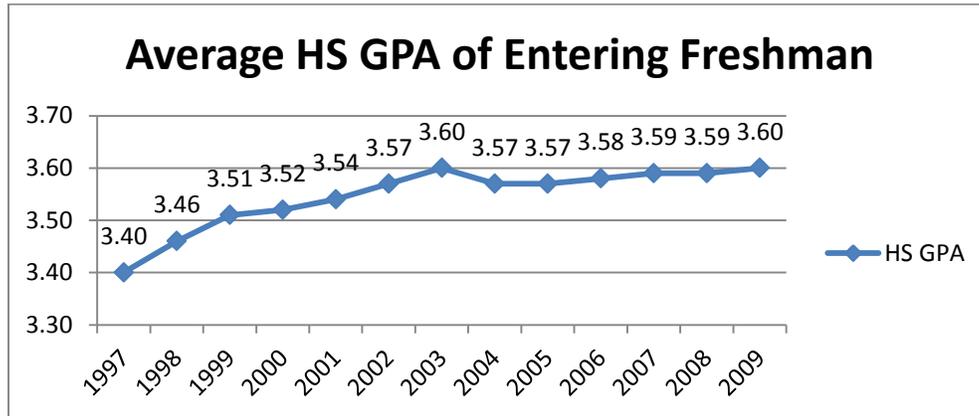


Table 2 displays the average ACT (and converted SAT) scores of incoming freshmen at the University of Arkansas compared to those of the benchmark group. The data from the submission to *U.S. News*

and *World Report* reflect the midpoint of the 25th and the 75th percentile to show the range of academic preparation of the freshman cohort.

Table 2				
Fall 2008 Entering Student Characteristics – 12 Benchmark Institutions				
Institution	ACT 25 th Percentile	ACT Midpoint	ACT 75 th Percentile	Mean HS GPA
Arkansas	23	25.5	28	3.6
Alabama	21	24	27	3.4
Auburn	23	25.5	28	3.7
Clemson	25	27.5	30	3.8
Iowa State	22	24.5	27	3.5
Kansas	22	24.5	27	3.4
Kentucky	21	24	27	3.4
Louisiana State	23	25.5	28	3.5
Missouri - Columbia	23	25.5	28	na
Nebraska - Lincoln	22	25	28	na
Oklahoma - Norman	23	25.5	28	3.6
South Carolina	23	25.5	28	3.9
Tennessee	23	25.5	28	3.7

Source: *U.S. News & World Report*, 2010 Edition

In addition to the group of schools that were selected for comparability of size, curricular similarity, and resources, the University of Arkansas will continue to compare itself to the schools of the South-

eastern Conference (SEC) in keeping with the goal of national competitiveness in academics as well as athletics (**Table 3**).

Table 3				
Fall 2008 Entering Student Characteristics – SEC Benchmark Institutions				
Institution	ACT 25th Percentile	ACT Midpoint	ACT 75th Percentile	Mean HS GPA
Arkansas	23	25.5	28	3.6
Alabama	21	24	27	3.4
Auburn	23	25.5	28	3.7
Florida	25	27.5	30	4
Georgia	24	26.5	29	3.8
Kentucky	21	24	27	3.4
Louisiana State	23	25.5	28	3.5
Mississippi	20	23	26	na
Mississippi State	20	23.5	27	3.1
South Carolina	23	25.5	28	3.9
Tennessee	23	25.5	28	3.7
Vanderbilt	30	31.5	33	3.7

Source: *U.S. News & World Report*, 2010 Edition

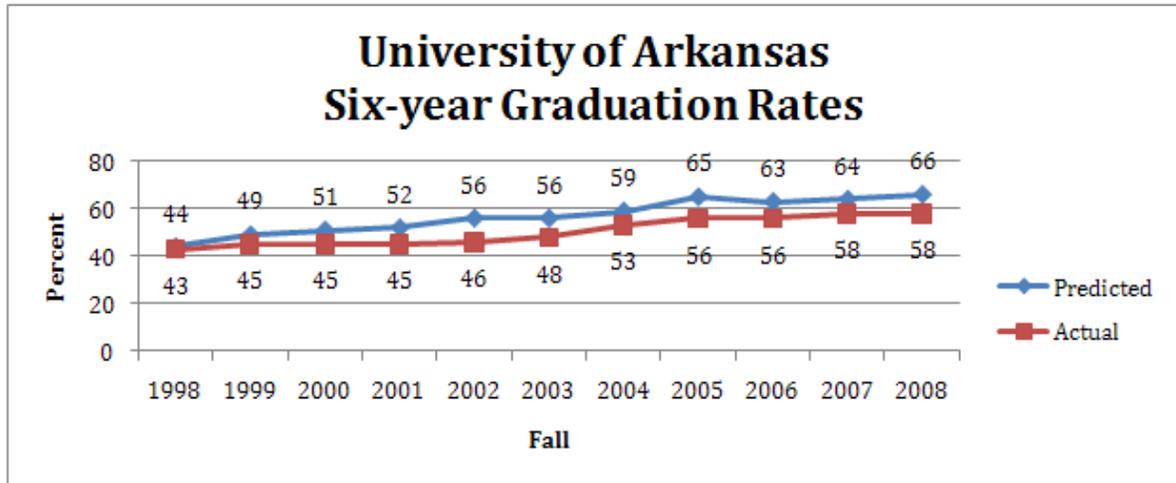
Graduation Rate Gap

As a part of its data collection and analysis, *U.S. News & World Report* calculates a predicted graduation rate and compares it to the actual graduation rate of national universities that participate in the rankings. The predicted graduation rate is derived from analyzing the qualifications of incoming freshman students at over 200 national universities; the analysis uses the qualifications of the cohort on

which the actual graduation rate is based to determine the predicted rate.

Figure 5 illustrates the gap between the U of A predicted graduation rate based on the freshman cohorts and the actual rates as submitted. The trend reflects the improvement in the qualifications of U of A students and a corresponding increase in the actual graduation rates over the past ten years.

Figure 5



However, the graph also illustrates the gap between the graduation rate of U of A students and the predicted rate based on the analysis of freshman qualifications and predicted rates across the country.

Table 4 and Table 5 give a more focused look at the benchmark data of both the benchmark group and the SEC schools. Despite the comparability of the incoming freshman classes resulting from the increase of admission standards in 1998 displayed in Figures 3 and 4 above, the gap between what the university’s graduation rates should be and what they actually are has ranged from 6 to 9 percentage points over the past five years.

Table 5 shows that some of the benchmark institutions are over performing on graduation rates; some are under performing. However, none of the benchmark institutions has a gap as large as Arkansas’ at 8 percentage points.

A similar pattern exists when comparing the predicted and actual graduation rates for the institutions in the SEC. Five of the SEC schools are over

performing based on their predicted rate. Seven are under performing. But again, none of the SEC schools has a gap as large as that of the University of Arkansas.

The size of the gap between the predicted graduation rate and the actual graduation rate is an element in the ranking formula used by *U.S. News & World Report*. As such, the size of the gap has had an impact on the university’s ranking. Regardless of agreement or disagreement over the value and methodology of the rankings themselves, the data analysis conducted by *U.S. News & World Report* on predicted and actual graduation rates leads to one conclusion: the qualifications of the incoming freshman cohorts at the University of Arkansas should produce a graduation rate more comparable to or even exceeding that of peer institutions – 66%.

Table 4						
Fall 2008 Retention & Graduation Rates – 12 Benchmark Institutions						
Institution	Freshman Retention Rate (%)	Graduation Rates (%)				
		4-year	5-year	6-year		
				Predicted	Actual	
Arkansas	82.0	33	53	66	58	
Alabama	85.5	36	59	61	64	
Auburn	85.8	34	58	63	64	
Clemson	89.8	50	76	74	79	
Iowa State	84.8	34	63	61	67	
Kansas	80.5	31	54	63	60	
Kentucky	78.5	29	51	59	58	
Louisiana State	84.0	28	54	62	61	
Missouri – Columbia	84.5	41	65	69	69	
Nebraska – Lincoln	83.8	25	56	62	64	
Oklahoma – Norman	84.2	26	53	65	62	
South Carolina	85.8	45	64	62	67	
Tennessee	82.5	30	55	62	60	

Source: *U.S. News & World Report*, 2010 Edition

Table 5						
Fall 2008 Retention & Graduation Rates – SEC Benchmark Institutions						
Institution	Freshman Retention Rate (%)	Graduation Rates (%)				
		4-year	5-year	6-year		
				Predicted	Actual	
Arkansas	82.0	33	53	66	58	
Alabama	85.5	36	59	61	64	
Auburn	85.8	34	58	63	64	
Florida	94.5	56	77	81	82	
Georgia	93.2	51	75	75	80	
Kentucky	78.5	29	51	59	58	
Louisiana State	84.0	28	54	62	61	
Mississippi	79.8	32	51	59	56	
Mississippi State	82.2	27	53	61	60	
South Carolina	85.8	45	64	62	67	
Tennessee	82.5	30	55	62	60	
Vanderbilt	96.0	84	89	90	89	

Source: *U.S. News & World Report*, 2010 Edition

Gender, Ethnicity, ACT and High School Grade-point Averages

There are also gaps when comparing graduation rate data within the University of Arkansas by gender and ethnicity (Appendix C). The gap between male and female graduation rates has reduced over the past three years, but women continue to persist and graduate at a higher rate than their male cohort members. The University of Arkansas has lost ground when compared to the 2006 graduation of Asian or Pacific Islander, Caucasian, and Hispanic students. It is important to remember that some of the cohort sizes in the ethnic category breakdowns include only a small number of students. Large percentage changes can represent changes in only a few students.

There has been progress made in graduation rates at most levels of ACT score ranges over the past three years. It is concerning that there was a drop in graduation rate for the students with the highest entering ACT scores. Students at the highest range of high school grade point average continue to graduate at the highest rates.

Indications are that the quality of the incoming freshmen at the University of Arkansas has maintained the improvements made in the late 1990s. Students appear to have a better sense of the academic preparation needed to succeed at the University of Arkansas, and the admissions process appears to be maintaining a consistently high quality of admitted freshmen. The key is to find strategies to help students who appear to be adequately prepared for college work to graduate at a rate commensurate with their incoming qualifications.

A review of national data from the CSRDE indicates a difference in graduation rates when comparing gender and ethnicity. The CSRDE summarizes

data on types of institutions based on the qualifications of incoming freshmen. The “Highly Selective Public CSRDE” category in **Table 6** includes all participants in the data exchange whose freshman cohort has an ACT average of greater than 24. The University of Arkansas falls into this category for comparative purposes. The rates are averaged for the number of cohorts in the study. The CSRDE data again show the gap in performance of University of Arkansas cohorts across various breakdowns of gender and ethnicity (**Appendix D**).

Challenges

The disparity in the UA performance complicates setting specific targets for graduation rates, both in near term and years out. Recognizing that the 2015 goal of 66%, as outlined in the Chancellor’s *Leadership Principles, Goals and Accountability Measures* document, reflects the goal for students who entered Fall 2009, the task force is cognizant that recommendations in this report such as special advising and degree audits for these students will be necessary to meet this stretch goal.

After reviewing the national data as depicted in the benchmarking studies and the history of the performance of UA students, the task force has identified interim goals for upcoming cohorts that will be needed in order to reach the goals set by the institution (listed at the beginning of this report). The projections included in **Table 7** reflect the interim rates that have to be met if the University of Arkansas is going to close the gap and attain six-year graduation rates that are commensurate with its peers and with the qualifications of the incoming freshman classes.

Table 6**Average Retention & Graduation Rates by Selected Characteristics, Fall 2000-2007 Cohorts**

	Continuation Rates		Graduation Rates		
	To 2 nd Yr	To 3 rd Yr	Four-Year	Five-Year	Six-Year
Note: Data represent the average of all applicable years since 2000	2000-2007	2000-2006	2000-2004	2000-2003	2000-2002
Highly Selective Public CSRDE Institutions (Mean ACT>24.0)					
Gender					
Male	87.10%	79.40%	37.30%	62.40%	67.60%
Female	88.30%	81.10%	51.50%	70.30%	73.50%
Race					
Black	86.10%	76.70%	33.10%	55.10%	60.70%
Hispanic	86.20%	77.50%	33.20%	55.80%	62.30%
Asian	91.70%	85.40%	48.90%	72.00%	76.60%
American Indian	79.70%	69.40%	30.00%	50.10%	55.60%
White	87.30%	79.90%	46.60%	67.80%	71.40%
Non-resident alien	87.50%	78.30%	47.70%	66.80%	70.50%
University of Arkansas					
Gender					
Male	81.50%	72.40%	26.80%	49.20%	54.40%
Female	89.70%	75.20%	46.30%	55.60%	59.50%
Race					
Black	82.80%	82.50%	20.20%	37.10%	46.10%
Hispanic	75.60%	67.60%	29.50%	45.80%	49.50%
Asian	87.80%	82.00%	38.50%	59.20%	65.50%
American Indian	75.10%	64.90%	23.70%	39.60%	43.80%
White	82.40%	73.90%	33.70%	53.80%	58.10%
Non-resident alien	88.80%	79.80%	38.10%	57.20%	64.90%

Source: UAOIR Website and 2008-2009 CSRDE Retention Report

The cohort for tracking graduation is a clearly defined group. Adjustments to this cohort are made in both the institutional tracking study and in the federal reporting on graduation rates for stu-

dents who are deceased or have been called into active military duty. Strategies that can improve the retention of students at each year of the six-year tracking will have a direct bearing on the final

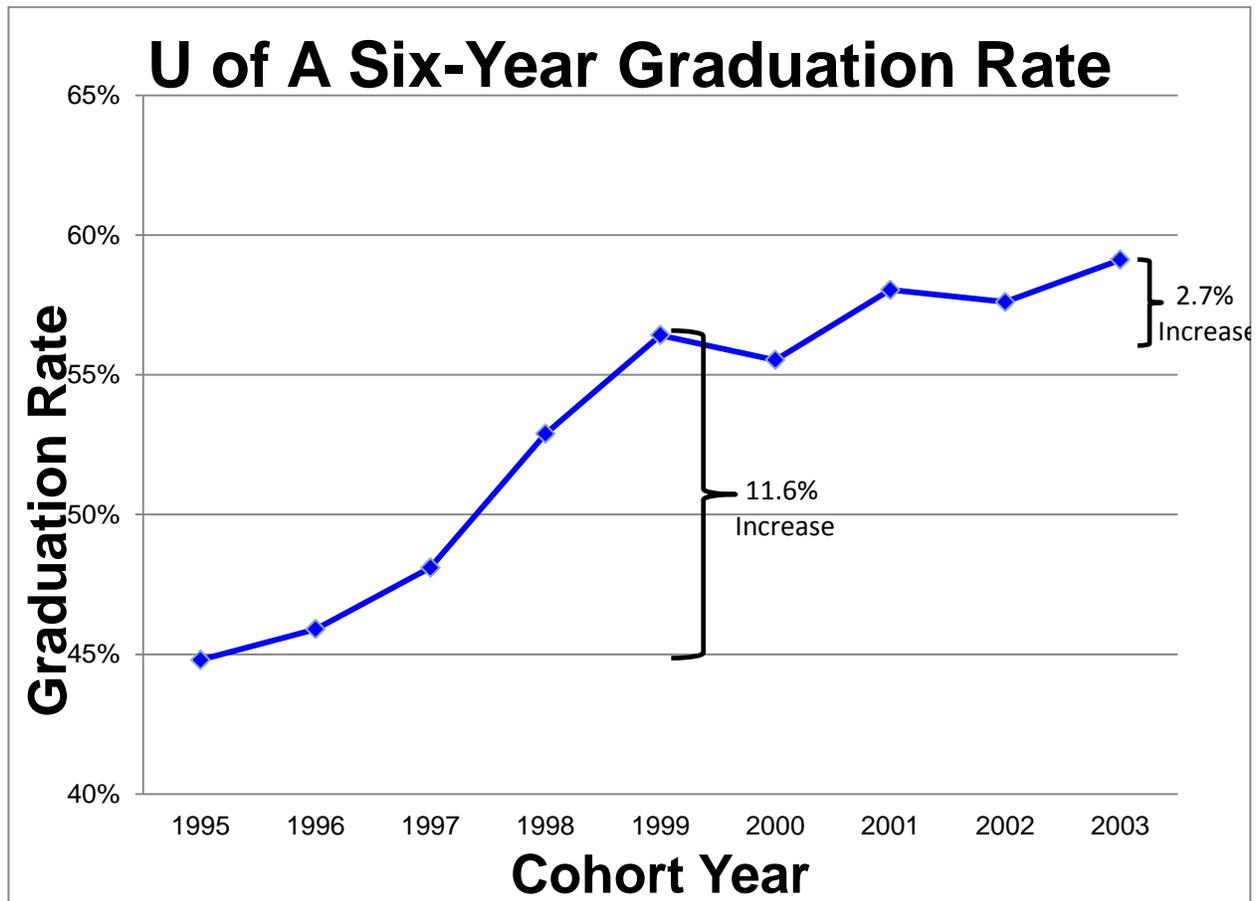
graduation rate. Retaining an additional 40 students from a freshman cohort of 3,000 students would increase the retention rate from 83% to 85%.

Rationale for Selected Goals

From the freshman class that entered in 1995 to the freshman cohort of 2003, the six-year graduation rate at the University of Arkansas increased from less than 45% to 59%. This success is attributed to the improvements in the ACT scores and high school GPAs of incoming freshmen and strategies employed by the university to improve graduation rates starting in the mid to late 1990s. It is important

to note that the gap between the predicted and actual graduation rate (Figure 5) has not significantly changed in those years. The recent trends show that the graduation rates have attained a plateau and any changes (increases or decreases) are within the range of scatter in the data (Figure 6). Thus, we might argue that if we have made improvements in the retention and graduation rates, so have our benchmark institutions. The plateau is an indication that the limits of benefits from the strategies that were put in place in the mid to late 1990s have been realized and to boost the rates to a higher plateau will require new strategies.

Figure 6



The University of Arkansas, with an average ACT score of 26 garnered by its entering freshman class, is tied for 2nd place among its 13 benchmark institutions. On the other hand, our six-year graduation rate of 59% is among the lowest and about 10 percentage points below the best in that group of universities. Clearly, there is room to improve in this regard. Based just on the academic profile of freshmen, our goal could be set as high as 70%, but the goals must be adjusted to take into account circumstances unique to the University of Arkansas. While we adopt the best-proven practices at institutions that are our aspiration peers and we identify our own innovative strategies to help graduation rates, it is also important to understand challenges that may limit our effectiveness.

Student selectivity, for example, is a recognized factor in determining the six-year graduation rates. But to effectively fulfill part of our promise to the state as a land-grant institution, access to a University of Arkansas education cannot be made any more selective than it is now.

The university has aggressive plans to increase its enrollment that will likely cause growing pains in the near term and might negatively impact retention and graduation rates. It is important to note that the University of Arkansas has a track record of growing enrollments and graduation rates simultaneously, but that growth was in an environment of stable state budgets and with an infusion of considerable private gift support. Enrollment growth during a time of reduced state funding may cause the gap between predicted and actual graduation rates to increase.

The per student expenditure from tuition and fees and state appropriation for the group of 13 benchmark universities ranges from a low of \$12,218 per year to a high of \$21,645 per year. The

per-student expenditure at the University of Arkansas is \$15,383 per year; that is \$1,366 (9%) per student less than the average. Since class sizes and availability, quality advisement, and student services all contribute significantly to student success, the lack of good financial support limits the effectiveness of strategies.

As a university community, we are strongly committed to enhancing diversity among our student body. To simultaneously enhance diversity and graduation rates will require special strategies that are not in place now and must be implemented.

Reduction in student financial aid during an economic downturn can cause undue stress on the students, affecting morale and graduation rates. On the other hand, the impact of the scholarships funded by a new state lottery should alleviate some of the financial difficulties. This program is new and its impact, although expected to be positive, is largely unknown.

Student motivation to succeed also depends on the following characteristics that are difficult to quantify:

- Family education background of our students compared to those of our benchmark institutions.
- Socio-economic background of our students compared to those of our benchmark institutions.
- Job opportunities and internship opportunities available to students/graduates within the state.

Considering all the factors above, a six-year graduation rate of 66% is proposed and is believed to be attainable for the university between 2015 (our stretch goal) and 2018 (our conservative goal).

Achieving either of these rates will also require hitting the intermediate goals identified in **Table 7** for 1st to 2nd year retention as well as the targets iden-

tified for 2nd to 3rd year retention and the four and five year graduation rates.

Table 7									
Projected Graduation and Retention Rates (Numbers in Red are Projections)									
Freshman Cohort	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Six Year Graduation Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
1 st to 2 nd Year Retention	81.4	83	82.8	80.7	83.1	83.1	86.0	88.0	90.0
2 nd to 3 rd Year Retention	72.1	75.1	74.3		79.2	80.5	83.1	84.4	85.7
Four - Year Graduation Rate %	34.4	33.9	35.4	36.6	36.6	37.2	38.4	39.0	39.6
Five - Year Graduation Rate %	52.7	52.7	54.7	55.7	56.7	57.7	59.7	60.7	61.7
Six - Year Graduation Rate %	56.2	57.3	57.2	55.3	57.4	60.0	62.0	64.0	66.0

The current success rate to graduation in six years among those that successfully advance to the second year at the University of Arkansas is 69%. If all our success strategies were focused on the freshman year alone to achieve a six-year graduation rate of 66%, we would need to boost the freshman to sophomore retention from its current level of 83% to almost 95% based on projections using the UA trend data, an increase which is not feasible. Achieving a freshman retention rate of

90% is considered more achievable, but we also need a very significant and strategic focus on improving the 2nd to 3rd year retention to achieve our ultimate goal. According to our proposed plan, the freshman retention rate must increase to 90% by 2013 and the retention to 3rd year to 85.7% by 2014 to achieve a six-year graduation rate of 66% by 2018.

Understanding the Issues

Why Students Leave

In a national study, *Hardwiring Student Success: Building Disciplines for Retention and Timely Graduation* (2009), the University Leadership Council reported that it is not a lack of support services that hinders student retention and graduation, but the failure to connect support services with the students who need them most. The researchers also found that it is often the unprepared or under-engaged students who are the most at risk and fail to take the steps necessary to seek out support.

In constructing a process to improve retention and ultimately achieve higher graduation rates, the University of Arkansas is heeding the call of David Kalsbeek, Senior Vice President of Enrollment Management at DePaul University, who challenged institutions to focus on progress and to concentrate on the high risk processes and policies that hinder students in their progress towards graduation. In October 2009 the Provost appointed and charged the Improving Graduation Rate Task Force to identify strategies and solutions to address the barriers to graduation on the university campus.

Why University of Arkansas Students Leave

The task force reviewed multiple sources of information to discover the most frequent reasons University of Arkansas students leave the university and may not return to complete a degree.

Unfortunately, some students just walk away. But students who officially withdraw from the university fill out exit surveys (932 in Fall 2006, 804 in Fall 2007, 562 in Fall 2008, and 602 in Fall 2009). In these surveys, students at the University of Arkansas identified financial problems, academic prob-

lems (including advising and academic support services), and personal problems, including family crises and psychological or medical crises, as reasons for leaving the university. Although challenges to accessing services were explicitly reported only for academic support services (Fall 2008 *Exit and Withdrawal Report*), there is no reason to believe that the U of A is different from other institutions in needing to provide a better connection between students and already existing services.

Academics

Students who either identified themselves as at risk for dropping out or had recently left the university often cited academic difficulties as a reason for leaving. Among the most frequent reasons listed were difficulties in specific courses, academic advising, academic support services and the quality of instruction. More personal academic reasons included a lack of access to coursework, a change in major, a poor grade point average, difficulties with the number of credits earned, frustrations with course availability and completing all degree requirements, and rigorous demands of specific programs. Delayed notification to students in academic distress and little attention to attendance and study habits by faculty and instructors were noted as well. Students and faculty both point out the need for degree audits and degree progression updates, two factors that may be tied to advising as well as student self-efficacy.

Advising

The 2004 ACT study *The Role of Academic and Non-Academic Factors in Improving College Retention* points to three strategies that particularly increase retention: academic advising, first-year pro-

gramming, and learning support. Researchers with the University Leadership Council concluded in a 2009 study that a “personal and high-touch advising service” is more important than ever to today’s students and their families:

“Student expectations for high-touch advising service – most prominently a personal relationship with a caring adult institutional representative – are higher than ever before. Among the reasons for students’ heightened expectations, university contacts report the influence of hyper-involved parents, the proliferation of high-touch service industries and the increasing cost of college tuition”(*Meeting Student Demand for High Touch Advising*, xiii).

According to UA student exit surveys, advising questions and discontent with advising form a leading factor in students’ decisions to leave the university. Literature review also reveals a national trend in this area as a prime concern for retention.

Expectations and Accountability

Students seem routinely to be surprised by the rigors of university life, according to University of Arkansas exit interviews, and to the expectations of college-level work, according to MAP-Works surveys. Unrealistic expectations can make the freshman year a bracing, disorienting jolt of reality – a jolt that sometimes serves to push students away from college.

On average, University of Arkansas students study only 11 hours a week outside of class; whereas, if they are taking a full load of 15 hours, they should be averaging 30 hours per week. Clearly student expectations are not in line with the realities of academic life. Students need to not just align expectations but also realize their accountability in this process. Keeping students knowledgeable

about, and responsible for, their education helps to keep their expectations in concert with the reality of the university educational experience.

Financial

According to student exit surveys and MAP-Works data, financial difficulties are the leading cause for students leaving the U of A. In Fall 2009, for example, 28.9% of the students who withdrew cited financial reasons as the main reason they left. In their deliberations about financial challenges as a contributor to student attrition, task force members did note that leaving for “financial reasons” can be a “polite” excuse for leaving when the reality is academic or personal difficulties. Financial challenges and other issues also get inexorably intertwined. During the Spring 2010 semester over 1,000 students on financial aid were in danger of losing their aid because of a lack of satisfactory academic progress – low grades or insufficient credits.

University of Arkansas students reported that numerous financial concerns either forced them to leave or were a heavy burden, which may have slowed progress to completion of a degree. First year through doctoral students cited family finances, loss of scholarships, the lack or loss of financial aid, and late receipt of financial aid as impediments to persistence. Students also reported the need for a job, the cost of books, and the expense of transportation from a long distance as other factors. “While financial aid by itself may not be enough to ensure persistence, it nonetheless plays an important indirect role by shaping the nature of students’ experiences once enrolled. That role is particularly striking for students whose financial resources fall short of meeting the costs of college attendance” (Pascarella 2005).

Therefore, it is not a surprise to find that many of our students work both on- and off-campus. Our

students' responses to the 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement show that both freshmen and seniors at the University of Arkansas work more hours than those enrolled in the comparison group of benchmark institutions. For example, the mean was 2.12 for UA freshmen compared to 1.74 at benchmark institutions. For seniors, it was 3.34 compared to 2.91 (survey scale: 1 = no hours, 2 = 1-5 hours, 3 = 6-10 hours per week). Many of these students are also single parents with further pulls on their time and wages. Financial difficulties are a major factor in attrition according to nationwide data, but U of A students are more likely to work than students in our benchmark institutions and less likely to apply to federal aid programs.

Personal

University of Arkansas students report that difficulties with roommates, living arrangements, and homesickness are reasons for dropping out. In addition, students cite responsibilities to the military and to their jobs and families. Some students admit to difficulties in the judicial system; there have been 526 alcohol violations reported from August 2009 through February 2010 at the University of Arkansas, as well as 471 UA judicial system referrals for liquor law violations in 2008. Other reported reasons include family crises with divorce, family members who are ill, and family members injured in accidents.

Students indicated that medical and mental health problems often led to too many missed classes. Increasing occurrence of mental health distress is reported in the American College Health Survey administered each fall: 37.9% of those surveyed reported feeling hopeless in the last twelve months. During the same 12 months, 26% reported being so depressed that it was difficult to function and 43.8% reported overwhelming anxiety in the fall of 2009. In a 2009 study of "Mental Health and Academic

Success in College," Eisenberg, Golberstein and Hunt state, "We find that depression is a significant predictor of lower GPA and higher probability of dropping out, particularly among students who also have a positive screen for anxiety disorder."

Other personal issues include the campus climate for individuals from under-represented groups, issues for students of color and the challenges of being a first generation student. Parents, particularly single parents, are challenged to find day care, and to keep a balance between family, jobs and academics.

In order to address globally the personal reasons that students pull away from the University of Arkansas, the Graduation Rate Task Force emphasizes the positive effects of community. Student connections to their campus, their faculty, and other students are a leading factor in keeping students through to graduation according to retention authorities. In creating a vibrant, supportive community, the University of Arkansas faces a number of obstacles including the increasing number of non-traditional students, the hours students are working, the number that commute home on weekends, and those living off-campus.

When these communities are formed early in the academic career of students, there is a greater impact on retention. At the university, for example, students who begin their college careers living on campus are consistently retained at higher rates than those who live off campus as freshmen. For the Fall 2008 new freshman cohort, the difference was 11.2% (84.3% on-campus retention vs. 73.1% retention for off-campus students).

Creating a welcoming environment for under-represented students continues to be a conversation in higher education. The pathway to providing a quality education for all students, while recognizing

ing the diversity students bring, is not a simple task to achieve. To create a welcoming environment for under-represented groups takes the combined, determined and committed efforts of all entities of the university campus. Researchers suggest that successful retention programs are vehicles to connect the students to the university (Hale, 2004). Institutions should and must play a better role in providing and promoting intellectual and social communities that allow a student to become more connected to the institution (Tinto, 1987) as well as providing role models students can seek out when needed. Additionally, when under-represented students connect with their major and faculty, and experience success in classes and organizations, they tend to graduate (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). According to Tinto (1987), the idea is to reduce the alienation and isolation often experienced by all students but even more so by under-represented groups.

Common points of stress for all students at certain times in their journey with us include: for

freshmen, the transition into a university environment; for sophomores, the intentional focus on a major and a career field; for juniors, running out of funds or energy to keep going; for seniors, worry about finding a job or paying off debt incurred while in college. There should be some entity that addresses these more global triggers of attrition through coordinating what is already in place in the colleges and adding what is not in place to level the playing field for all students and to counter the reasons that students leave the university. A University of Arkansas student should never receive inferior support services because of the major or college she has chosen. An undeclared major, for example, needs just as effective a freshman-year program as a freshman engineering student. A student transferring into the university or transferring between colleges in the university should not miss out on services because he is redefining his journey.

Strategies for Retaining and Graduating Students

The overall approach to increasing graduation rates recommended by the task force is to connect resources with students so that they will be able to define their own plans that effectively address their individual issues. Existing retention initiatives within colleges and programs should be assessed and continued if they are effective and detected gaps in retention services filled in. Faculty and staff involvement in monitoring and identifying early on at-risk students is also crucial to the entire retention and graduation process; professional development

should be provided as needed to support their efforts. The task force recognizes that a cultural change on campus will also need to occur for recommended initiatives to flourish. To begin this process, the task force recommends five university-wide strategies as detailed below. Specific objectives are outlined for each strategic area of focus with recommended action items listed under the objectives and generally arranged in order from no/low cost to some/more cost.

Strategy 1: Coordinate University-Wide Efforts for Retention and Graduation

1.1 Complement the work of the colleges and schools, especially with and for students who have not decided on a major or who are changing majors or who are unclear about university graduation requirements. Some specific action items to implement this strategy are as follows:

1.1.1 Inventory the college and departmental advising activities to document current efforts and identify areas of success to be duplicated elsewhere and areas that need further support.

1.1.2 Use technology, such as the MAP-Works system currently being piloted with 1600 students, to identify and reach out to students who are at risk for leaving.

1.1.3 Continue expanding the use of AdvisorTrac across colleges so that when students change colleges or majors their advising files automatically transfer with them. Insure consistency of advising experience through developing a university mission statement on advising with stated outcomes (model: Clemson University).

1.1.4 Inventory the number of advisors per college or school to determine what would be needed to allow a student to work with the same advisor from entrance to graduation. Add a few general advisors to the Student Success Network to work with those students undecided on a major or changing majors, a strategy which would also better balance the advising load among colleges.

1.2 Create a highly visible university-wide Student Success Network, first by reorganizing existing resources and later by adding other crucial elements. This network will address the more global triggers of attrition – loss of financial resources, change of majors, “no one to talk to,” poor early progress grades, and the like. Coordinating and connecting students with campus resources that can address these triggers would be the major operational strategy of the network. Some specific action items recommended are:

1.2.1 Determine existing components that can “cluster” to create the foundation of this Student Success Network, including the Enhanced Learning Center and the Office of Academic Success.

1.2.2 Create a correlating Student Success Website with a Destination Graduation road map, recommendations for successful navigation of a student’s degree plan, and links to multiple offices at the U of A with services to support students in this journey (model: University of South Carolina).

1.2.3 Make ISIS training sessions available to students by creating Web-based tutorials on how to track degree progress on ISIS, and create a link from the new Website.

1.2.4 Offer re-orientation sessions early in the spring semester with one-stop-shop answers on finances, academics, choosing majors, and requirements for graduation. Emailed invitations to the sessions could be triggered by academic warnings issued through the Registrar’s Office or MAP-Works and notices of unsatisfactory aca-

demic progress issued through the Financial Aid Office.

1.2.5 Increase supplemental instruction and tutoring for courses with a D, F, or W rate of over 30% and encourage faculty to require participation.

1.3 Create a permanent university-wide Destination Graduation Committee chaired by associate deans appointed by the provost. Some specific action items include:

1.3.1 Form this coordinating committee with representation from each college and school as well as several appointed members continuing from the Increasing Graduation Rate Task Force.

1.3.2 Charge the committee with sharing research and best practices on retaining and graduating students with one another and with the campus community.

1.3.3 Charge the committee to gather and evaluate data annually (see Outcomes Assessment) and report to the Provost on both successes and needed changes.

Strategy 2: Address Financial Challenges

2.1 Create a Financial Learning Center (FLC) as part of the Student Success Network. This “center” would provide students (and parents) with resources and tools for understanding the reality of college costs and for creating a financial plan to maintain enrollment and reach graduation. Some specific action items include:

2.1.1 Use late payments as a warning system to automatically refer students to the Financial Learning Center.

2.1.2 Provide advice to students on managing budgets and expenditures.

2.1.3 Provide advice to students about balancing work and school and show them the consequences of losing financial aid or scholarships.

2.1.4 Increase help to working student-parents, including information on child care.

2.2 Increase and publicize on-campus job opportunities and connect students with these opportunities. Research shows that students who work on campus feel a special bond to that campus and are retained at higher rates. Some specific action items to implement this strategy include:

2.2.1 Use the new hiring software in HR to create a system for students to apply for on-campus jobs.

2.2.2 Use job fairs to connect students with local businesses near campus.

2.2.3 Increase alumni involvement through coordination of shadowing and work study opportunities with local alumni.

2.3 Earmark funds from the next capital campaign or from Alumni Association funds for continuing student scholarships.

2.3.1 Create competitive Destination Graduation scholarships on the basis of need for students who have passed the milestones of 30 and 60 credits toward

their degrees with a satisfactory grade point average.

Strategy 3: Create “Culture of Success” Thinking among Students, Faculty, and Staff

3.1 Launch a university-wide campaign to promote a better understanding of the requirements for academic success and students’ responsibility for their own achievement. The university’s expectations of students—to attend class, to spend sufficient amounts of time studying, to participate in class discussions, to seek help when difficulties arise, to meet deadlines—are not always clear and apparent to students, especially new ones. Keeping students knowledgeable about, and responsible for, their education helps to keep their expectations in concert with the reality of the university educational experience.

3.1.1 Work to change the “culture”: let students know when they enroll our expectations of them, such as attending classes and becoming self-regulated learners. Recommended is a one-day academic orientation for new students the Friday before classes begin.

3.1.2 Create an honor code for students to sign during orientation or academic convocation.

3.1.3 Create a “pledge of intention to graduate” for students to sign during orientation or academic convocation.

3.1.4 Create incentives for students to attend the first days of class by decreasing the ability to enroll in classes late and by requiring attendance in the first week under

the threat of administrative withdrawal from the class.

3.1.5 Follow student progress, identify problems through MAP-Works, and refer students to resources that can help while stressing to them how the resources can help.

3.2 One aspect of the Student Success Network should include creation of a group of online tools to facilitate students’ monitoring their own progress and to increase awareness of resources for students and parents.

3.2.1 Create web-based utilities that allow students to monitor on their own what a low grade will do to their GPA, what changes in their courses will do for their degree path, and what changes in their major or their college might do to their expected graduation date. [Note: The task force recommends the university look at the University of Florida, Duke University, or the University of Utah for the productive use these universities have made of technology to help students monitor their progress toward graduation.]

Strategy 4: Chart a Road map to a Degree

4.1 “Students have their dreams and goals in hand, but their action plan is blank. We, as professors, educators, and staff should be able to help them fill in the blanks” (*Imagine Success: Engaging Entering Students*). Help every student define his/her educational and career goals and develop a road map to success.

4.1.1 Request the Destination Graduation committee review the UA Experience map, developed by a previous retention committee, modify as needed, and assign areas responsible for fleshing out the map (Appendix E; the University of South Carolina ACE coaches help students develop academic maps).

4.1.2: Have copies of the Destination Graduation road map available for orientation, advising, and the like.

4.2 Designate a small team of transcript specialists to hold advertised walk-in sessions for juniors and seniors to review transcripts for unmet course and university requirements so that they can complete their degree plan road map on time.

4.2.1 Create incentives for students to contact advisors before making course changes, major changes, or other decisions such as withdrawing from the university.

4.2.2 Counsel juniors and seniors who encounter a roadblock to graduation when they cannot enter upper-level or professional programs. Work with these students on modifying their road maps with optional degree programs or on developing methods of improving their academic credentials.

4.3 Target seniors with a minimum of 90 credit hours who have applied for graduation but who have incomplete requirements at the end of the fall semester.

4.3.1 Request that the Registrar's Office create rosters of students by college who fall into this category. Advisors will contact the students about missing requirements and give assistance in enrolling in appropri-

ate courses, addressing missing transfer work or tending to other degree program requirements.

4.4 Target students who have left the university in good academic and financial standing within the past year and who were on track to graduate on time when they left.

4.4.1 Request that the Registrar's Office identify students who fall into this category and provide the names to the Office of Academic Success. OACS will contact students to determine what barriers prevented the successful completion of the degree.

4.4.2 Have OACS work with students to enroll in on-campus, off-campus or distance education courses to complete degree requirements, to secure financial assistance to complete coursework, and to secure transcripts to determine if transfer work can meet missing requirements.

Strategy 5: Increase a Sense of Community to Engage and Retain Students

5.1 Insure that all university employees are aware of their responsibilities for and potential contributions toward retaining and graduating students.

5.1.1 Regularly hold professional development workshops on positive customer service.

5.2 Expand opportunities for special communities on campus so that all students on campus will be able to have a "home base."

5.2.1 Expand residence hall study groups.

5.2.2 Increase accountability from student organizations and make sure their missions/goals reflect campus priorities, especially the priority on graduation.

5.2.3 Expand living/learning communities and attempt to get all students into a living/learning community their first year.

5.2.4 Re-create a university-wide FYE course committee to coordinate all FYE courses across campus, insuring that all new students have access to an FYE course and receive a common set of information taught by instructors trained to work with new students.

5.2.5: Increase the areas available for public studying and gathering for all university students.

5.3 Increase and strengthen mentoring and counseling programs.

5.3.1 Get parents involved appropriately with continued use of the parenting handbook and creation of a Website for appropriate parental strategies to assist in their students' success.

5.3.2 Expand the number and training of peer mentors, allowing mentees the opportunity for the relationship to continue beyond the first year.

5.3.3 Increase and strengthen counseling programs at the university for students with mental health issues and substance abuse problems.

Outcomes Assessment

No long and arduous journey can be completed efficiently without good navigation tools and a guidance system. In our context, it means keeping track of the gains (or losses) along the way and developing an assessment plan that effectively measures the efficacy of the individual strategies being employed. Mid-course corrections in plans, as needed, must be implemented to stay focused on the identified strategies. The task force recommends that the person charged with coordinating retention and graduation services and the university-wide Destination Graduation Committee be charged to track the metrics with assistance from the Office of Institutional Research. A brief annual

report of progress toward the goals should be submitted to the provost and widely circulated among the campus community. Any changes to the goals and strategies recommended should be described in the annual report.

Recommendations on data collection and analysis include the following:

Continue to collect the annual retention and graduation data that include retention and graduation numbers by cohorts after the 1st to the 6th year for the entire university; adjust the current data collection to include:

- By colleges and majors.
- By ethnicity and gender.
- By financial need (as determined by FAFSA applications/ recipients of the PELL grant or other indicators of socio-economic backgrounds of freshmen).

Collect information to keep track of whether objectives for strategy 1 are effective. The data may include the following:

- Data on number of students identified in MAP-Works as high risk for leaving who are retained.
- Data on advisor loads across the university after undecided students are rerouted to be advised centrally.
- Data on use of and satisfaction with Student Success Website.
- Data on number of students who attend ISIS training workshops and re-orientation sessions.
- Data on number of tutoring and SI sessions students attend with correlating grades.

Collect and analyze the following information on the effectiveness of the objectives for strategy 2:

- Data on how many students have financial need, how many of those sought advice on financial matters, and how many of those who sought help graduated in six years or less.
- Data on on-campus jobs and near-campus jobs available to U of A students, the number of hours worked, and the hourly pay.
- Data on financial aid provided/available for sudden changes in students' financial situations and its impact on student retention and graduation.

- Data on number of alumni working with students through shadowing or work-study programs.

Collect data to monitor whether objectives for strategy 3 are effective:

- Data on student perceptions of the usefulness of the academic orientation session.
- Data on the average hours per academic credit hour that a U of A student spends studying outside the class room and comparative data.
- Data on number of academic dishonesty cases after introduction of honor code.
- Data on class attendance.

Collect data to verify whether objectives for strategy 4 are effective:

- Data on the number of freshmen and sophomores advised when changing majors.
- Data on juniors and seniors advised with regard to requirements remaining for graduation.
- Data on number of contacts made with students who left the university while in good academic and financial standing and the numbers that returned to the U of A.

Collect data to determine whether objectives for strategy 5 are effective:

- Data on programs conducted for faculty and staff to build awareness of their respective roles that can contribute to student success.
- Data on number of slots available in living and learning communities and differences in graduation rates among those that are in living and learning communities versus those that are not.

- Data on differences in graduation rates among those that are involved with two or more clubs/fraternities/sororities versus those that are not engaged in social clubs.
- Data on the number of students that have access to peer mentoring and the success rates of those that had peer mentoring versus those that did not have peer mentoring.

Appendix A: Task Force Members

Co-Chair Karen Hodges, Director, Academic Success

Co-Chair Ashok Saxena, Dean, College of Engineering

Charles Adams, Associate Dean, J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences

Mark Boyer, Department Chair, Landscape Architecture, Fay Jones School of Architecture

Lorraine Brewer, Instructor, Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry, J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences

Richard Cassady, Director of Freshman Engineering Program & Professor of Industrial Engineering, College of Engineering

Taj Cobbs, Director, Student Support Services, Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity

Gisela Erf, Professor, Department of Poultry Science, Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, & Life Sciences

Alice Griffin, Coordinator of Advising and Retention, Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences

Melissa Harwood-Rom, Associate Athletic Director, Athletics Department

Bryan Hembree, Director, Scholarship Office

Florence Johnson, Director, Administrative Services, University Housing

Yvonne Kirby, Assistant Director, Office of Institutional Research

Barbara Lofton, Director, Diversity Programs, Sam M. Walton College of Business

Michael Miller, Associate Dean, College of Education & Health Professions

Carol Reeves, Associate Professor of Business, Department of Management, Sam M. Walton College of Business

Mary Alice Serafini, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs & Director of University Health Center

Nan Smith-Blair, Director, Eleanor Mann School of Nursing, College of Education & Health Professions

Trish Starks, Associate Professor, Department of History, J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences

Lalit Verma, Interim Dean, Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food & Life Sciences

Kathy Van Laningham, Vice Provost for Planning & Director of Office of Institutional Research

Jorg Vianden, Associate Director, Academic Programs, University Housing

Juana Young, Associate Dean, University Libraries

Appendix B: Resources Consulted

Presentations

- Adams, C. The 2000 U of A Retention Committee Report.
- Adams, C. Interview with Director of Student Success Center, University of Missouri.
- Boston, K. Retention and Graduation Initiatives, Sam M. Walton College of Business.
- Boyer, M. Fay Jones School of Architecture Leadership by Design Initiative. Interviews with Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Executive Director Educational Support Services, and Faculty Chair of Retention Committee, Auburn University.
- Caloianu, C., Kirby Y., & Van Laningham, K. Institutional Research Data on Retention and Graduation.
- Caloianu, C., Kirby Y., & Van Laningham, K. Data on Students Who Changed Colleges, Departments, and Majors.
- Caloianu, C., Kirby Y., & Van Laningham, K. List of New Peer Institutions.
- Cassady, R. The First Year Experience in the College of Engineering.
- Griffin, A. Retention Goals and Strategies, Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences.
- Hodges, K. & Young, J. Interview with Alice Lacey and Nancy Talburt on Barriers to Graduation.
- Johnson, F., Vianden, J. & Scott, A. Implementing MAP-Works at the U of A.
- Lee, C. Fall 2008 Withdrawal Report.
- Lofton, B. Minority Focus Group Results: Sam M. Walton College of Business. Interview with Director of Assessment, Clemson University.
- Saxena, A. Review of ACT Research on Retention and Graduation.
- Serafini, M. A. The University of Arkansas Experience Roadmap; The Mental Health of U of A Students (for Jonathan Perry).
- Van Laningham, K., & Hodges, K. Major ideas from the University Leadership Council's research on Elevating Student Retention and Success.
- Van Laningham, K., Kirby, Y., and Lee, C. Three Year Snapshot: Historically Difficult Courses Fall 2006 – Spring 2009.

Conferences and Webinars Attended

- Improving Student Success and Persistence at the Florida State University. Webinar. January 21, 2010.
- Institute on Sophomore Student Success. Savannah, Georgia. April 11-13, 2010.
- Student Success Symposium. Conway, Arkansas. March 31-April 1, 2010.

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Appendix C: Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange--Data Comparison

Appendix C					
Average Retention & Graduation Rates, Fall 2000-2007 Cohorts					
	Retention Rates		Graduation Rates		
	To 2 nd Yr	To 3 rd Yr	Four-Year	Five-Year	Six-Year
Note: Data represent the average of all applicable years since 2000	2000-2007	2000-2006	2000-2004	2000-2003	2000-2002
Public/Doctoral, Research-Extensive CSRDE Institutions¹	85.50%	77.40%	40.30%	62.10%	66.90%
University of Arkansas	73.60%	69.50%	32.80%	52.50%	57.00%

¹ These institutions typically offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and they are committed to graduate education through the doctorate. During the period studied, they awarded 50 or more doctoral degrees per year across at least 15 disciplines.

Source: UAOIR Website and 2008-2009 CSRDE Retention Report

Appendix D: Retention Rates by Gender, Ethnicity and High School Preparation

Appendix D								
University of Arkansas Retention & Graduation Rates by Gender, Ethnicity, ACT, and High School GPA - 2000 & 2003 Cohorts								
			Retention Rates			Graduation Rates		
			1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year	4-year	5-year	6-year
2000 Cohort	Gender	Female	82.4	73.2	69.2	36.5	55.4	59.2
		Male	81.3	70.8	66.3	22.6	45.2	51.8
	Ethnicity	African American	85.3	72.7	63.6	16.9	38.7	44.4
		Am Indian or Alaska Native	82.1	69.6	67.9	21.4	41.1	44.6
		Asian or Pacific Islander	87.9	87.9	75.9	31	56.9	63.8
		Caucasian	81.5	71.8	68.1	30.7	51.6	56.9
		Hispanic	67.9	57.1	53.6	25	32.1	32.1
		Non-Resident Alien	94.6	75.7	70.3	37.8	54.1	59.5
		Unknown	60	50	50	20	20	30
		ACT	0-21 & No Score	76.7	60.3	54.5	15.8	34.7
	22-24		78.7	69.9	63.7	24.7	45.8	50.6
	25-26		82.7	72.9	67.8	31	49.5	54.7
	27-29		84.2	76.3	74.4	37.2	58.3	63.1
	30-36		91.6	87.4	87.1	48.7	73.1	80.1
	High School GPA	0-2.24 & No GPA	58.6	37.9	41.4	6.9	13.8	24.1
		2.25-2.49	66.7	41.3	33.3	1.6	7.9	12.7
		2.50-2.74	73.3	57.1	43.8	7.6	21.9	26.7
		2.75-2.99	76.3	67.6	59.1	14.2	34.1	39.8
		3.00-3.24	71.4	58.9	52.3	15.2	32.7	37.6
		3.25-3.49	78.7	64.3	59.8	17.9	37.9	43.8
3.50-3.74		88.6	77.5	73.3	30	54.4	59.5	
3.75 & Above		88.6	84.1	82.9	48.4	71.7	76.6	
2003 Cohort	Gender	Female	84.7	75.5	70.6	38.9	58.6	61.9
		Male	82.5	74	69.6	29.3	51.1	55.9
	Ethnicity	African American	84.3	71.3	68.9	21.7	36.8	40.6
		Am Indian or Alaska Native	66.7	63.3	53.3	23.3	36.7	36.7
		Asian or Pacific Islander	93.7	87.3	79.4	39.7	58.7	66.7
		Caucasian	83.6	74.8	70.3	34.8	56.1	60.1
		Hispanic	73.7	71.1	68.4	39.5	60.5	60.5
		Non-Resident Alien	88.1	76.2	66.7	40.5	57.1	57.1
		Unknown	87.2	71.8	71.8	28.2	48.7	59
	ACT	0-21 & No Score	75.2	62.3	58.8	17.7	37.1	41.6
		22-24	82	71.7	65.2	27.1	47.9	52.1
		25-26	83.9	74.9	70	32.1	56	59.9
		27-29	84.4	77.6	73.9	39.9	61.1	64.6
		30-36	93.3	88.4	84.2	56.3	74.9	79
	High School GPA	0-2.24 & No GPA	66.7	45.8	41.7	16.7	20.8	20.8
		2.25-2.49	83.3	61.1	55.6	11.1	11.1	11.1
		2.50-2.74	67.7	56.5	43.5	8.1	14.5	17.7
		2.75-2.99	66.7	58.6	48.1	11.7	28.4	32.7
		3.00-3.24	78.1	61.3	58.1	15.5	34.8	41
		3.25-3.49	79.1	67.2	63.2	24.3	44.9	50
3.50-3.74		85.9	77.6	73.6	28	55.2	58.9	
3.75 & Above		90.5	85.5	81.6	52.9	73.8	77.1	

Source: UAOIR Website

Appendix E: Road Map to Destination Graduation



Appendix F: Benchmark Models for Organizing Services

Benchmark University	Graduation Services “Department”	Services Provided
Alabama	UA Center for Teaching & Learning under Vice Provost of Academic Affairs	FYE & study skills courses; SI and tutoring; workshops; Student Success Council
Auburn	Educational Support Services under Office of Undergraduate Studies	SI and tutoring; career development; academic counseling and coaching; FYE; learning communities
Clemson	Academic Success Center under Office of Undergraduate Studies	Freshman seminar; disability services; early alert; Tutoring and SI; academic coaching and counseling
Iowa State	Academic Success Center under Dean of Students	Academic consulting; academic intervention; PSY 131; SI and tutoring; peer educators
Kansas	Academic Achievement & Access Center under Vice Provost of Student Success	Tutoring; disability services; academic success consulting and workshops; freshman transition course
Kentucky	Student and Instructional Support under Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education; also Provost’s Retention Workgroup	Academic consulting; academic enhancement (tutoring); academic readiness; undergraduate success center; advising network; early alert
LSU	Center for Academic Success under Asst. VC of Learning and Teaching (SA)	Tutoring and SI; workshops; consulting for students & faculty; study groups
Missouri	Student Success Center under Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies	Academic Exploration and Advising Services; Retention Services; Learning Center; Career Center; Freshman Seminar
Nebraska	Academic Support Resources under Office of Undergraduate Studies	Satellite tutoring and advising; SI and tutoring; peer mentors; study skills and career dev. courses; writing lab; math resource center
Oklahoma	University College (for freshman); Graduation Office	Freshman programs; Center for Student Advancement; Assessment and Learning Center(tutoring); Advising for freshman; graduation support
S. Carolina	Student Success Center, ACE, and Initiatives for Special Student Populations coordinated by Associate Vice Provost for Student Success Initiatives	Academic coaching; SI and tutoring; workshops; early intervention; academic probation; transfer mentoring; first year college center; loss of scholarships advising
Tennessee	Student Success Center under Associate Vice Provost	Academic coaching; SI; tutoring information; FYE course; freshman intervention; UT Lead (support students with Tennessee scholarships)

Appendix G: Organizing and Funding the Strategies

Inaugural Model Proposed

As Appendix F indicates, there are many ways to organize retention and graduation services. In a “network” model, for example, a designated office identifies existing resources, fills in crucial missing pieces, and connects students with these resources. Kansas, South Carolina, and Tennessee employ more of a network model than do most of the other benchmark institutions which operate their retention/graduation initiatives from an undergraduate studies office. The University of South Carolina’s network of a Student Success Center combined with Academic Centers for Excellence and supported by a Web presence is the proposed inaugural model. We already have in place the following elements: tutoring, supplemental instruction, a writing center, a half-time learning coach, a full-time instructor devoted to a college learning course for new students, and the Director of Academic Success.

Not in place are a generalist cross-campus advisor, an intervention specialist, a financial learning specialist, and a Website administrator. In addition, to jump start our graduation number improvement, there is a need for a graduation specialist. Whom can we shift to cover these responsibilities? If the Director of Academic Success assumes the start-up responsibilities of coordinating all these efforts as well as handling some intervention and graduation outreach, and, if the half-time learning coach becomes full-time, to help with the intervention (especially with the expanding Academic Challenge Scholars), then there would be three additional positions important to fill for our minimal start-up operation:

1. Generalist advisor for students changing majors and colleges
2. Web administrator to design and maintain the on-line “center” crucial to a cluster model of support
3. Financial learning specialist

Estimated costs for these 3 ½ positions are \$130,000 plus fringe benefits.

In addition, the task force recommends using technology to expand the reach of this minimal staff:

1. MAP-Works expanded to 3500 first-year students would cost \$28,000
2. Continuing the university-wide implementation of AdvisorTrac would cost \$25,000

Paying for the Model

Our annual retention rate for the Fall 2008 cohort of 2,979 students was 83.1%. Had we retained these students at 86%, heading them toward a 64% graduation rate, we would have retained an additional 85 freshmen. Based on the current tuition rates for in-state and out-of-state students, the approximate 78% in-state and 22% out-of-state ratio, and the average of 14.4 credit hours/student, we would have also retained \$285,368 in tuition revenue that we lost last fall. The start-up costs listed above for the inaugural Destination Graduation Program total \$215,500. Retention can pay for itself after an initial investment.

