



## Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal Review Form

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Date of Review: February 10, 2014

Name of Institution: University of Arkansas

State: AR

Institutional ID: 1986

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions):

Jervaise McDaniel, Associate Dean, Adult and Continuing Education, Illinois Eastern Community College

Jan Murphy, Professor of Nutrition, Illinois State University

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### Review Categories and Findings

#### 1. Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

- ◆ Potential for significant impact on the institution and its academic quality
- ◆ Alignment with the institution's mission and vision
- ◆ Connection with the institution's planning processes
- ◆ Evidence of significance and relevance at this time

#### Finding:

The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates acceptable scope and significance.

The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate acceptable scope and significance.

**Rationale and Comments:** (Provide two to three statements justifying the finding and recommending minor modifications, if applicable. Provide any comments, such as highlighting strong points, raising minor concerns or cautions, or identifying questions.)

This Quality Initiative has the potential for significant impact on the University and on the academic quality of the students who attend and graduate. The University has worked diligently over the past 12 years to increase graduation rates from 45 to 60 percent. However, based on the demographics of entering students, University leaders believe that the graduation rate should equal or exceed 67 percent and thus, through their strategic planning processes, have set a goal of achieving a 70 percent graduation rate by 2021. This initiative is a component of the University's Strategic Plan, *Providing Transparency and Accountability to the People of Arkansas*, and is aligned with the mission and vision of the University.

#### 2. Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

- ◆ Clear purposes and goals reflective of the scope and significance of the initiative
- ◆ Defined milestones and intended goals
- ◆ Clear processes for evaluating progress

**Finding:**

- The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates clarity of purpose.  
 The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate clarity of purpose.

**Rationale and Comments:**

The ultimate goal of achieving an increase in the university's graduation rate is to be achieved through actions in three main areas: 1) technical and communication components; 2) student support components; and 3) a learning centered component. Each of these areas of emphasis is clearly defined with very specific goals and action items to be accomplished. All of this will be coordinated by the newly established Office of Retention and Graduation. The director of this office will be a 50 percent faculty member who will oversee the implementation and assessment of all action items.

The institution has developed sample metrics for assessing the initiative that rely on collaboration between the Office of Retention and Graduation, the Office of Institutional Research, and the Teaching and Faculty Support Center. The institution will refine this assessment plan as it operationalizes the Quality Initiative Project to help determine which components are working.

**3. Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative**

- ◆ Commitment of senior leadership
- ◆ Commitment and involvement of key people and groups
- ◆ Sufficiency of the human, financial, technological, and other resources
- ◆ Defined plan for integrating the initiative into the ongoing work of the institution and sustaining its results
- ◆ Clear understanding of and capacity to address potential obstacles

**Finding:**

- The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates evidence of commitment and capacity.  
 The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate evidence of commitment and capacity.

**Rationale and Comments:**

Senior leadership supported the goal of increasing graduation and retention through the establishment of a 16-member committee representing all areas of the University involved in developing this proposal. The Office of the Provost has committed funding to establish the Office of Retention and Graduation with a 50 percent director, by signing a three-year contract with Starfish Retention Solutions to develop the new *UASuccess* online system, by designing and supporting the new freshman class *University Perspectives: Destination Graduation*, and by expanding resources for the Teaching and Faculty Support Center.

The proposal clearly outlines potential challenges to success including the complexity of the initiative. The complexity of this project will require significant oversight that makes half-time buyout of a faculty for the director position a concern. The institution might want to consider making this a full-time administrative position that is more permanent in nature. The components of the plan are action items that will need on-going oversight and assessment. It would be challenging for a part-time director to immerse himself or herself in a project that is so complex.

**4. Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative**

- ◆ Consistency with intended purposes and goals
- ◆ Alignment with the implementation of other institutional priorities
- ◆ Reasonable implementation plan for the time period

**Finding**

- The Quality Initiative proposal demonstrates an appropriate timeline.

The Quality Initiative proposal does not demonstrate an appropriate timeline.

**Rationale and Comments:**

The timeline is consistent with the intended action items and goals and with the timing of the institution's next comprehensive HLC visit. The University has achieved its intended actions for 2013 and hopefully is on track to achieve the established actions for spring of 2014.

**5. General Observations and Recommended Modifications:** (Panel members may provide considerations and suggested modifications that the institution should note related to its proposed Quality Initiative.)

The Quality Initiative Proposal of the University of Arkansas is very clear in purpose. They have utilized data and past initiatives to draft the current activities. They have been inclusive in their steering committee and have the support of the administration. Their timeline is reasonable and coincides with the HLC visit for 2016-2017. "Closing the loop" is an area that often gets overlooked or lost in quality initiatives, but the university acknowledges this and has planned to have many of the activities at this juncture by the time of the HLC visit. The only concern is the assignment of a part-time director for a project of this magnitude.

This initiative aligns with the institution's vision by striving to be recognized as one of the "nation's top 50 public research universities." They have taken the lofty vision and charted a course that addresses components of student and faculty success and growth. The university is building on previous success in improving its six year graduation rate from 45 percent to 60 percent over a 12 year period. A steering committee analyzed data and their efforts during that time period and crafted the current initiative.

As this institution acknowledges in their "challenges" section, ". . . most challenging is the very nature of student retention itself." The institution's past history also indicates that increasing retention and graduation rates is a slow and deliberate process. The University of Arkansas seems to be in Phase II of moving their institution into the top 50 category.

**6. Conclusion:**

Approve the proposed Quality Initiative with or without recommended minor modifications. No further review required.

Request resubmission of the proposed Quality Initiative

**Rationale and Expectations if Requesting Resubmission**

**Timeline and Process for Resubmission** (the Commission staff will add this section if the recommendation is for resubmission)

