

Improving graduation rates

All institutions of higher education are judged on their graduation rates. This metric — perhaps more than any other — highlights the effectiveness of an institution to deliver on a core mission: undergraduate education. We must strive to be among the top states in educational attainment. Today, the likelihood that a 9th-grader in



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Nevada will achieve a baccalaureate degree by age 24 is too low. Our collective future — the health and well being of our state and nation — depends on it. It is tempting to focus all of our efforts on being highly selective; however, for the benefit of our state it is our responsibility to facilitate an educated citizenry. Ultimately, the kind of student we turn out will be driven by the quality of the experience we provide, and we have identified several steps to enhance student success. We

recognize that creating a “culture of completion” is a top priority. From the day students enter our doors we want them to have their sights set on graduating four years later. We want them to know that graduation rates matter.

Why graduation rates matter

- ▶ We are defined by whom we graduate. Because we strive to offer educational opportunities to all who seek them, we are defined not by whom we admit but who we graduate.
- ▶ Failing to graduate comes with an opportunity cost. Students with a college degree earn an average of a million dollars more over their lifetimes than their counterparts without one.
- ▶ Stretching out one’s college education makes it harder to engage, and engagement is key to learning. It’s harder to feel personally invested when your attention is only partially directed at the goal. When there is a choice, being a full-time student taking 15-18 credits is the ideal.
- ▶ We are judged by our graduation rate. For better or worse, national rankings look at both four- and six-year graduation rates as measures of institutional effectiveness. Our six-year graduation rate of 49.4 percent is similar to the national average of 52 percent but it is lower than other large public institutions. We can and must do better.
- ▶ Time to degree matters. Students should not be deterred from seeking a college degree — no matter how long the process takes. But the length of time it takes a student to complete a degree does not escape the attention of prospective employers — and probably adversely affects younger, inexperienced workers more. College is the first job that many of our graduates will hold and the time to degree is a reflection of their success on the job. It matters to employers. The value of the degree to our students and alumni is similarly affected as graduation rates affect our institution’s reputation.

What we will do to enhance student success

- ▶ **Increase faculty size selectively to ensure quality education and put top faculty in key lower-division classes. Top faculty will engage students and provide a solid foundation on which a student can build in order to be successful in a program of study.**
- ▶ **Enhance advising. In order to guide students through a course of study, advising is critical, and feedback on progress — especially in the first two years — is very important.**
- ▶ **Enhance financial aid. We will continue to work to reduce the financial pressures that lead to students choosing a job for pay over their job as a student. We can create more student jobs: students who work on campus persist at higher rates than students who work off campus.**
- ▶ **Increase average class load of students. We need to both educate our students on this issue and create incentives to carry a true full course load. For example, we could adopt a tuition plateau model so that it is the same price to take 15-18 credits, as it is to take 12 credits.**
- ▶ **Change where students “live.” Our university has a relatively small number of students living on campus or resident students. We know that living on campus leads to student engagement. But more important is to change where students spend their time. We don’t care where students sleep — we care where they live. The goal is to create a “sticky” campus, an appealing environment that draws students here to study and socialize and keeps them engaged in campus life. We have a unique opportunity with the opening of the Joe Crowley Student Union this fall and the IGT-Mathewson Knowledge Center in August 2008.**