

**Minutes of the Graduation Task Force Meeting
October 1, 2009**

BE IT REMEMBERED, That the Graduation Rate Task Force met in a regular meeting in the Board Room of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning in Jackson, Mississippi at 1:00 p.m. and pursuant to, written notices were mailed to each member of the Task Force dated September 24, 2009. Those members attending the October 1, 2009 meeting of the Task Force were:

Members of the Task Force Present:

Dr. Hank Bounds, Commissioner of Higher Education, MS Institutions of Higher Learning
Chairman Cecil Brown, House of Representatives Education Committee
Chairman Kelvin Buck, House of Representatives Universities and Colleges Committee
Dr. Eric Clark, Director, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Ms. Patricia Dickens, Board Member, Community and Junior Colleges
Chairman Doug Davis, Senate Universities and Colleges Committee
Dr. Willis Lott, President MS Gulf Coast Community College
Mr. Mike Mulvihill, Interim Assoc. State Supt. Vocation Education and Workforce Development
Mr. Johnny Franklin, Education Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor
Dr. George Ross, President, Alcorn State University
Trustee C.D. Smith, MIHL Board of Trustees
Ms. Kris Jones, Mississippi Dept of Mental Health
Mr. Blake Wilson, President and CEO, Mississippi Economic Council

Members of the Task Force Not Present:

Chairman Videt Carmichael, Senate Education Committee
Dr. Martha Saunders, President, University of Southern Mississippi
Ms. Kami Bumgarner, MS Board of Education
Dr. Scott Elliott, President, Meridian Community College

Others Present:

Dr. Jim Borsig, Assistant Commissioner for External Relations, MIHL
Mr. Jim Hood, Director of Institutional Research and Technology, MIHL
Ms. Mitzi Johnson, Assistant Executive Director for Research and Planning, State Board Community and Junior Colleges
Dr. Susan Lee, Director of P-16 Initiatives, MIHL
Dr. Jeanette McCrory, Director of Nursing, MIHL
Ms. Pearl Pennington, Director of Student Affairs, MIHL
Dr. Fiona Qualls, Associate Executives Director for Programs, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Dr. Al Rankins, Interim Assistant Commissioner of Academic and Student Affairs, MIHL
Mr. Kell Smith, Communications Director, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges
Ms. Leah Rupp Smith, Communications, MIHL
Dr. Reginald Sykes, Assistant Commissioner of Community and Junior College Relations, MIHL
Members of the Press

1. Welcome and Roll Call

Senator Doug Davis called the meeting to order and called the roll, asking members to include their affiliation when answering roll call.

2. Approval of the Minutes from the August 26, 2009 Meeting

Motion to approve minutes and minutes were approved without objection.

Dr. Borsig updated the taskforce on actions since the last meeting date:

1. A retention practices survey was conducted by Noel-Levitz since last meeting. The poll surveyed two and four year institutions to see what practices and policies were currently in place. Eleven of fifteen community and junior colleges and seven of eight IHL institutions participated in the survey.
2. A workshop was conducted today for enrollment management staff. Thirty two were present for the meeting, a good mix of two and four year schools and fifteen participated via webcast. Results of the survey and discussion were presented.
3. Presentation by Kevin Crockett, President, CEO, and Principal, Noel-Levitz

Highlights of Kevin Crockett's Retention Practices Presentation:

Noel-Levitz is a 35 year-old consulting firm with the sole purpose to help colleges and universities. We serve 1,000 colleges on an annual basis. Many more are included in conferences, etc. The University of Southern Mississippi is a good partner institution here in Mississippi. Mississippi schools are doing a lot and doing it well.

Three Broad Topics to share with you today:

1. Recent trends in retention and completion in Mississippi compared to national data:

a. Data on Student Retention

Fall 2006 to fall 2007 – same school retention rates in the four year sector

CJC sector – slight decline on students from first year to second year college going.

IHL sector – research from 78

Mississippi survey responses are probably reported a little different than the Noel-Levitz national sample. These findings appear to include a bit of inflation, so it's unfair to compare to national data. Effectiveness ratings can be interpreted in several ways.

ACT selectivity classifications:

As student preparation improves, so does progression toward a degree– students are more capable of doing the work as they move up that scale.

4 year sector – By rough selectivity classification for MS four year institutions with average retention rates. (2006 cohort)

Alcorn State Univ., Delta State Univ., Jackson State Univ., and MS Valley State Univ. – 66%

MS State Univ., MS Univ. for Women, Univ. of MS and Univ. of Southern MS – 75%

Retention rate is higher with better prepared students

Schools really excel when they perform one selectivity level above themselves – one notch above the preparation level of their students.

MS performing reasonably well as compared to national averages. There are some good things going on on campuses relative to retention.

2. Two Measures of Completion:

- a. Total cohorts – enrollment weighed – large enrollment schools contributing to overall rate
Pretty flat performance – 50% finish in 6 year time
Underperforming schools don't do as well.
Four year completion – 44.9%
Two year completion – 20.4%
- b. Completion rate within 5 years
Alcorn State Univ., Delta State Univ., Jackson State Univ., and MS Valley State Univ. – 33.6%
MS State Univ., MS Univ. for Women, Univ. of MS and Univ. of Southern MS – 37.9%

Findings suggest:

- Mississippi should focus on retention from the second to third year and third to fourth year;
- Comparisons to peer institutions can be made using collegeresults.org;
- Additional data should be compiled on institutional level performance compared to peers;
- Mississippi should be encouraged to develop benchmarks and use these data to inform institutional goal setting designed to improve statewide performance;
- Additional data on the CJC to IHL transition process and student success rates should be assembled. Improving this rate will improve degree production.

Last May, Noel-Levitz conducted a national survey of retention practices and 316 institutions responded. The Mississippi survey was sent to presidents to distribute; and the results are reported in three broad categories:

1. Organization and Planning

Among the IHL institutions, 87% had a retention plan, 43 % said it was a good plan.

- Lots of variation in quality of plans
- Need a clear and measurable goal
- Need clear and measurable strategies
- Strategies need to be supported by clear action plans, timetables, etc.

Starting Point Recommendations:

- Implement a uniform student success planning process at the institutional level that supports state wide goals for improved graduation rates and degree production;
- Consider forming regional planning councils to enhance coordination and collaboration between the two year and four year sectors;
- Provide statewide training on the role and purpose of effective retention planning teams designed to improve their effectiveness;
- Develop a process to help campuses define the best organizational model for student success planning and implementation;
- For IHL institutions 44% had someone to coordinate activities on campuses – less than half;
- Among the CJC institutions one out of two had a plan, but had same concerns about quality;
- 50% of CJC institutions had someone to coordinate retention activities on campuses;
- Retention Committees didn't think they had much power to influence change on campus

2. Data – Tracking and goal setting

Four broad components:

1. Institutional Assessment
2. Student Assessment
3. Institutional interventions
4. Student Interventions

Top Ten List – Critical elements of successful retention, progression and completion programs

1. Collect, compile, and analyze pertinent retention/completion-related data, information, and research
2. Implement an early identification/alert systems and appropriate student intervention strategies
3. Commit to both a front loading and progressive responsibility philosophy in prioritizing action plans and determining degree of proactiveness
4. Focus on the importance of the teaching/learning process
5. Student Engagement
6. Enhance the organization and delivery of academic advising services
7. Create programs and services based on meeting students' individual needs and differences.
8. Design institutional systems, policies, and processes to be more student-oriented.
9. Monitor, on a systematic basis, student expectations, levels of satisfaction, and education outcomes.
10. Establish a permanent organization structure to pursue quality of student life and learning Initiatives and an institutional change process

3. Top retention strategies: National versus Mississippi data

IHL Institutions

Ten least used strategies

Other retention strategies

Learning Communities

Orientation for outer populations

Students who have on campus jobs

Programs targeted at second and third year students

Things data points suggest about opportunities for improvement in the four year school:

1. Improved programs designed specifically for at-risk students (early alert)
2. Tracking persistence patterns of students who matriculate
3. Recruit-back programs
4. Improved academic advising
5. Improved use of data and information to make changes
6. Enhanced communications for currently enrolled students
7. Improved on-line student services
8. Improved programming in the second year
9. Enhanced support for adult/non-traditional learners
10. Enhanced support for online learners

CJC Institutions

Developmental Education

Mississippi looks pretty typical

1/3 reported that there were no special programs for students in high failure courses

Things data points suggest about opportunities for improvement in the two year school:

1. Explore implementation of programs specifically for first-year students
2. Collect student engagement data to augment student satisfaction data
3. Improve intervention programs for at-risk students
4. Expansion of learning communities
5. Second year programs designed to encourage completion and transition to a four year
6. Implement stronger recruit-back programs
7. Strengthen academic advising
8. Improved on-line student services
9. Look at transfer orientation in response to increased student swirl
10. Undertake a complete review of developmental education trends and delivery models and develop strategies in response to the findings.

Student Retention Practices Workshop Findings: What did the campus representatives say is most important?

1. Database to track no FTFT
2. Data on 2 year to 4 year transition
3. Regional planning councils to improve 2 year to 4 year transitions
4. Improved institutional data tracking
5. Early alert programs for at risk student
6. Improved academic advising
7. Implement/enhance recruit-back programs
8. implement/enhance learning communities
9. implement/ enhance 2nd year programs
10. Undertake a complete review of developmental education trends and delivery models and develop strategies in response to the findings.

Comments:

Cecil Brown:

How do you recommend we go forward in trying to accomplish these strategies?

Kevin Crockett:

The task force is a pretty important first step. Rarely do you get system wide change without building a coalition that is committed to change. It is important to have state wide goals that translate down to two and four year institutions. Establish goals based on meaningful improvement at the institutional level. You are going to get the most traction down at the institutional level, not at the policy level. Change has to take place there. This implies good planning processes and the way they work with students. Institutions need incentives for change, what's in it for them?

Kelvin Buck:

The issue comes down to every student understanding the purpose for why they are at the school and how the school will support them to finish. Money for students is not seen as an issue. Students leave school because they don't pass, not because of money. Everything you suggest says that whatever we do, neither the legislature nor IHL can do it.

Kevin Crockett:

We don't know the causes. All we had was data on institutional practices. I can guarantee you money is a factor. If you come from a lower economic status, your chances of finishing are substantially lower, at least on a national level. Finances were not measured as a factor. We didn't talk to students as to why they are or are not going. I suggest you pursue additional data along those lines.

Doug Davis:

One out of ten graduate?

Kevin Crockett:

No, only one out of ten goes on from a two year to a four year institution.
[Note: IHL/CJC data indicates the rate is approximately 15%]

Doug Davis:

You say there needs to be better interaction between systems - elaborate on that.

Kevin Crockett:

The groups this morning would suggest that while wonderful progress has been made, i.e. articulation' good, true collaboration goes a lot deeper than that. How are we promoting the four year experience at a two year school? Put people in a room to see how we can do better, based on the data. We need to be supporting a seamless system. Articulation is just the first step. Encouragement and motivation to move must be there.

Blake Wilson:

If 75% of our community and junior college students are in a non-work related education program, and 25 % are in work force training, we are only getting 10% to go on?

Kevin Crockett:

In a given year.

Jim Borsig:

There are issues around the state, but that is what the data appears to show. One third of the awarded degrees are from community and junior college transfers. They may take longer to complete, but they do complete at a higher rate that first time in college students.

Kevin Crockett:

Louisiana has an 11% rate. There is something there. Some at the community and junior college never go to a four year school and that is fine. Data needs to measure that. We need to know how many come with the intention of completing both two year and four year.

Reginald Sykes:

Even though 75% indicate that they are in an academic program, they do not stay there.

Kevin Crockett:

All along the way, you are looking at groups of students to mine. Community and junior colleges are one opportunity and adults who have earned up to 80 hours but have not completed a degree are another potential source of increased degree production. I believe that is one of the big opportunities.

Reginald Sykes:

I don't want the committee to think that Institutions of higher learning and community and junior college aren't working together. We are working on doing things in this state to improve articulation and transfer.

Kevin Crockett:

Agreed, and it is probably better in some areas than others, but there is still lots of room for improvement.

Cecil Brown:

Do you have data that shows the top ten reasons students stop out?

Kevin Crockett:

Yes, one of the problems is that the data is post mortem – finances play a role, but sometimes it’s an easy way to say that it just wasn’t worth it. Personal reasons – spouse changes, etc. Academic achievement is hugely correlated. Students that get grades of “C” or worse don’t complete – like we said about developmental earlier.

Fiona Qualls:

What can you say is a group target for the 10%?

Kevin Crockett:

Only 8,200 move to a four year school. That is very low. We know they go to the second year. There is not a norm of national statistics. This is just starting to get a lot of traction. I can only give you the one comparison. Doubling that would be a reasonable goal – at least 20% of the population - that is, if they (the students) have some intent to continue in the first place.

Blake Wilson:

Willis, can you share what you were saying earlier in the subcommittee?

Willis Lott:

Really about 60% of our (Ms Gulf Coast Community College) students are university transfer students. 10% of our students are trying to get in the two year nursing program. Another 10% are developmental. What I am hearing is that 10% of our students - we are not counting the students that transfer to a private institution in Mississippi or institutions outside Mississippi. A good many of our graduates go to USA (University of South Alabama). Same thing in Senatobia (Northwest Community College) – students go to the University of Memphis. We don’t know how many are going out of state. This is a mis-label.

Kevin Crockett:

The national student clearing house can tell you where 90-95% of the students are the next year. There are methods and ways to build this. We should not place undue focus on the 10% figure, but there is opportunity to do better. We are looking to close leaks throughout the process.

Doug Davis:

Isn’t there a way the community and junior college system can track a student to figure out why they are there? Isn’t there a way to break down your student population as to who is there for a two year program and who is there to get to the next level? Is this being done?

Mitzi Johnson:

It is being done.

Johnny Franklin:

I tracked it for three years - Enrollment and completion by major. The years I looked, the gross enroll was over 90,000 – FTEs half of that. 79% were enrolled in academic. Only 21% were enrolled in technical/career. When you look at the kids that go on, only 3,600 completed an associate degree. Some don’t want that - over the three years, around 4,000 students, give or take.

Kevin Crockett:

Only 16.5% finish an associate degree within three years. What happens to the others? I am always quick to say that we are hurting ourselves by forcing students to do the associate degree if their objective is the baccalaureate degree. We should help them fulfill that as quickly as possible. Mississippi is about one half of the national associate degree completion rate, so it’s still problematic.

Doug Davis:

Any other questions? None – thank you Kevin. Jim, next is subcommittee reports.

Jim Borsig:

You have the reports of the subcommittees in your packets. The Articulation Subcommittee met today at 11:00 a.m. We set calls up last week to get committees to focus on the issues they want to work on. We need to know what they need from IHL and CJC. The Articulation Committee may want to report.

Cecil Brown:

We would like to talk to someone from SREB - have someone tell us what the options are. Consensus is that we do have some issues that need to be resolved. We have made a lot of headway on articulation but still have issues that need to be resolved. Is that the consensus of the group?

Doug Davis:

We appreciate your work on that and will wait to hear a report from your committee.

Jim Borsig:

During the discussion today with staff, the same issue was raised regarding student health services. That came up in the part Kevin facilitated at the end. I wanted the student services committee to know that.

Cecil Brown:

Was the issue of mental health services raised?

Jim Borsig:

It was the observation that students are coming in with diagnosis and on medication, and that those issues need to be managed seamlessly while they are in college.

Kevin Crockett:

I think they were asking if we had observed an uptick in this problem. I said that there was a substantial increase in request for services, but this can't be proved as causation for the graduation rate problem because that pre-dates the uptick in requests for these services.

Jim Borsig:

There was an awareness of a different type of student services needed.

Kelvin Buck:

What is the plan once we have the subcommittee reports?

Doug Davis:

As far as making recommendations?

Kelvin Buck:

They have only had one meeting. Does that suffice?

Doug Davis:

There will probably be more conversation as to another meeting to gather more information. We can check with chairs to see where we need to go from here.

Jim Borsig:

There are two meetings scheduled. The graduation barriers could do work on the study. The study is on track, but we discovered that the regional meetings were not the most efficient use of time. We are doing to do those meetings at the IHL board meetings in October. Dr. Lott will do the same with the community and junior college presidents. We will have a written draft that we can circulate before the December meeting. I was hoping that we could appoint sub committee chairs and get a schedule of meetings for additional information.

Doug Davis:

I assumed that the first name was the chairman. We could stick with that convention if you want to.

Jim Borsig:

I thought the list was alphabetized. Yes, I see Susan shaking her head.

Doug Davis:

I can work with that. Let me look at the lists. I can go with alphabetical. Does that answer your question, Mr. Brown regarding the subcommittees?

Jim Borsig:

Blake Wilson offered to ask some questions with the road show, if that was needed.

Blake Wilson:

Dr. Bounds and Dr. Clark will be joining us on the road show. We also do a formal survey that we can work on questions if you need them. We start November 9th and finish December 10th. We can get you information along the way and will have done two thirds of the visits before the December meeting. We can share with the two chairs and get information to the group.

Doug Davis:

I think that is right. Be sure to include K-12 as well. Will that be done by the next meeting?

Blake Wilson:

Yes, we can do that and still meet the printing deadline.

Doug Davis:

Yes, if Dr. Bounds and Dr. Clark go along with that, we can look at that at the next meeting.

Jim Borsig:

I just want everyone to be available to participate in those discussions.

Cecil Brown:

I do want to say that I thought that the presentation was a giant step forward. It did give us a beginning on how to proceed with state wide strategies. This is not something we can do in a few months. This was a tremendous addition for the task force.

Doug Davis:

Let me publically thank Chairman Brown. This (taskforce) was his idea. He and Videt Carmichael put this into their respective committees. We do have the same common goal – to have policy recommendation made to the respective committees when they convene in January. I want to publically thank Chairman Brown for the concept.

4. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 2:46 p.m.