ANNUAL REPORT

of the

Student Advisory Board

to the

Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

July 2020
Purpose. The purpose of the Student Advisory Board is to communicate to the State Regents the views and interests of all Oklahoma college and university students on issues that relate to the constitutional and statutory responsibilities of the State Regents. In representing students, the Student Advisory Board shall combine the opinions of students with good, sound research to develop the best proposals and recommendations for The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education.

Creation. The creation of this board is consistent with provisions of House Bill 1801 of the 1988 session of the Oklahoma Legislature. Seven members are elected annually by delegates to the Oklahoma Student Government Association. Members represent public tier and independent colleges, and they serve a one-year term (May through April).

MEMBERS

Kailey Kelpine, Chair, University of Central Oklahoma

Robert Couch, Vice Chair, Langston University

Jonathon Curtis – University of Oklahoma

Logan Hutto, Oklahoma State University

Tanner Hurst, Rose State College

Palmer Tetley, Tulsa Community College

Clayton Myers, Oklahoma Baptist University
**Student Advisory Board**

**Recommendations and Counsel to the State Regents**

**Recommendation**
The Student Advisory Board recommends that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should require colleges and universities to offer all 4 types of accommodation for all classes hosted by the university.

**Background / Analysis**
The Student Advisory Board recognizes the importance of accommodations, and how those accommodations provide students with disabilities with equal access to course instruction, materials, and evaluation. Reasonable accommodations are modifications or adjustments to the tasks, environment, or to the way things are usually done that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program or a job (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The 4 types of accommodation are presentation, response, setting, and timing/scheduling.

Broad categories of accommodations include:

- Changes to the application process to ensure an equal opportunity to apply for program enrollment.
- Changes that enable a student with a disability to perform the essential functions of the academic program.
- Changes that enable a student with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of the program

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Barriers:</th>
<th>Accommodation Category:</th>
<th>Examples:</th>
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| The way information is presented (e.g., text, lecture, video): | Presentation accommodations
- Allow a student to access information in ways other than standard visual or auditory means
- Change the way that instruction, directions, and information are presented | Books and materials with large print
- Visual cues (e.g., color-coded text)
- Audiobooks
- Close-captions on videos |


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<th>The way a student is required to respond (e.g., writing, speech):</th>
<th>Response accommodations</th>
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<td>▪ Allow students to complete assignments or assessments through ways other than typical verbal or written responses</td>
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<td>▪ Speech-to-text software</td>
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<td>▪ Orally dictate responses (using a scribe or digital recorder)</td>
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<th>The characteristics of the setting (e.g., noise level, lighting):</th>
<th>Setting accommodations</th>
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<td>▪ Allow for a change in the environment or in how the environment is structured</td>
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<td>▪ Preferential seating (e.g., near the teacher)</td>
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<td>▪ Testing in a separate location</td>
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<th>The timing and scheduling of the instruction (e.g., time of day, length of assignment):</th>
<th>Timing and scheduling accommodations</th>
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<td>▪ Allow for changes to when and how long students have to complete assignments or assessments</td>
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<td>▪ Allow assignments to be broken down into smaller sections</td>
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<td>▪ Extended time to complete the task</td>
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<td>▪ Frequent breaks</td>
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<td>▪ Shorter testing sessions</td>
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Sources:


**Recommendation**

Both public and private Universities in Oklahoma have shown increased efforts to increase their Four-Year Graduation rates as competition amongst higher education institutions increases in tandem with an increased demand for transparency Academic credentials and opportunities that become determining factors for degree-seeking Undergraduate Students. The Student Advisory Board recommends that the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education should commission a study on the four-year graduation rates of public higher education institutions. The study could determine if factors including, but not limited to financial stability, transfer student status, and community origin affect an Oklahoma Student’s ability to graduate in four years.

**Background / Analysis**

According to research done by Mark H. Raikes et Al. in the article “To Dream the Impossible Dream: College Graduation in Four Years,” the most influential factors for students to graduate in four years is institutional aid and real tuition cost (Raikes et Al. 2012) which may incline some Universities in Oklahoma to take a more insightful look on how their institution’s cost affects the desire for a student to remain at the university. In light of the long term effects of COVID-19 on the state’s budget, the possibility of cutting funding for higher education after sustained cuts in years prior may lead to a rather significant increase in tuition cost among Oklahoma’s public universities.

For many students, an essential source of financial aid comes from Pell Grants. In “The Effect of Pell Grant Changes on the Graduation Rate and College Finances: A Study of Rural Community Colleges in Virginia” by Nikki Hicks et Al., The authors examine the responses students have when they lose pell grants as early as two semesters into college which they found to be a leading cause for decreased graduation rates. If a student wants to pursue their bachelor’s degree, they will transfer from community college to a 4-year institution. Often, at this point, an array of issues arise. One of those issues is if all of their credits from the 2-year institution will transfer over. If they all don’t transfer, this could increase their chances of graduating in 4 years.

In the State of Oklahoma, efforts to increase graduation rates seen by universities in Oklahoma, Langston University’s “15 to finish” program which encourages students to enroll in 15 credit hours every semester exhibited promising results. Comparing Langston’s 2016 cohort to that of 2018, the percentage of students enrolled in 15+ credit hours in the first semester increased from 30% to 85% while the percentage of students who completed 30+ hours increased from 7% to 17%. Along with this, Langston University implemented a “Maymester” program that allowed students to earn 3 credit hours by taking a two-week class at the end of the spring semester. With the majority of students participating in the Maymester program being freshmen, the opportunity to earn 3 credit hours in two weeks may ease the stress of meeting the number of credits required for graduation come senior year. If the Regents desire a control group to base their efforts in studying four-year graduation rates, we would recommend looking to Langston University, as their efforts to increase student retention have presumably shown promising results.
Works Cited


**Recommendation**

The Student Advisory Board recommends that the State Board of Regents forms a board that contains diversity practitioners from higher education institutions from across the state and is chaired by an employee of the Board of Regents of Higher Education. This board can be used as an advisory board to the Board of Regents, but it can also be used towards the higher education institutions that do not have the resources offices that focus on diversity, equity, or inclusion.

**Background / Analysis**

With only one (1) HBCU within the state of Oklahoma, and many schools without an office of diversity, or a diversity officer at the university, the Student Advisory Board sees a need across the state to increase diversity resources and to make Oklahoma higher education more inclusive to minority students, LGBTQ+ students, disabled students, and so many more students that are underrepresented within Oklahoma Higher Education. By creating this State Diversity Board, this will allow the Board of Regents to make more educated and helpful recommendations and policies that can benefit the diverse student populations across the state of Oklahoma. This board can also work to help the institutions that do not already have a diversity officer or an office that focuses primarily on diversity, equity, and inclusion in their decision making.
Recommendations

The Student Advisory Board recommends that the State Board of Regents have college campuses expand their health resources available to students. Due to recent events it is clear that health and safety of students should be a top concern when face to face classes possibly resume in the fall.

Background / Analysis

This can be done in a variety of ways including but not limited to; on-campus clinics, access to free wellness checks, testing, and other walk-in services. According to Forbes on-campus wellness centers are critical to student success for a number of reasons. They work to combat suicide, drug, and alcohol abuse, they support those affected by discrimination, harassment, and sexual violence, and in rural areas, college health centers help with responsibilities and resource constraints (Forbes). With face to face classes tentatively set to resume in the fall, all colleges and universities should be required to strictly adhere to CDC guidelines in regards to social distancing. Students should have separation in between each of them and in instances where the student density is incompatible with social distance masks should be required and objects should not be shared (CDC). Clearly, each institution and classroom setting is different so there will be instances where it’s up to the institution or professor to implement guidelines accordingly. In the event that infections taper off by fall, then wearing masks is not necessary. Unfortunately, viruses are unpredictable so at this point, it is better to play it safe going forward. It is also important to remember that mental health is a critical part of the health and safety of the student body. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness mental illness has multiple detrimental impacts on college students. 64% of those no longer attending college listed mental health-related reasons as to why, 50% never disclosed their mental health condition, 57% did not access accommodations for a multitude of reasons, 65% said walk-in health centers were critical for their success, and 50% said 24 hotlines were critical for their success. The most concerning number is 73%, which is the percentage of those who said they had experienced a mental health crisis while in college (NAMI). Numbers like these paint a worrying picture of a hidden issue plaguing campuses and bolster the fact that access to telemedical services (at the minimum) should be universal across the state to ensure that students who are struggling are not falling through the cracks.
Recommendations

The Student Advisory Board recommends that the State Board of Regents encourage colleges and university’s boost efforts in green energy and sustainability.

Background / Analysis

Our state’s economy is tied heavily to the petroleum industry, which creates budget issues. Going forward it would be prudent for institutions of higher education to take the lead on creating an environment of energy independence that in the long run would require less spending on energy bills each year. Money that is saved can be put towards other divisions and departments that may need it. Oklahoma is a prime state to implement wind and solar power into the energy infrastructure of our college buildings, we rank sixth in the nation for the potential solar generation (KGOU/NPR). Colleges like OSU and OU have made the switch to wind energy. With help from the state, other colleges and universities could start transitioning as well. This can be done by appropriating a set amount of money to colleges each year for them to acquire the resources to transition from fossil fuel-based grids to sustainable renewable energy grids. There are many companies and options on the market that it would be up to each institution to decide which route to go, whether it be onsite or offsite systems.

Besides, switching to solar or wind-based systems not only cuts overall operation costs but can help brand image and boost enrollment (Energysage). In addition to switching to green energy, there needs to be an effort to combat our practices of how much waste we put out. Higher ed institutions are high population density areas with students who generate hundreds of pounds of waste annually. In order to combat this problem, we can take steps towards curbing and cutting how much waste is produced and where this waste goes. There are many routes to take and again while no college or university is the same there are some universal actions that can be put into place. The first is to implement multi-bin recycling containers in classrooms, common areas, hallways, etc. in order to separate out trash and recyclables. Second, is to collect organic waste from dining facilities that can then be used for composting and applied to the landscaping of campus and outdoor athletic fields. In conjunction with this, it is strongly recommended that single-use plastics should be phased out on all campuses and replaced with biodegradable/compostable products. Plastic waste is one of the most overlooked yet profound issues affecting this generation, while large scale plastic pollution fills dumps and clogs the oceans once these plastics break down they will impact generations to come. Microplastics infiltrate the food chain and eventually make their way to humans, and since they give off toxic chemicals they have a variety of adverse effects on health, the true extent to which is still unknown (NIH.Gov).

Higher ed institutions put out those who will mold and shape the nation for years to come so likewise our institutions should reflect the positive change we want to see in our country. While it might just be a starting point it is our duty to set the pace and scope of progress in our state and to know that in the end, we did our part to make tomorrow better, today.
Recommendation

The Student Advisory Board urges the Oklahoma State Board of Regents for Higher Education to require member institutions to give mental health awareness training to new students to educate them on the importance of mental health and the resources that are available to them on the individual campuses.

Background/Analysis

In a spring 2019 study by the American College Health Association (National College Health Assessment), it showed that nearly 3 out of 5 students deal with overwhelming anxiety related to school and life together, with 2 out of 5 being too depressed to function. Only a small percentage of these students who are struggling actively seek help, about 10-15%. One of the reasons that students do not seek help is the negative stigma that goes along with someone seeking help for their mental state. In providing early discussions about mental health on campus and having open conversations that everyone is a part of, the stigma could be lowered and cause students to be dissuaded by the current norms that are a part of mental health help and actively seek help. Another reason students do not seek help is the lack of knowledge about resources available to them. If there is a required training that gives students knowledge about mental health and what resources their schools offer to them, they have the knowledge of resources available to them. While these would be small steps to take, the lives of students should be of the utmost importance. Requiring these trainings could mean the difference between life and death for some students by being educated in the world of mental health and the tools their campuses give them to combat the issues.
2019-2020 Student Advisory Board Activities

Monthly Meetings. Beginning in May, 2019, members of the Student Advisory Board met monthly, with the exception of July, to receive orientation, discuss issues, make campus visits and work plans, and prepare and vote on recommendations.

Student Leadership Retreat. Jakob Harmon, and Bobby “Trae” Trousdale, participated in the 19th Annual Oklahoma Student Leadership Retreat that took place September 27, 2019 at University of Central Oklahoma.

Oklahoma Student Government Association Events. Spring Congress was held March 6-8, 2020 at the Oklahoma State Capital. Members who attended were Clayton Myers, Robert Couch and Tanner Hurst.

Higher Education Day at the State Capitol. Several members traveled to the State Capitol on February 12, 2019, to work with the state higher education community in representing The Oklahoma State System of Higher Education’s concerns to state legislators and Governor Stitt.

State Regents Tuition Hearing. Student Advisory Board Member Robert Couch and Logan Hutto vocalized student concerns at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Tuition Hearing in Oklahoma City on May 29, 2020.

Campus Visits & Communication. In addition to representing the students in their home institutions, members of the Student Advisory Board networked with student leaders from other campuses at the events listed above and visited with student leaders from the following institutions:

Bacone College
Connors State College
Langston University
Oklahoma Christian University
Oklahoma City Community College
Oklahoma State University – Oklahoma City
Southeastern Oklahoma State University
Rogers State University
Tulsa Community College
University of Central Oklahoma