

SREB

# Sharing the Savings: Reducing Time to Degree

Summit on Cost in Higher Education  
October 21, 2013 | Boston, MA

Cheryl Blanco, Vice President for Special  
Projects, Southern Regional Education Board

# Overview

- Time as a microscope
- Why are students taking 6 years to complete a four-year degree?
  - Students can't get the courses they need to graduate, but they need 12 hours to keep their financial aid, so they take anything they can get in the short term.
  - Students transfer in with 60 credit hours, but the receiving institution doesn't think much of some of those classes, so the student has to take them over.
  - Students haven't bothered to declare a major and have been 'sampling' courses into their junior year.

# Symptoms and Strategies

- College Readiness
- Excess Credits
- Financial aid
- Credits to graduate
- Advising
- Transfer
- Declaring a major
- Accelerated options
- Alternative credits
- Tuition structure

# College readiness

- Number of students not college ready is expected to increase with higher state standards
- Potential significant impact on college developmental ed courses
- Increases the cost of college for these students
- Higher ed collaboration with K-12 on 12<sup>th</sup> grade interventions
- Mandated collaboration and interventions: KY, MD, WV

# Cost of excess credits: Florida

- FY 2004-05 students attempted 780,769 excess credits toward BA at a cost of \$62 million
- Excess hours increased student tuition and fees by \$71 million (an additional \$2,418 in tuition and fees per student with excess hours).
- Most were earned by a small percentage of students: 20% accounted for 58% of all credit hours over the minimum graduation requirements
- Legislation: students pay excess hour surcharge for each hour in excess of the number of credit hours required to complete the baccalaureate degree
- 2012-13: 100% of the tuition rate for each credit hour in excess of 110%

# Cost of excess credits: Texas

- The average Texas graduate with a BA accumulates 27 more credits than required.
- Of the 2011 BA graduates, 58% accumulated more than 135 credits; 35% accumulated more than 150 credits.
- Estimated state general revenue used to support excess credits: \$15M
- Approximation of additional tuition/fees a student earning a BA degree with 27 additional credits would pay: \$6,600.
- THECB proposal: state funding would be eliminated, and institutions may charge higher tuition, after 135 credits, rather than after 150 credits.

# Credits per semester

## 15 to finish campaign - Hawaii

- Fall 2011: 15% of freshmen statewide took 15 or more credits; flagship campus at Manoa: 38%
- 15 to finish campaign
- Fall 2012: 24% statewide and 56% at flagship

# Financial aid

**Incentive Scholarships** – small financial aid awards to students who complete (not attempt) at least 30 or more credits each year

**Minnesota** – more financial aid for taking 15 credits; 57% of low-income aid recipients take 15 or more credits

**Adams State University (Colorado)** – same tuition for 15 credits as for 12 + \$500 incentive scholarship if student completed 30 credits per year

## **Texas: B-on-Time Student Loan Program**

- Incentive to finish on time (4 years) with at least a B average.
- Loan carries a 0% interest rate if the student is not eligible for the forgiveness provision.
- Funded by tuition set-aside funds.

## **Colorado: New Financial Aid Allocation Model**

- Covers Pell eligible, PT and FT students
- Progressive award 'steps' to incent and promote retention and progress - increased allocations to institutions after students reach 30, 60, and 90 credits
- Includes financial 'disincentives' for continuing students past completion of 120 credit hours

# Credits to graduate / credit creep

- Cap or limit the number of credits required for a bachelor's degree to 120 credits
- Exceptions:
  - a) the program is defined as a five-year program
  - b) professional accreditation requirements stipulate a higher number of credits or require coursework that cannot be realistically completed within 120 credits, or
  - c) A program is governed by certification requirements that result in a need for credits in excess of 120 over four years.

# Advising

## E-advising

- Monitor student course-taking
- Plan course availability
- Block students from registering for unneeded courses

## Intrusive Advising

- Regular and frequent advising
- Monitor student course-taking
- Block students from registering for unneeded courses

# Transfer

## Transfer agreements that protect students' credits

- Excess credits may not transfer among institutions
- Statewide agreements: FL, LA
- Institutional agreements – joint or guaranteed admission

# Declaring a major

**Require that students declare a major by beginning of sophomore year**

- reduces 'sampling'
- enables focused advising
- reinforces degree aspirations

## Accelerated options

- Dual enrollment – FL found more than 17% of acceleration courses and exams taken do not result in college credit
- Early College – support low-income high school students who, without significant assistance, may lack the skills and knowledge to enter and persist through college – TX, NC
- Prior learning – TN, OR, MN,
- Competency-based learning

# Alternative credits

## Encourage or require summer study or online credits to graduate

- University of Maryland: Policy on alternative credits requires that on average students complete at least 12 credits (or 10%) outside of the traditional classroom experience.
- By 2010, 12.3% of total credits were completed by alternative means

# Tuition structure

## **Encourage students to finish on time**

- Block tuition or tuition bands vs per credit tuition
- Lower tuition in final year or semester
- Tuition rebate for performance

# University of Maryland

## Effectiveness and Efficiency Initiatives

Goal: promote enhancements in effectiveness and efficiencies in the USM operating model, increase quality, serve more students, and reduce the pressure on tuition.

- 10-Year Progress Report: ***\$356 million in cumulative savings***
- Time to Degree:
  - limit the number of credits required for a bachelor's degree to 120 credits
  - time to degree remaining at lowest level – 8.7 semesters
  - challenges in academic advising - several new programs in advising, including “intrusive” advising, programs for transfer students, and the implementation of information systems that flag students who are off course for a degree in four years, requiring advising before registering for the next semester.
  - students required to complete at least 12 credits (or 10%) outside the traditional classroom experience
  - Provided the additional physical capacity to accommodate between 2,000 – 3,000 students systemwide in traditional classroom settings.