



March 15, 2018

Debra K. Davenport
Auditor General
2910 N. 44th Street
Phoenix, AZ 85018

Dear Ms. Davenport,

On behalf of the Arizona Board of Regents, I am pleased to respond to the audit report, Arizona's Universities - Student Success. We thank you for the tremendous time and effort of your team in preparing the report and its recommendations. We will work closely with the universities to ensure their implementation.

Ensuring students are well prepared with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for the work and life path they choose is central to our work. Accordingly, student success is a primary objective of our state's public universities and a primary focus of our governance. Although the audit report is focused on university-level practices, we feel it is important to share some additional details regarding the board's recent efforts to promote stronger student outcomes at all of our universities and to promote higher levels of educational attainment statewide. We appreciate the chance to offer these additional considerations given the importance of the audit topic.

How the Board Prioritizes and Measures Student Success

While individual university performance measures have been in place for some time, the board added student success as a statewide objective in 2013 as part of our statewide strategic plan. That plan includes performance targets and benchmarks for our universities according to their respective missions. At the same time, the board established quality markers that ensure our offerings represent the level of excellence our students expect even as we scale in size and

REGENTS

Chair Bill Ridenour, *Paradise Valley* * Ron Shoopman, *Tucson* * Ram Krishna, *Yuma* * Jay Heiler, *Paradise Valley*
Rick Myers, *Tucson* * Larry Penley, *Phoenix* * Lyndel Manson, *Flagstaff* * Karrin Taylor Robson, *Phoenix*

STUDENT REGENTS: Vianney Careaga, *UA* * Aundrea DeGravina, *ASU*

EX-OFFICIO: Governor Doug Ducey * Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas

ENTERPRISE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Board President Eileen I. Klein * ASU President Michael M. Crow * NAU President Rita Cheng * UA President Robert C. Robbins

productivity. That quality initiative has since evolved to a full evaluation of quality assurance priorities and practices at our universities, a review and reforms to general education offerings and analysis of student learning evaluations.

Universities are encouraged to set whatever additional metrics and benchmarks necessary for the management of their institutional performance. Once the plans have been developed, presented and accepted by the board, each plan then becomes the baseline against which progress is measured and against which resource requests and investments are made. Student success metrics and other factors closely related to student success are monitored by regents throughout the year through a dedicated academic affairs committee.

Why Student Success Matters

It has long been recognized that higher education is an investment that pays dividends throughout an individual's lifetime, from increased wages to a better quality of life. In fact, Arizonans with an undergraduate degree earn a median wage that is approximately \$20,000 more each year than their peers with a high-school diploma. More than ever, higher levels of educational attainment and skills acquisition are essential for employment mobility. Our state and country face a rapidly changing economy that prioritizes higher education: today, nearly two-thirds of all jobs now demand education beyond a high school diploma.

Our state's public universities are the primary institutions through which Arizonans are able to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. Market factors, a growing population and changing demographics mean that we must not just make our university offerings available to more individuals. We must also forge new ways to make more students -from increasingly diverse backgrounds- successful in learning, skill acquisition and degree completion, so that they - and our state - can be competitive. Students have more choices available to them than ever for their higher education, and they are more responsible than ever for paying for it. For all of these reasons, ABOR and Arizona's public universities put considerable effort into ensuring student success while maintaining their access mission.

Statewide Focus on Student Success Shows Results

By all accounts, this statewide focus on student success is producing results. We are pleased your report demonstrates the impacts of our work. Student enrollment is at a record high, and student diversity has set records as well. Importantly, retention and completion rates continue to climb.

Arizona University System	2009-10	2016-17	Increase	Percent Change
Total Enrollment	130,151	179,102	48,951	37.6%
Graduation Rate	56.0%	61.5%	5.5ppt	9.8%
Bachelor's Degrees	21,110	29,298	8,188	38.8%
Degrees in High Demand Fields	11,733	16,814	5,081	43.3%
Freshmen Retention	78.5%	81.1%	2.6ppt	3.3%

Arizona State University	2009-10	2016-17	Increase	Percent Change
Total Enrollment	68,064	103,567	35,503	52.2%
Graduation Rate	55.8%	67.0%	11.2ppt	20.1%
Bachelor's Degrees	11,810	16,450	4,640	39.3%
Degrees in High Demand Fields	5,487	8,477	2,990	54.5%
Freshmen Retention	81.2%	83.8%	2.6ppt	3.2%

Northern Arizona University	2009-10	2016-17	Increase	Percent Change
Total Enrollment	23,320	30,704	7,384	31.7%
Graduation Rate	50.0%	53.3%	3.3ppt	6.6%
Bachelor's Degrees	3,473	5,901	2,428	69.9%
Degrees in High Demand Fields	2,926	3,547	621	21.2%
Freshmen Retention	72.2%	75.5%	3.3ppt	4.6%

University of Arizona	2009-10	2016-17	Increase	Percent Change
Total Enrollment	38,767	44,831	6,064	15.6%
Graduation Rate	58.4%	59.9%	1.5ppt	2.6%
Bachelor's Degrees	5,827	6,947	1,120	19.2%
Degrees in High Demand Fields	3,320	4,790	1,470	44.3%
Freshmen Retention	78.1%	80.5%	2.4ppt	3.1%

Other Student Success Measures and Monitoring In Place to Promote Retention and Completion

We appreciate the recommendations to improve student success practices at our universities, along with the efforts made by the Auditor General to identify best practices in the field, including those of other universities and higher education organizations. As the auditors have noted, there is no single set of “industry standards” related to student success among public universities. In every instance, however, we strive to adhere to available best practices and to encourage further innovation and scaling of best practices at our universities.

In addition to student success measures discussed in the report, many other factors impact the educational attainment of our students. Accordingly, we extensively measure and monitor outcomes related to:

Transfer Students - Students transferring from community colleges comprise a greater percentage of the student body. ABOR has established transfer student retention metrics to measure the progress and outcomes of this population following their arrival at the universities. We also measure the graduation rates of transfer students to determine their ability to complete their studies as compared to their peers. Likewise, to promote degree completion, “reverse transfer” has been prioritized, a process by which students who started their education at a community college receive an associate’s degree once they complete the requisite coursework, even if they did not complete all of the courses at the community college.

Earnings Power - More than ever, a key measure of student success to graduates and the general public the public is employability after graduation. With our Wages of Graduates and other reports, we track the employment and earnings trends of our graduates and the impact of our graduates on the state economy. We also show how our graduates’ earnings compare to others with lower levels of educational attainment.

Affordability - Affordability is a big factor in determining a student’s ability to pursue and complete a college degree. Apart from tuition reforms such as guarantee programs and efforts to stabilize and reduce operational costs, we also encourage the creation of new degree pathways and other instructional delivery methods, such as online education, to help reduce the costs to students. Financial aid is key to our affordability strategy, and we particularly appreciate the audit’s recognition of financial aid in the report. It is important to note that nearly all financial aid is generated within the university system; only one-half of one percent comes from the state of Arizona. Meanwhile, no financial aid program exists for community colleges. Our annual financial aid report is a key state resource to monitor university affordability and student debt levels. Similarly, we have revamped our state appropriations requests to emphasize funding for resident students to help defray their costs. Over time, it will be essential for our state to reconsider funding and aid strategies so that students are not blocked from attending and completing college for financial reasons.

Pipeline Performance - Student success at the university level begins long before students are enrolled. We actively measure the progress of our Arizona high school students in core courses required for admission. Likewise, we measure the numbers of students who continue on to higher education here and in other states. Once enrolled, we also examine the degrees and majors selected. Examples of these reports and analyses include ABOR reports on Fall Enrollment, High School Report Card, Degrees and Majors, and AZTransfer’s Articulation and

Transfer report. We make all of these reports and our analysis of the related trends available to the public and collectively, these fact sets represent are respected as a leading authority on student success in Arizona.

Statewide Attainment - ABOR's student success measures tie to other state measures of academic progress and educational attainment. We participate in efforts like the Arizona Progress Meter to examine how well our state's P-20 education pipeline is performing. To help raise educational attainment levels in Arizona, ABOR helped spearhead "Achieve60AZ" a grassroots movement to encourage 60 percent of Arizonans aged 25 to 64 have a college degree or certificate by 2030.

Finally, our commitment to student success also extends to the health and wellbeing of our students. Many programs are in place to ensure students have access to the support they need beyond academics, including health, recreation, advising and counseling services. We recently revamped our student health insurance offerings so that students have the coverage they need. With student safety a top concern nationwide, we led a statewide task force to update our campus safety practices to better protect students on and off campus. The board also has increased student engagement and involvement in board and university processes to ensure the student voice is heard in key decisions.

We appreciate this opportunity to outline additional focus on student success at our public universities and the results of those efforts. We hope this helps underscore our commitment to our students and to the continuous improvement of the services we provide them.

We thank you and your team for their dedication to excellence and for the insights they shared with us through this process to help us improve our work.

Sincerely,

Eileen I. Klein
President



March 14, 2018

Debbie Davenport
Auditor General
Office of the Auditor General
2910 North 44th Street, Suite 410
Phoenix, AZ 85018

Dear Ms. Davenport:

On behalf of Arizona State University, I am pleased to respond to the performance audit of Student Success at ASU. We are in agreement with all of your findings, and our responses to your recommendations are enclosed. The report represents a thoughtful analysis of ASU's Student Success initiatives.

My staff and I wish to thank you and your staff for the professional manner in which this audit was performed. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our program and operations.

Sincerely,

Michael M. Crow
President

Enclosure

cc: Mark Searle, Executive Vice President and University Provost
Morgan R. Olsen, Executive Vice President and CFO

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

FULTON CENTER 410, 300 E. UNIVERSITY DRIVE
PO BOX 877705 TEMPE, AZ 85287-7705
(480) 965-5253 FAX: (480) 965-0865
[HTTP://PRESIDENT.ASU.EDU](http://president.asu.edu)

Chapter 2: Universities should establish guidance for more consistently evaluating strategies to achieve student retention and graduation goals

Recommendation 2.1: ASU, NAU, and UA should continue efforts to develop university-wide approaches for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. These approaches should include related policies, procedures, and/or guidance, for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. Their university-wide evaluation approaches should also include guidance on planning the evaluation of each strategy before it is implemented. In addition, these approaches should include guidance on the following:

- Strategy descriptions that clarify the strategy's activities and desired short-term and long-term results, including an explanation of how the strategy is expected to achieve these results;
- Questions the evaluation will answer, including questions for assessing strategy implementation and short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes related to overcoming common obstacles to staying in school and graduating in a timely manner;
- Methods for answering the evaluation questions, including what information is needed to do so, how the information will be obtained, and how the information will be analyzed and interpreted. Additionally, strategies that involve voluntary participation should include methods for addressing the potential influence of self-selection bias, when applicable; and
- Explanations for how evaluation results will be used.

ASU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: As indicated in the report, ASU has created a collaborative workgroup to define the data and analysis infrastructure needed to support coordinated and systematic research and evaluation related to its student success planning and implementation. As a part of this work, the group will develop the specific protocols to design and implement meaningful program/strategy evaluation.

Chapter 3: Universities should improve strategic plans to help achieve student retention and graduation goals

Recommendation 3.1: ASU should:

Recommendation 3.1a: Develop a SMART objective for its goal related to increasing the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students.

ASU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: ASU will develop an objective pertaining specifically to the goal to increase the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students for inclusion in the 2018-20 ASU Five Year Strategic Plan and Arizona Master List of State Government Programs.

Recommendation 3.1b: Consider developing multiple SMART objectives for each of its student retention and graduation goals as appropriate.

ASU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: ASU already includes multiple objectives pertaining to student retention and graduation goals in the ASU Five-Year Strategic Plan and Master List of State Government Programs submitted to The Governor's Office of Strategic Planning and Budgeting each year. We will continue to refine the objectives listed in this document to ensure they best reflect desired achievements to support the specific goals.

Recommendation 3.1c: Develop performance measures and/or revise existing performance measures to assess the progress of its strategies and tasks for achieving its goals related to its freshman retention rate, 6-year graduation rate, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students. ASU should also consider using a combination of multiple types of performance measures to assess different aspects of its performance related to each of its strategies and tasks, where appropriate.

ASU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: ASU already includes multiple performance measures pertaining to student retention and graduation goals in the ASU Five-Year Strategic Plan and Master List of State Government Programs submitted to The Governor's Office of Strategic Planning and Budgeting each year. We will continue to refine the performance measures identified to ensure they provide the best methods for tracking progress towards accomplishment of our goals and objectives.

Recommendation 3.1d: Revise its action plans for its goals related to its freshman retention rate, 6-year graduation rate, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students to specify deadlines and the party or parties responsible for implementing each strategy and task.

ASU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: ASU recognizes the value of systematic and documented planning. However, we will determine the best approach to adding detail as a part of documenting our plans, such that it adds value to our processes and emphasizes action and accountability.

Recommendation 3.2 – 3.3: Not applicable to ASU.

March 15, 2018

Debra K. Davenport
Auditor General
Office of the Auditor General
2910 N. 44th Street, Suite 410
Phoenix, AZ 85018

RE: Response to Auditor General's Report on Arizona's public universities' student success initiatives

Dear Ms. Davenport:

This letter provides Northern Arizona University's response to the Audit Report on the universities' student success initiatives.

Student success has been and will continue to be at the center of NAU's mission, values and strategic planning. This audit reaffirms the work NAU has already accomplished to develop and implement our retention action plan to guide our efforts to meet our 2025 metric target of 80% for first-time, full-time retention. This audit also identifies opportunities where we can apply the same planning and assessment practices more specifically to other student success goal areas. We appreciate this OAG feedback as we strive to further enhance our efforts to improve our students' success and help advance Arizona's educational attainment levels.

Chapter 2: Universities should establish guidance for more consistently evaluating strategies to achieve student retention and graduation goals

Recommendation 2.1: ASU, NAU, and UA should continue efforts to develop university-wide approaches for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. These approaches should include related policies, procedures, and/or guidance, for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. Their university-wide evaluation approaches should also include guidance on planning the evaluation of each strategy before it is implemented. In addition, these approaches should include guidance on the following:

- Strategy descriptions that clarify the strategy's activities and desired short-term and long-term results, including an explanation of how the strategy is expected to achieve these results;
- Questions the evaluation will answer, including questions for assessing strategy implementation and short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes related to overcoming common obstacles to staying in school and graduating in a timely manner;
- Methods for answering the evaluation questions, including what information is needed to do so, how the information will be obtained, and how the information will be analyzed and interpreted. Additionally, strategies that involve voluntary participation should include methods for addressing the potential influence of self-selection bias, when applicable; and
- Explanations for how evaluation results will be used.

NAU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: NAU will continue its efforts to evaluate and enhance its student success initiatives and further develop its university policies and procedures to ensure more meaningful assessment of its initiatives.

Chapter 3: Universities should improve strategic plans to help achieve student retention and graduation goals

Recommendation 3.1: Not applicable to NAU.

Recommendation 3.2: NAU should:

Recommendation 3.2a: Develop at least one SMART objective for each of its student retention and graduation goals.

NAU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: NAU will continue its efforts to evaluate and enhance its student success initiatives and develop one SMART objective for each of the retention and graduation goals.

Recommendation 3.2b: Consider developing multiple SMART objectives for each of its student retention and graduation goals as appropriate.

NAU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: NAU will continue its efforts to evaluate and enhance its student success initiatives and where appropriate develop multiple SMART objectives.

Recommendation 3.2c: Develop performance measures and/or revise existing performance measures to assess the progress of its strategies and tasks for achieving its goals related to its 6-year graduation rate, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students, and the

number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students. NAU should also consider using a combination of multiple types of performance measures to assess different aspects of its performance related to each of its strategies and tasks, where appropriate.

NAU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: NAU will continue its efforts to evaluate and enhance its student initiatives and develop performance measures for the appropriate retention and graduation goals.

Recommendation 3.2d: Continue with its efforts to develop action plans for its goals related to its 6-year graduation rate, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students and these action plans should include the strategies and tasks that will be implemented to achieve the goals and specify deadlines and the party or parties responsible for implementing each strategy and task.

NAU Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: NAU will continue its efforts to evaluate and enhance its student success initiatives and further develop action plans for the appropriate retention and graduation goals.

Recommendation 3.3: Not applicable to NAU.

Sincerely,

Rita Hartung Cheng
President



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
Executive Office
of the President

1200 E. University Blvd. Rm. 200
P.O. Box 210021
Tucson, AZ 85721-0021

Off: 520-621-5511
Fax: 520-621-9323

president.arizona.edu

March 14, 2018

Debra K. Davenport, CPA
Auditor General
State of Arizona – Office of the Auditor General
2910 N 44th Street – Suite #410
Phoenix, AZ 86018

Dear Ms. Davenport,

I have reviewed the preliminary report of the *Arizona's Universities – Student Success* performance audit. Thanks to you and your team for the work that has been put into the audit and for engaging us in a dialogue about how we engage in student success. The report clearly values the work we have done at the University of Arizona by showing that UA has:

- Created a culture of strategic planning and assessment of student success programming and initiatives;
- Established mechanisms to scale those student success efforts over time; and,
- Provided a roadmap for what the UA will set out to accomplish over the next five years.

The report does highlight some areas where the University of Arizona can improve and deepen its work in student success strategic planning and assessment. To that end, we agree with the findings overall, although in some places we might take a slightly different methodological approach to achieve the recommendations set out in the report.

There are several campus leaders that worked hard throughout this process to make this report possible. They spent hours collecting and sharing key data and ensured that the University of Arizona responded to requests from your office in a timely manner. I would be remiss if I did not recognize that hard work, including the efforts of:

- Dr. Allison Vaillancourt, Vice President for Business Affairs and Human Resources, and Audit Coordinator
- Dr. Melissa Vito, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, Enrollment, and Strategic Initiatives
- Dr. Vincent J Del Casino Jr, Vice President for Student Success and Retention Innovation

Debra Davenport

March 14, 2018

Page 2

- Dr. Gail Burd, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
- Dr. Angela Baldasare, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research
- Dr. Jen Meyers Pickard, Assistant Vice President for Divisional Initiatives and Planning
- Dr. Marla Franco, Director of Divisional Assessment and Research

This team has led initiatives that have led to the positive outcomes outlined in the report. This group will also provide leadership as we move forward to address the recommendations outlined in the report over the next six months.

Thank you once again for the thorough review of our student success efforts and for giving the University of Arizona an opportunity to respond.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Robbins, M.D.
President

Chapter 2: Universities should establish guidance for more consistently evaluating strategies to achieve student retention and graduation goals

Recommendation 2.1: ASU, NAU, and UA should continue efforts to develop university-wide approaches for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. These approaches should include related policies, procedures, and/or guidance, for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. Their university-wide evaluation approaches should also include guidance on planning the evaluation of each strategy before it is implemented. In addition, these approaches should include guidance on the following:

- Strategy descriptions that clarify the strategy's activities and desired short-term and long-term results, including an explanation of how the strategy is expected to achieve these results;
- Questions the evaluation will answer, including questions for assessing strategy implementation and short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes related to overcoming common obstacles to staying in school and graduating in a timely manner;
- Methods for answering the evaluation questions, including what information is needed to do so, how the information will be obtained, and how the information will be analyzed and interpreted. Additionally, strategies that involve voluntary participation should include methods for addressing the potential influence of self-selection bias, when applicable; and
- Explanations for how evaluation results will be used.

UA Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: As the auditors know, and recognize in their report, the University of Arizona has built a strong model of consistent assessment for student success strategies in pockets across the campus. With this recommendation, we will bring together leaders across campus to discuss how to implement more consistent practices. This has enabled UA to move the needle on first-year retention last year from 80.5% to 83.5% and six-year graduation rates from 59.9% to 63.5%.

Chapter 3: Universities should improve strategic plans to help achieve student retention and graduation goals

Recommendation 3.1 – 3.2: Not applicable to UA.

Recommendation 3.3: UA should:

Recommendation 3.3a: Develop a SMART objective for its goal related to increasing its freshmen retention rate.

UA Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: The University of Arizona appreciates the use of a Strategic Planning Framework for their analysis. But, there are many approaches to strategic planning, including SMART. The University of Arizona will strive to refine its strategic plan

for Student Success and Retention Innovation and appreciates the broader spirit of the recommendations.

Recommendation 3.3b: Consider developing multiple SMART objectives for each of its student retention and graduation goals as appropriate.

UA Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and a different method of dealing with the finding will be implemented.

Response explanation: The University of Arizona appreciates the use of a Strategic Planning Framework for their analysis. But, there are many approaches to strategic planning, including SMART. The University of Arizona will strive to refine its strategic plan for Student Success and Retention Innovation and appreciates the broader spirit of the recommendations.

Recommendation 3.3c: Develop performance measures and/or revise existing performance measures to assess the progress of its strategies and tasks for achieving each of its student retention and graduation goals. UA should also consider using a combination of multiple types of performance measures to assess different aspects of its performance related to each of its strategies and tasks, where appropriate.

UA Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: The University of Arizona agrees it is reasonable to expect performance metrics.

Recommendation 3.3d: Revise its action plans for each of its student retention and graduation goals to specify the party or parties responsible for implementing each strategy and task.

UA Response: The finding of the Auditor General is agreed to and the audit recommendation will be implemented.

Response explanation: This is a reasonable expectation and the university will make sure to create strategic planning documents that have responsibilities attached to each strategy and task.