Bemidji State University Application for Academy for Student Persistence and Completion

Recent Efforts

1. Provide a brief overview of the institution's students

Bemidji State University had a student FYE in 2012-2013 of 4347 and a headcount of approximately 5000. About 96% of the headcount is undergraduate students, with the balance being students in Master’s programs. Approximately 20% of the University’s credits are taken online.

The University has approximately 50% of students who are the first generation to attend a post-secondary educational institution, 37% of students who are eligible for Pell Grants, and 11% of students who are from underrepresented groups.

Persistence of students from first fall to second fall is 67.1% overall, and considerably lower for unrepresented students (e.g. 40% for Native American students)

2. Provide a brief overview of the institution’s recent efforts to improve student persistence and completion. Include the individuals and groups that have been involved in these efforts.

The institution has developed a Strategic Enrollment Management Committee, which is focused on increasing enrollment by developing strategies and action items to improve student recruitment, retention, and student success. This group includes representatives from the four divisions on campus- Academic Affairs, Student Development and Enrollment, Innovation and Extended Learning and Facilities and Administration. Additionally, students are represented on the committee.

The University also has a TRIO/Student Support Services program designed to increase the persistence and graduation of first generation students, and students from underrepresented groups.

The University has a First Year Experience, and First Year Residential Experience program for students, which is designed to help freshmen learn the skills and other attributes needed to be successful in College. These courses are taught primarily by full time faculty and staff.

The University has a retention counselor specifically focused on improving retention of Native American students.

The University has also developed a re-recruiting strategy to connect the university with students, who were academically eligible to continue the following semester, but had not yet enrolled.

3. List the data sets the institution has related to persistence, retention, and completion and how the institution has used the data to determine ways to improve persistence and completion. Please be specific and relate the data to student types/groups.

The University compiles detailed data on student demographics, which is available at: http://www.bemidjistate.edu/offices/research_effectiveness/fact_books/BSU%20Fact%20Book%20202013-14.pdf.
This information includes fall to fall retention rates and six year graduation for the past ten year (p 26 of the document).

Based on this information and other data on student persistence and graduation, departments are expected to include, in their five-year plans, how they will enhance student persistence and graduation.

Based on data about student persistence and graduation, the University has developed specific targets for improving both persistence and graduation. These include increasing student persistence by 3.5% by 2016, and increasing completion rates by approximately 2% by 2019. http://www.bemidjistate.edu/offices/president/planning/strategic/strategy_f/

The University is also considering strategies designed to specifically enhance the persistence and completion of underrepresented students, particularly Native American students who comprise the largest group of students of color at our institution.

The University is increasingly relying on data to improve student retention and completion. For example, data on course completion for late-registering freshmen who take online course showed a very low success rate. This has led us to have more on-campus sections of high demand courses available to students during late registration sessions, in order to improve the likelihood that these students will be successful in their first semester courses.

As another example, our data shows that persistence and completion rates for American Indian students is low. This has led to plans for workshops this next year to help faculty and staff understand some of the causes of this opportunity gap, and to provide strategies to address this gap.

Scope and Significance

4. Explain the issues the institution wants to address while in the Academy and why these issues are significant and relevant at this time

The issues the institution wishes to address are low rates of persistence and completion both across the University, and for specific under-represented groups, particularly Native American students. Based on Dolence’s 1996 definition, BSU has defined Enrollment Management as a comprehensive process designed to guide Bemidji State University to achieve and maintain the optimum recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of students including any factor that influences a student’s decision to attend or continue enrolling. We recognize that BSU is an enrollment driven institution and we must establish a university commitment to enrollment and then sustain our enrollment for the short and long-term.

Over the past few years, our retention and graduation rates have declined while our new student enrollment has not been consistent. It is our belief the academy will provide needed assistance and direction as the university defines our future.

5. Define the goals for participating in the Academy and the intended impact on the institution as a whole.

The institutional goals are to improve overall student persistence and completion, and to reduce the opportunity gap for students who are members of underrepresented groups. This is explained in more detail in the section on “Purposes and Outcomes”, below.
6. Explain how the goals align with current academic or strategic priorities.

These goals directly align with the University Master Academic plan, which includes student retention and completion as a key element of the plan.

Similarly, the University strategic plan, currently in development, includes Strategy F, with the specific goals of improving student persistence and completion.

**Purposes and Outcomes**

7. Explain the specific outcomes the institution wishes to achieve in terms of the issues and goals. Identify which student groups are your focus.

- Increase student fall to fall persistence for first time, full-time students to 72%.
- Increase Native American fall to fall persistence to 66%.
- Increase six year graduation rates for all students to 52%.
- Increase six year graduation rates for Student of Color to 47%.

8. Describe potential challenges and issues in implementing the initiative.

The idea that improving student success is everyone’s job is not yet pervasive on campus. Although many faculty and staff recognize their role in improving student retention and completion, this value is not yet woven into the fabric of the University.

**Commitment and Capacity**

9. Describe the level of internal support from faculty, staff, and administrators for Academy participation and the planned work on persistence and completion.

As the institution increasingly relies on student tuition dollars for financial sustainability, there is widespread recognition across campus of the need to increase student retention and graduation rates.

Beyond the financial concerns, there is also a recognition that we owe a duty to ensure that as many students as possible who attend our institution or successful in exiting with an academic degree.

10. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

A key group will be the Student Enrollment Management group, which is charged with providing recommendations to enhance student retention and graduation.

In addition, the Admissions staff, the Financial Aids staff, and the Academic Success Center staff will likely be heavily involved in implementing any recommendations.

Finally, we recognize the critical role that faculty play in improving student retention and graduation. Therefore, faculty will be heavily involved in initiatives designed to enhance student success. We will work with faculty through the contractually-defined Meet and Confer process to ensure we have the assistance we need from faculty.
11. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

The University has committed to participation in the Academy for Student Persistence and Completion. In addition, the University is committing time from the retention counselor for Native American Students, the Academic Advising Success Center, and other units of campus to ensure this initiative is successful. The University has 1.5 Institutional Research staff who will devote a considerable portion of their time to this initiative.

Financially, the University has made a substantial investment to improving student persistence and completion, based on the human resources devoted to this effort, as noted above. In addition, the University intends to invest significant funds to focus on student persistence and completion, based on the recommendations that come through the Academy.

In addition, the University plans to involve faculty and staff in in-service days focused on enhancing student persistence and completion.