Enhancing Student Retention and Completion: Gardner Institute Work Plan for this Academic Year

As a part of its Quality Initiative Plan for the Higher Learning Commission to enhance student retention and completion, BSU has agreed to contract with the Gardner Institute and participate in their Gateways to Completion cohort that began this fall [http://www.jngi.org/](http://www.jngi.org/). This relationship will continue for three years. We would like interested faculty to learn more about the Gardner Institute and toward that end have scheduled an informational WebEx with Drew Koch from the Gardner Institute on January 6th from 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. so that interested faculty and staff can attend. Information about the Gardner Institute and the WebEx will be sent out by email yet this fall semester.

BSU will be one of several universities participating in the Gardner Institute’s Gateways to Completion (G2C) Cohort. According to their website, the G2C is “designed to create and implement an evidence-based plan for improving teaching, learning and success in historically high-failure rate courses. Success in foundation level courses, such as: accounting, math, chemistry, biology and writing and rhetoric, is a direct predictor of retention.” Past universities that have worked with the Gardner Institute include North Dakota State University, the University of Rhode Island, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and Florida International University. It is clear from these institutions that transformations may also need to occur in other areas of the university (e.g., in the area of student support services).

What does BSU’s participation involve? Participation in the Gateways to Completion (G2C) cohort will provide BSU with “processes, guidance and tools to support redesign of lower division and/or developmental level courses.” While some of the meetings with interested faculty will be face-to-face, the bulk of the work involves video conferencing (e.g. WebEx or Skype).

During Year 1 (the remainder of this academic year) Gardner staff will work with BSU personnel (faculty and staff such as Institutional Research) to

- Review information (with the help of our IR staff) on our own students (40-50 variables).
- Take a readiness survey that helps determine the specific needs of our faculty, students, and staff.
- Self-select (faculty) for participation.

During year 2, course redesign will take place and early information gathered. Other non-course changes may also be implemented. Course tweaks may be necessary. Gardner Institute staff will work with faculty to

- Learn principles to guide course transformation.
- Learn key performance indicators and evidence.
- Examine evidence-based, successful national models and research regarding student success and course design.
- Offer a teaching and learning academy that involves both face-to-face and virtual workshops in which the self-selected faculty will study, learn and apply promising practices and engaging pedagogies. This work occurs in both discipline-specific and cross-discipline groups.
During year 3, the revisions are implemented in courses. We will also be asked as a part of the Gardner Institute to share our successes. While this is vague, the sharing could be at conferences like the annual meetings of the HLC or AAC&U.

The BSU administration will not require faculty to participate in the Gardner Institute. Instead, we are looking for volunteers who wish their courses to be pilot studies (up to 3 or 4) and for other faculty to be a part of a learning community that supports the work of the directly participating faculty and who are also potentially willing for their courses to be included in the next round.

For the faculty who agree to be in the pilot study, we will provide some duty day pay to help offset the increased workload. In addition, the administration will pay for travel related to attending face-to-face meetings. Finally, the administration will not send course evaluations to students in the courses that are a part of the redesign pilot study while the course is undergoing redesign.