



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

The Vision Project Working Group on Graduation and Student Success Rates

Richard M. Freeland, Commissioner | June 2010

Background

In May, 2010 the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education approved an ambitious agenda for public higher education called the Vision Project. This initiative, which has been endorsed by the leadership of the community colleges, the state colleges and UMass, is based on the premise that Massachusetts needs to have the best educated citizenry and workforce in the nation and that excellence in public higher education is an essential prerequisite to achieving this result.

The Vision Project identifies five key educational outcomes for public higher education that are implied by the goal of national leadership. One of these goals is that Massachusetts public higher education needs to be a national leader in graduation and student success rates. The Vision Project also calls upon our public campuses to be national leaders in achieving comparable outcomes with respect to graduation and student success rates for students from different ethnic/racial, economic, and gender subpopulations. As part of the Vision Project the Department of Higher Education will collect and annually report to the public information on how our public campuses compare with their peers in other states with respect to graduation and student success rates.¹

The Vision project's focus on graduation and student success rates is entirely consistent with intensified national attention on increasing the number and percentage of American citizens who earn a post-secondary degree or credential. The Obama administration recently called for the U.S. to have the highest proportion of students graduating from college in the world by 2020 and that all Americans should be prepared to enroll in at least one year of higher

¹ The specific metrics to be included in the Vision Project's annual report include the following:

Baccalaureate-seeking

- College/university graduation rates from initial institution, with national comparisons and disaggregation by student population groups.
- College/university graduation rates from any institution in the system, state or anywhere in the United States.

Associate's/Certificate-seeking

- Community college completion rates for degrees/certificates, with national comparisons and disaggregation by student population groups.
- Community college success rates that measure a range of student outcomes (including transfer to four-year institution and continuous enrollment), with national comparisons and disaggregation by student population groups.

education or job training. National and state-based foundations (e.g. Lumina, Ford Gates, The Boston Foundation, Balfour and Davis) and new national initiatives (e.g. achieving the Dream, Complete College America, Access to Success, and Getting Past Go) are strong advocates working with institutions and states to address this goal. American higher education is at a crossroads in its history where the emphasis on access is shifting to include an equal focus on completion. Massachusetts should be at the forefront of this movement.

The Working Group on Graduation and Student Success Rates is a broad-based advisory body, appointed by the Commissioner of Higher Education, to make recommendations including on how best to support the work of our public campuses in achieving the goals in this area set forth by the Vision Project. In carrying out this charge, the Working Group will build on campus efforts that have been ongoing for many years and also on the work that commenced from the Board of Higher Education's 2005 Task Force on State College Graduation Rates and the 2007 Task Force on Graduation and Completion Rates at the Community Colleges. In addition, Massachusetts is participating in two national, foundation-funded efforts focused specifically on improving graduation rates and closing attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations: *Achieving the Dream* and *Complete College America*. These two national initiatives will provide resources and technical assistance to the Working Group.

Charge

The charge to the working group is to develop a set of recommendations which will serve to guide the Board of Higher Education, the Department of Higher Education, and all the public higher education institutions in their work to ensure that the public higher education system leads the nation with the highest graduation and student success rates and the lowest educational attainment gaps compared to its peers. The working group will meet on a regular basis from June 2010 through April 2011 and report its recommendations to the Commissioner, who will present the recommendations to the Board of Higher Education.

The charge to the working group contains three main elements:

1. Recommend graduation and student success goals by 2015 and 2020 for the community colleges, state colleges, and the University of Massachusetts benchmarked to peers.
2. Review campus goals and plans to improve graduation and student success rates and make recommendations on how campuses and the Department of Higher Education can most effectively proceed.
3. Review and prioritize existing and emergent statewide policies and practices which support the increase of graduation and student success rates (e.g. developmental education placement, transfer, financial aid, adult learners, and use of limited resources).