

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 10-06

BOARD DATE: May 4, 2010

VISION PROJECT: A PUBLIC AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education approves and adopts the Vision Project as described in the attached document including specifically the following elements:

- the statement of “the vision”;
- the statement of “key outcomes”;
- the proposed metrics; and
- the issuance of an annual report with comparisons between Massachusetts and other states.

The Board directs the Department of Higher Education to place a high priority on working with the community and state colleges and the University to achieve the goals of the Vision Project and urges the campuses to work collaboratively with the Department in this effort. In furtherance of this collaboration, it may be appropriate in particular instances at the campus level for administrators to work with campus governance bodies, and the Board recognizes and respects the importance of such discussions. The Board directs the Commissioner to provide an annual report of progress in implementing the Vision Project that can include recommended changes in any element of this policy.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 15A, Section 9

Contact: Richard M. Freeland, Commissioner



Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

The Vision Project: A Public Agenda for Higher Education in Massachusetts

A Proposal to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Richard M. Freeland, Commissioner | May 4, 2010

Summary

The goal of the Vision Project is to demonstrate that public higher education can act in a unified and focused way to ensure the future well-being of the Commonwealth and that we are ready to hold ourselves accountable for results to the people of the state. The Vision Project pursues this goal in three ways: (1) highlighting the work of our campuses on a limited number of educational and research outcomes that represent public higher education's most important contributions to the strength of the Commonwealth; (2) annually reporting our standing among the 50 states with respect to these outcomes; (3) organizing our work to ensure a targeted and sustained effort to achieve and maintain national leadership with respect to each of the Vision-related outcomes.

Background

The Vision Project was first discussed by the Board of Higher Education at its retreat in September 2009. That discussion built upon an earlier retreat organized by the Secretary of Education at which BHE Chairman Charles Desmond, DHE Commissioner Richard Freeland, and UMass President Jack Wilson participated in an effort to define an overall vision for the Secretariat and to identify a list of priority activities based on that vision. Commissioner Freeland presented a preliminary conception of the Vision Project to the Board of Higher Education in October 2009 and was encouraged by the Board to develop the plan further and bring it back for formal consideration before the end of the academic year. At the March 16, 2010, meeting of the BHE, Commissioner Freeland presented a progress report on work done since October in anticipation of presenting a proposal for BHE action at the May meeting.

Between October and May, the Department of Higher Education has devoted a substantial amount of attention to refining the Vision Project. Commissioner Freeland has met regularly with the leadership of the councils of presidents of the state and community colleges. These discussions have resulted in numerous changes, additions and improvements to the Project. At the March 16 BHE meeting, both President Gurnon, speaking for the state colleges, and President Sbrega, speaking for the community colleges, expressed their support. Commissioner Freeland has also worked with the leadership of the University of Massachusetts regarding the University's participation in the Vision Project, and UMass Senior Vice President Marcellette Williams has reviewed the Project with the five campus provosts. President Wilson has committed UMass to being an active partner, a commitment articulated by Senior Vice President Williams at the March 16 BHE meeting.

In addition to consulting with administrative leaders of the colleges and the University, Commissioner Freeland has met with leaders of the Legislature, the state and community college faculty unions,

and the governance leaders of the five UMass campuses to review the Vision Project and solicit comments and recommendations. He has also made presentations to the business community and to other civic leaders, including the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, and MassINC. Finally, he has begun exploring possibilities for obtaining non-state funds to support the Vision Project, including a discussion with Martha Kanter, Under Secretary of Education for Higher Education in the Obama Administration.

During this same period, senior members of the DHE staff have been working on various components of the Vision Project. Associate Commissioner Jonathan Keller and his staff have been designing the necessary systems of measurement, data collection, and data reporting. Associate Commissioner Keller has met with the institutional research directors of the state and community colleges and the University to review his proposed system of metrics and has also consulted with institutional research professionals around the country to solicit comment and advice on how best to build a program of measurement to track progress on Vision Project goals. In anticipation of continuing activity on the Project, Deputy Commissioners Aundrea Kelley and David McCauley and Associate Commissioner Francesca Purcell have been preparing plans for action to support and enhance the work of our public campuses with respect to college-going rates, graduation rates and student success, and workforce alignment. Finally, Senior Academic Advisor Patricia Crosson has convened a Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment that will provide critical input to the Vision Project with respect to documenting students' academic achievements.

This report summarizes the current state of the Vision Project, including steps that we have taken to organize work on Vision Project goals following action by the BHE.

The Vision

The Vision Project rests on the following statement of the most important contributions of public higher education to the well-being of the Commonwealth:

**We will produce the best-educated citizenry and workforce in the nation.
We will be a national leader in research that drives economic development.**

These statements are not mere aspirational goals. They represent urgent necessities for Massachusetts. It is well understood that the primary advantage of our state in the fierce national (and international) competition for jobs, investment, and talent is the quality of our workforce. We need to be a national leader in the educational attainment of our citizens, and it is obvious that this goal cannot be realized without outstanding work by our public colleges and University. Together the community colleges, state colleges and University educate approximately half of our recent high school graduates who attend college, and the graduates of our public institutions are also more likely to remain in the state and become part of our workforce and our communities than are their counterparts who attend private colleges. Our public institutions also play a key role in educating older, returning students seeking to upgrade their skills.

In the research area, it has become increasingly clear that we need to balance our historically strong private sector with a vibrant, research-active public university. The five campuses of the University of Massachusetts now play critical roles in the economic development of the state through the research conducted by their faculties, through myriad strategic partnerships with the business community that build on that research, through policy leadership in statewide and regional economic planning

activities, and through partnerships with private universities to bring federal research dollars to the state.

It should be understood that in focusing on the most important contributions of our public campuses to the well-being of the Commonwealth, we are not suggesting that these activities represent the full array of purposes of public higher education. Our campuses are deeply concerned with helping students develop their full potential as individuals to lead rich and rewarding lives as well as economically productive and socially constructive ones. Our faculties are engaged in community service activities throughout the state and have forged lasting partnerships to benefit Massachusetts citizens. The colleges and the University contribute to economic development in a myriad of ways that range beyond the specific activities highlighted in the Vision Project, including training contracts with industry and professional consulting. Not all valuable research promotes economic development. The purpose of the Vision Project is to identify and highlight our most critical contributions to the strength of Massachusetts—not to articulate the full set of purposes that our campuses pursue.

It should also be understood that the Vision Project does not seek to impose a uniform set of educational goals on every public institution. Variation with respect to institutional goals—and local determination of those goals—are important reflections of diversity among our campuses and the communities they serve. The premise of the Vision Project is that, even as these institutions maintain their individual characteristics, they can work collectively toward the seven key outcomes we have identified.

The Key Outcomes

What needs to be true for our public campuses to claim success in producing the best-educated citizenry and workforce in the country? The Vision Project asserts that Massachusetts needs to be a national leader in five key educational outcomes:

- *College-going rates of high school graduates*
- *Graduation and student success rates*
- *Alignment of degree production with key areas of workforce need*
- *Academic achievements on campus-level and national assessments of learning*
- *Comparable learning outcomes among different student population groups*

What needs to be true for the University to be a national leader in research that drives economic development? The Vision Project asserts that Massachusetts needs to achieve and maintain a top national ranking in two key outcomes:

- *Research activity related to economic development*
- *Economic activity derived from research*

There is agreement among the leaders of the community colleges, state colleges and the University concerning this formulation of the key educational and research outcomes to be included in the Vision Project.

Public Accountability and Proposed Metrics

The Vision Project proposes to hold public higher education accountable for achieving national leadership in the seven Vision-related outcomes by annually reporting our national standing with respect to each. Our rank will be reported in aggregated form for the three segments (community colleges, state colleges, and University) based on comparisons with groups of peer institutions in other states. It is our intention over time to integrate this report with the currently existing *Performance Measurement Report*, which already includes information on some of the outcomes associated with the Vision Project. There is still work to be done on how best to bring together these two aspects of public accountability.

It should be noted that comparative data on other states are not currently available for all items on which we wish to report; however national data are sufficiently available to allow comparisons with other states with respect to at least one important metric associated with each of the Vision-related outcomes, and Massachusetts data can be used to supplement the national data and provide additional detail on our work in each area. It should also be noted that, wherever possible, all Vision Project metrics will be disaggregated by different student population groups, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and economic status. In the summary of metrics provided below, metrics related to the goal of achieving comparable results for subpopulations are included under each of the other outcomes.

These are the metrics that we propose to include in the annual report on the Vision Project:

College-Going Rates of High School Graduates

- College-going rates of recent Massachusetts high school graduates, with national comparisons.
- College-going rates of recent Massachusetts high school graduates (public only), with disaggregation by student population groups.
- Net migration for college attendance (Massachusetts residents enrolled out of state versus non-residents enrolled in state), with national comparisons.
- Percent of enrolled freshmen who were recent high school graduates and place into remedial education, disaggregated by math and English (state and community colleges only).

Graduation and Student Success Rates

- *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.

Production of Graduates in Key Areas of Workforce Need

- Degrees and certificates produced in key occupational areas, with national comparisons.
- Degrees and certificates conferred in key occupational areas compared to forecasted growth in Massachusetts.
- Student persistence and degree completion in key occupational areas, with disaggregation by student population groups.
- Employment, and/or continuing education, of graduates from Massachusetts public higher education.

Achievement on Assessments of Learning

- Pass rates on a broad range of professional licensure tests, with national comparisons.
- Performance on a broad range of graduate school entrance examinations, with national comparisons.
- Other assessments of learning to be recommended to the BHE at a later time.

Research Related to Economic Development (UMass)

- Level of research expenditures, with national comparisons.

Economic Activity Derived from Research (UMass)

- Level of licensing income, with national comparisons

The proposed educationally oriented metrics to be included in the annual report have been presented to the leaders of the state and community colleges and the University of Massachusetts as well as to campus institutional research directors. There is general agreement that these metrics are appropriate for tracking our work on Vision Project outcomes. The research-oriented metrics have been endorsed by the University.

The only significant concern about the proposed metrics has been expressed by the presidents of the community colleges, who question the validity of the standard IPEDS graduation rate as a measure of student success for their institutions. We agree that the IPEDS measure is a very partial indicator of student success in community colleges, and we therefore plan to report additional data that provide a more complete picture of educational work at this level. We intend, however, to include within the annual report the standard IPEDS measure (the percent of first-time, full-time students who graduate within three years of enrolling) because, though limited, it is a valid measure of a part of what the community colleges do and because it is the standard metric nationally to measure student success. We applaud efforts underway at the national level to develop a better and more comprehensive measure of student success in community colleges, and we will recommend incorporation of an improved metric in this area as soon as one is available and sufficiently accepted to serve as a national standard.

Implementing the Vision Project

Much work is already being done on the outcomes included in the Vision Project. Indeed, each of our campuses has been working for many years to advance the five educationally oriented Vision-related outcomes, and the University has a similarly strong record of supporting economic development through research. The DHE also has a number of ongoing programs related to the goals of the Vision Project, including activities focused on college readiness, student success and workforce development. Activities with respect to the outcomes identified by the Vision Project will not, therefore, begin with Board endorsement of this effort. The goal, rather, is to intensify our focus on the Vision-related outcomes, to work together in a coordinated way across all of public higher education to make sure we are doing everything we can, campus by campus, to achieve the best possible results, and to achieve greater public appreciation of our work by annually reporting our progress toward national leadership as a total public system.

To accomplish this heightened focus and intensified effort, once the vision, the outcomes and the metrics as defined in this report have been approved by the Board, the Department's attention will shift toward identifying the most effective programmatic interventions to advance each outcome. This work, which is currently being planned and organized, will be done collaboratively by staff from the Department of Higher Education, the UMass President's Office and the campuses, as well as other stakeholders, in whatever manner is most appropriate to each of the outcomes.

The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of work to date and plans for future work with respect to each of the key outcomes included in the Vision Project.

College-Going Rates

Work in this area is being led within the DHE by Deputy Commissioner Aundrea Kelley. There are two aspects to this work. One part of this effort will involve an attempt to understand and analyze current patterns of college attendance among graduates of the state's public high schools with a particular focus on identifying disparities among sub populations in college-going rates. This work, which will be done by a small study group drawn from the campuses, will be followed by activities directed toward maintaining the position of Massachusetts as a national leader in college-going rates and also toward eliminating disparities in these rates among major subpopulations, especially those defined by race/ethnicity, economic circumstances and gender. These activities will inevitably involve a high level of collaboration with our colleagues in the K-12 sector and will include a strong emphasis on early college opportunities, including dual enrollment and other programs that expose high school students to college-level work.

The second dimension of our work on college-going rates will focus on improving the readiness of graduates to do college-level work. At the moment, too many students complete their high school diplomas, including passing the MCAS exams, only to place into remedial courses in college. In addition, there are almost certainly students in the state's high schools who are not likely to attend college and yet could do so if exposed to a richer pre-college program. Enhancing college readiness holds the key not only to high college-going rates but also to high graduation and success rates after matriculation, since placement into remediation at the point of enrollment reduces the likelihood of ultimate graduation. Work on college readiness has been a major focus of collaborative activity between DHE and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for an extended period

of time; this work, which will include alignment of college admissions and Mass Core requirements, will continue and expand with a heightened focus under the umbrella of the Vision Project.

Graduation and Student Success Rates

Work in the area is being led within DHE by Associate Commissioner Francesca Purcell. In this aspect of the Vision Project, our work will build on efforts that have been ongoing for some time. In 2007, for example, the Department sponsored a Task Force on Graduation and Completion Rates at the Community Colleges, which made a number of recommendations to improve our work in this area; individual institutions throughout the system have been pursuing this goal over the past three years. In addition, since 2007, four of our institutions have been participating in a national, foundation-funded effort called Achieving the Dream, which is focused on improving student success in community colleges. This work will be incorporated in our efforts under the Vision Project, which will seek to transfer what we are learning through Achieving the Dream to the other community colleges, while more broadly sharing best practices developed by any of the community colleges.

Work to improve graduation rates has also been underway for some time in the state colleges. In 2005, a DHE-sponsored Task Force on State College Graduation Rates analyzed the work of the state colleges in this area and made a number of recommendations to improve our performance, setting an overall goal of being in the top ten state college systems nationally on this metric. Over the past four years, the individual colleges have undertaken a number of initiatives to improve graduation rates and have shown steady improvement. This spring we were able to report that the state colleges have achieved the goal set in 2005 and now stand among the top ten of their peer systems nationally in this area. The Vision Project will build on this work with the goal of national leadership in graduation rates among state colleges.

As part of our efforts on graduation and student success rates, we will work with and support individual campus efforts, and we will lead the state's policy efforts in the context of the Achieving the Dream initiative, as well as the new Complete College America initiative that Massachusetts joined this year. Complete College America is a national alliance of states focused specifically on improving graduation rates and closing attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations. Combining the resources and technical assistance from these two national initiatives, we will have a comprehensive state policy team that will guide state and campus completion goals and plans, and we will analyze existing and emergent statewide strategies to increase graduation and student success rates.

Alignment of Degree Production with Key Areas of Workforce Need

The DHE's work in this area is currently being led by Deputy Commissioner David McCauley. Our public colleges, especially our community colleges, have a long history of collaborating with the workforce development and training communities, as well as the state's employers, to address workforce needs. Many community colleges have advisory boards of employers to advise them regarding workforce needs, and many of the presidents serve on regional Workforce Investment Boards. The community colleges also participate in a state-funded workforce program that provides non-degree training to employers.

In recent years the Department of Higher Education has managed a number of initiatives focused on improving and expanding educational programming in areas of high workforce demand. The two

most established programs are in Nursing/Allied Health and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), both of which have been supported by special legislative appropriations. During the past year the Department has also launched an initiative to bring together our public campuses, especially Boston-area community colleges, with the area's major hospitals to create a partnership focused on developing systemic responses to workforce needs. In addition the Department has worked with the Secretariat of Labor and Workforce Development to sponsor regional forums of educators and employers intended to make sure that educators are aware of emerging workforce needs and trends.

All current work will continue under the umbrella of the Vision Project. However the Vision Project will also involve the DHE in an effort, recently initiated by Governor Patrick, to collaborate with the Executive Office of Education and the Secretariats of Labor and Workforce Development and Housing and Economic Development to develop industry-specific workforce plans in the Life Sciences, Health Care and Information Technology, the three industries currently projected to experience the highest levels of job growth in the state. This initiative, currently in the organizational stage, is intended to move beyond specific workforce programs by establishing a shared understanding of future workforce needs that can inform state policy as well as program development among our colleges.

Academic Achievements on Campus-Level and National Assessments of Learning

The DHE's work in this area is being led by Senior Academic Advisor Patricia Crosson in consultation with a Working Group on Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment drawn from all three segments and appointed and charged by the Commissioner. The Working Group has been asked to address its charge in two phases. During Phase One, which is occurring during the spring 2010 semester, the Group is reviewing the national literature, research and best practices on campus-based learning outcomes and assessment. It is also collecting information on current programs of learning outcomes and assessment among public campuses in Massachusetts and reviewing these in the context of what it is learning about best practices nationally. Finally the Working Group has been asked to consider the recommendations of the Commissioner's Advisory Group on Undergraduate Education with respect to learning outcomes. The basic goal of Phase One is to make sure that every public campus has a well-developed assessment program closely linked to its mission and curriculum.

Phase Two of the project, which will occur during the fall 2010 semester, will involve a review of studies, reports and recommendations by national and state higher education organizations on how student learning assessment can be most usefully linked to statewide planning and policy, performance measurement, public accountability and comparative ranking systems. Based on this review the Working Group has been asked to recommend how best to develop a system-wide learning assessment effort, building on campus-level programs, that enables us to compare the academic achievements of students in Massachusetts with their peers in other states, a key goal of the Vision Project.

Research Activity Related to Economic Development and Economic Activity Derived from Research

These two outcomes, which relate specifically to the University of Massachusetts, will be pursued by the University through currently established structures.

The Challenge of Funding

It will be challenging to achieve the level of success we seek for our public colleges in all seven Vision-related outcomes at a time of severe financial constraints. Nonetheless, we are proceeding on the understanding that the goals of producing the best-educated citizenry and workforce in the nation and leading the nation in research that drives economic development are even more important to Massachusetts in difficult times than in good ones. So we shall use the resources at our disposal to advance our purposes as best we can. We shall also aggressively seek outside funding wherever possible to support various aspects of the Project. And we shall work to persuade our colleagues in the Legislature through our efforts and our achievements that our work is worthy of strong financial support.