



## **DIVERSITY**

November 2017

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## Diversity in Higher Education – Envision 2030

As the state entities in North Dakota collaborate on planning to ensure that we educate our students at the best possible level, a multitude of questions and opportunities are brought forth. Some of the questions deal with how our institutions deliver degrees, what type of education best addresses our population and workforce need, and others. Accompanying these larger questions, there is an emphasis on ensuring equitable education for the diverse populations within the state. In what manner do we make sure that we are reaching the diverse pool of students who require higher education at various levels? If we are reaching the various groups, how do we ensure equitable educational pathways and attainment possibilities? Within this paper, we address some of the areas of diversity and discuss projects and recommendations to strengthen our educational models for diverse populations.

### I. Areas of Diversity

The term “diversity” is not always well understood. When trying to discuss what makes a person or group of persons diverse, arriving at a consensus is not an easy task. During our discussion, the group coalesced around particular areas that are salient to the North Dakota region. The groups listed below may not capture all varieties of diversity, but we feel we have encompassed a large fraction of the population.

Seven major areas of diversity were identified on which to focus as we seek to raise the state’s attainment rate, while fulfilling the region’s educational and workforce needs. The areas are listed as:

- 1) Racial and Ethnic
- 2) Socio Economic
- 3) Age and Focus
- 4) Geographic
- 5) Military status
- 6) Ability
- 7) Gender

Each of the above classifications contains part of a population that is potentially underrepresented in higher education. Focus and programming to reach these groups successfully is needed to fill the state’s work force needs and reach the Envision 2030 attainment goals. Prior to any changes or program implementation, it is first necessary to determine which groups are already witnessing success within the NDUS system, and which groups require further support. Sections II – V give insight into possible pathways.

## **II. Use of Predictive Analytics – Determining Issues**

The Legislative body of North Dakota generously purchased software packages for the eleven NDUS institutions to aid in the study of analytics and compilation of data. One of these packages, Starfish, allows the NDUS community access to a robust set of tools that enables the institutions to flag students at risk, determine areas of concern, and allow for early intervention practices to be implemented. The second of these packages, PAR (Predictive Analytics Reporting), allows institutions to utilize organization tools and services to inventory and measure the impact of student success interventions, benchmark overall institutional success. It also allows institutions to utilize historic and current data to predict ranges of student success and need. Along with Starfish, it allows schools to predict which students may be at risk, allowing for the important early intervention steps to be implemented. These packages can also be used to determine equity levels among differing populations and among educational tiers. The differing levels of attainment ranging from certificate programming to bachelors degrees need to be assessed within all the categories mentioned in section I. Only after gaining this understanding can effective programs to aid attainment be applied.

Coupled with the analytical tools above, it is important to have an accurate model for tracking NDUS students. Currently, IPEDS data are utilized within the state system. IPEDS data focus on first-year, first-time, full-time students as the group to track from institutional entry until attainments are reached. The majority of North Dakota students do not align under this rubric, resulting in the knowledge that IPEDS is not the most accurate tracking method. Many of our students begin their educational career, stop for a period, and then re-enter the institution at a later date. Other students transfer within the NDUS systems. Still others begin their educational pursuit as a part time student due to family or work obligations. Each of these particular pathways does not stop the potential success of the student, but IPEDS has no filter for tracking their advancement, penalizing the institutions and removing the ability to continue following the student's progress. A method for tracking students within the NDUS system better is SAM, which counts students who are part-time, students who have stopped and re-started their educational pathway, students who have transferred, etc. It is better aligned with the North Dakota student population and allows for more accurate tracking. We do not believe that IPEDS must be removed entirely, but the acknowledgement that this particular program does not truthfully count NDUS student populations must be realized. The official use of SAM will aid in mitigating this particular issue.

## **III. Assessment of Current Practices – Alternative Educational Pathways**

In accordance with determining current issues as described in section II, an assessment will be required to help gauge what are the current practices already being undertaken at each of the eleven NDUS institutions. We are already contacting

schools to determine what is offered outside the traditional two- and four-year degree pathways. After we establish these offerings, an assessment of the success of the alternative degrees will need to be undertaken. Are students successful upon receiving the degree? Do the degrees target the correct population? What other areas should be offered, and what areas should be removed. Alternative pathway degrees often serve a work force that changes rapidly. Institutions need to remain nimble to keep programming updated and to remain abreast of industry and workforce needs.

The greater multitude of these degrees may not reside in the traditional two- or four-year degree. The NDUS institutions are already offering many alternative pathways. Further study of these programs with a focus on diverse population needs will need to be undertaken. Among the programs that other institutions are currently offering for alternative pathways are: 2+2 programming, certificates, adult learning, apprenticeships, deeper-style internships, boot camp degrees, badges, reverse degrees, and stackable credentials. Programming for diverse groups in many ways overlaps with the Bakken U program. This convergence can be quite positive. If we have programs that are overlapping, it will be possible to share resources, a crucial need in order to realize success of effective outreach to our diverse population groups. Combining resources where possible will be a crucial aspect of the NDUS system as implementation strategies to reach the goals of Envision 2030 are initiated. Online teaching may help reach students in rural areas, but the campus environment will remain important. A majority of students undertaking online learning live within 100 miles of the campus, and supplement online learning with traditional courses. National surveys have revealed that students feel they garner about 25% of their collegiate knowledge from the classroom. The rest is learned from within the higher learning “community” through athletics, social clubs, academic clubs, internships, etc. These areas are not reproducible in an online environment and are areas that students still crave and need. Learning is not a solo venture, but rather a group undertaking, with all the little tributaries that feed into the river of knowledge.

#### **IV. Program Implementation/Change**

Implementation and change that occurs within specific programs as discussed will be based upon the outcome of studies as described in sections II and III. The conclusion of aforementioned studies will help determine which groups have equity at different levels; how marketing materials and information is reaching particular groups; and what other support may be necessary to help students in these groups engage within their potential educational corridors.

## V. Resources and Recognition

A key component toward success of the goals will be the sharing of resources among the NDUS institutions where feasible and helpful to the project. As this topic was discussed in section III, it will not be described further at this time.

The state of North Dakota must be an active partner in the Envision 2030 process for attainment goals to become a reality. There are multiple areas in which the state will be required to help clarify facets of education as the process moves forward.

What will constitute a completion? What will need to be changed under State and Federal recognition? Many of the programs described within this document are not traditional two- and four-year degree programs. Many of them may not be credit bearing in the historical sense, yet they are no less important to reaching the goals of Envision 2030. As alternative pathways are discussed, planned, and implemented, a funding model based on course completion is no longer sufficient for institutions to meet new needs for the various populations, especially those individuals pursuing a non-traditional pathway of education.

The state model will need to expand to give recognition for enrollment of students in underserved populations.

The state will have to give special recognition for students who required remediation and have successfully completed this program while still being enrolled in their institution. At present, most institutions have implemented minimum requirements for admission. Many students in diverse groups may not have been given the opportunity to meet these minimum requirements. Since the background of these students may not fully prepare this person for the rigors of higher education, extra help and support from the institution will be needed in terms of tutoring and advising. Since students falling within these groups have historically had a lesser chance of reaching attainment, institutions are hesitant to enroll them. For institutions willing to take the chance on a student who many not have the traditional minimum requirements, and who many require extra help to reach attainment, the state needs to recognize when milestones in these pathways are met. Recognition for students who completed required remediation while still being enrolled at the institution. Recognition for those students who complete successfully their first year and return for their second year. Extra recognition for these students when they reach attainment within whichever program they have chosen. This is a group of students who deserve an equitable chance to complete higher education at some level. For institutions willing to reach out and help fulfill their dream in this endeavor, the state must recognize the extra risk and work required of that institution.

The state will also need to give recognition for institutions enrolling adult learners. Adult learners most often require schedules that do not conform to the typical educational – workday. Adult learners require much more 24-hour outreach and communication. In institutions where funding is already strained, serving this group is not always financially feasible. The funding model will need to carry some recognition of the extra costs required to effectively teach the adult population within North Dakota.

Recognition for the completion of alternative pathway areas mentioned in sections III and IV above along with recognition of institutions whose students graduate and remain within North Dakota for a certain period of time (3-5 years) upon graduation, thus strengthening the state’s workforce.

To implement the studies described within this document, funding will be required for initial assessment and marketing. The state can aid the individual institutions to a great extent by working with the schools in each area to determine the best type of assessment and marketing strategy. An umbrella policy that is identical for each of the eleven institutions will not be successful. Each part of the state has a niche population with differing needs that must be contacted and recruited. The assessment and marketing campaigns must understand and build upon these niche areas.

## Summary

Diversity within populations occurs within multiple variables across a range of definitions. For Envision 2030 to be successful, each of the multiple areas of diversity needs to be understood, studied for current equity and future needs, with programming then set in place to reach our population effectively. This paper outlined various techniques to help begin to understand where is the NDUS system at present along multiple educational pathways including; enrollments of diverse populations; programming for diverse populations; and assessment for planning better in the ensuing years and decades for diverse populations. As discussed, the institutions and state will need to partner where possible to share information, help support each other, and funnel resources into the correct programming and support projects. We will build upon what we already have in place for assessment tools and programming to begin clarifying our current successes and needs with respect to diversity and education.