



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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February 26, 2019

President James Smith
Eastern Michigan University
202 Welch
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Dear President Smith:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on student retention, persistence and completion goals. No further reports are required on this topic.

The Standard Pathway Year Four Comprehensive Evaluation is scheduled for 2021 – 2022 and will include an embedded report on strategic planning.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2027– 2028.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Steph Brzuzy (sbrzuzy@hlcommission.org); (800) 621-7440 x 106.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: February 26, 2019

STAFF LIAISON: Steph Brzuzy

REVIEWED BY: Steven Kapelke

INSTITUTION: Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. James Smith, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 12/3/2018 on student retention, persistence and completion goals.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2017 Comprehensive Evaluation. The team recommended the following:

EMU must identify specific, projected, short-term and long-term (at least 6 years into the future) performance goals and benchmarks for student retention, persistence and completion.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The Eastern Michigan University (EMU) interim report on student persistence, retention and completion is presented in a clearly written narrative supplemented by a series of appendices that include the institution's Four Year Retention and Degree Completion Improvement Plan (Summary) and the University's 2013 Strategic Plan table, showing Goals and Objective by Strategic Theme, among other documents. Indications are that the report is thorough and candid.

REPORT SUMMARY: The EMU interim report begins with a brief contextual section that provides an encapsulation of the institution's recent efforts toward improving student success, noting, for example, the priority given the subject in the University's current strategic plan. In March 2018, the institution formed the Retention and Completion Team to examine the matter of student persistence. The Team, which was constituted broadly of University constituent groups reviewed data pertaining to First Time in Any College (FTIAC) student persistence and established what the group found to be realistic goals in student retention and completion.

The body of the report begins with a section titled "*Data Analysis*," in which the institution provides an overview of key data pertaining to student success, noting, for example, the University's "*respectable*" first year retention rates for its FTIAC cohorts, which varies from 71 to 76%. Other notable figures include the most current six-year graduation rate of 45.1%, which is proximate to the average level of all Carnegie R3

public universities. The tables below contain additional comparative numbers in these areas.

Table 1. Trends of FTIAC 1st-Year Retention Rate (in %)

Cohort Start Term	Cohort Size	1st-Year Retention Rate
Fall 2010	1,955	76.1
Fall 2011	2,119	75.3
Fall 2012	2,612	73.8
Fall 2013	2,848	72.5
Fall 2014	2,588	74.7
Fall 2015	2,846	74.6
Fall 2016	2,785	71.7
Fall 2017	2,783	71.6

Table 2. Trends of FTIAC 4-, 5-, 6-Year Completion Rate (in %)

Cohort Start Term	Cohort Size	4-Year	5-Year	6-Year
Fall 2008	2,167	12.9	27.0	36.6
Fall 2009	2,196	13.1	30.9	40.1
Fall 2010	1,955	13.0	32.3	40.7
Fall 2011	2,119	14.1	31.7	40.4
Fall 2012	2,612	16.6	36.8	45.1
Fall 2013	2,848	19.1	38.9	
Fall 2014	2,588	19.9		

Here the report also cites the work of the Retention and Completion Team in its review of “a *broad range of student persistence data...*,” and identifies a series of “*highlights*” from this review, including, but not limited to the following items as articulated in the report.

- *Both retention and graduation rates for underrepresented ethnic minority students are five to ten percentage lower than it for White and Asian students (See Appendix E)*
- *The attrition rate between the beginnings of the 2nd and 3rd year is 12%.*
- *The African American EDGE group (special admission) has low first-year retention rate (56.7%), while the same group has an attrition rate of 16% between the beginnings of the 2nd and 3rd years*
- *African American students present low completion rates, both in overall population and in certain subgroups (e.g., male, male+Pell, EDGE).*

- *First-generation students show a slightly lower retention rate in both 1st and 2nd years.*
- *First-generation students who received Pell have a significantly lower 6-year graduation rate (27.6%) than the university average (39.2%).*

The next section of the report, “*Proposed Student Success Goals*,” presents an enumerated list of goals for student success—based on both the institution’s mission and what the report terms “*recent improvements in student degree completion*.” These goals are presented in two broad categories—FTIAC Retention Rate Goals and FTIAC Graduation Rate Goals—each of which has multiple objectives. For example, in the FTIAC Retention Rate Goals category, the first objective is to “*Recover the overall 1st year retention rate to 75% by 2021 (for fall 2020 cohort), and then maintain it at a 75% range.*”

The last content section of the report’s narrative outlines the “*Plan of Action*” that will serve to aid the institution in reaching its student success goals. The plan is summarized in a series of bulleted points that identify “*high-level and high-impact actions the University has implemented...*” These include, but are not limited to, the following two items:

- *Continued systematic improvement of student advising structure and student support services. In an effort to improve retention and degree completion Eastern Michigan University has established five academic college advising offices across campus, and the University Advising and Career Development Center. All new students entering EMU are required to attend an academic advising session during the fall semester before registering for the winter semester. The University Advising and Career Development Center works with all students who are undeclared/undecided. Advisors, along with career coaches, work with this student population to help guide students toward the declaration of major in a timely manner.*
- *Optimized the institutional scholarship award algorithm to recruit better prepared students. In Fall 2012, EMU implemented a new Emerald scholarship program offering higher scholarship awards to attract larger quantity and quality of students. Table One shows the positive impact of that program on enrollment growth. Table two shows the first entering class (Fall 2012) from the new scholarship model has produced a 4.7% increase in the six year graduation rate.*

Emerald Scholarships have three award ranges; high (\$4,500), medium

(\$3,500), low (\$2,500). The high award has a one-year retention rate of 86.6%, medium is 72.4%, and low is 66.4%. Students with no academic scholarship had a 56.5% retention rate. The four year graduation rate for the high award is 30.8%, medium is 11.7%, and low is 7.6%.

REPORT ANALYSIS: The EMU interim report on student success (persistence, retention, completion) data indicates that the institution has made considerable progress in tracking these data and establishing a plan for this activity moving forward.

More specifically, the report documents the University's efforts in developing data sets that enable the institution to track specific factors with regard to student success. The information provided in the first "content" section of the report, which focuses on current data, deals most prominently with First Time in Any College (FTIAC) students, noting for example the first year retention rates and four, five and six-year completion rates for those same students. (Tables showing these figures are supplied in the Report Summary section above.)

Also, this section of the report cites an important "structural" improvement in the collection and review of student success data, with the formation of the Retention and Completion Team, a committee consisting of a broadly constituted group of individuals from across the University. In addition to providing an important resource to its student success efforts, the work of the Team appears to have centralized the institution's activities in the collection and review of these data. The report provides a number of examples of key data derived from the Team's efforts.

The report also makes it clear that the University has established goals for retention and completion for FTIAC students; these goals are mission-oriented, have basis in the institution's strategic plan, and are specific in nature, as reflected in the list of completion goals below.

2. FTIAC Graduation Rate Goals

- a. **Baseline Goal:** Increase the overall 6-year graduation rate to 48% by 2021 (fall 2015 start cohort), and then maintain it at a 48% range.
- b. **Mid-Range Target:** Increase the overall 6-year graduation rate to 50% by 2023 (fall 2017 start cohort) and sustain rate at that level.
- c. **Aspirational Goal:** Increase the overall 6-year graduation rate to the top 20% level of all Carnegie R3 public universities by 2025 (that is: 53.4% at present).
- d. **Reduce the performance gap for first-generation and underrepresented groups;** specifically, to increase the 6-year completion rate by 3% for (1) first-generation students and (2) ethnically underrepresented groups.

Finally, the report provides documentation pertaining to the institution's "*Plan of Action*" with respect to student success, presenting in a bulleted list of planning items, intended or already activated initiatives. These include activities in a number of areas, including improvement of the University's student advising procedures and its "*institutional scholarship award algorithm*," which it anticipates will assist in recruiting better prepared students. In addition, the "*future actions*" noted in the report include the implementation and improvement of the degree completion plan originally developed in 2014.

Analysis Concluding Statement: Although the EMU actions to improve its efforts in student persistence, retention and completion are still very much works in progress, indications are that the University has made substantive progress in this area, having established key data sets, identified goals for retention and completion, and developed action plans going forward. The institution is to be commended for the quality of its interim report.

The Higher Learning Commission will not require additional reporting on this topic. However, the institution should assume that the HLC Peer Review Team conducting the University's Standard Pathway Four-Year Comprehensive Review in AY2021-2022 will examine carefully its continued progress in this area.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): Core Component 4.C pertaining to goals for student success.

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

☒ Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.

☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.

☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.

☐ Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on student retention, persistence and completion goals. No further reports are required on this topic.

The Standard Pathway Year Four Comprehensive Evaluation is scheduled for 2021 – 2022 and will include an embedded report on strategic planning.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2027– 2028.