



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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Assembly Higher Education Committee February 4, 2016 Assembly Bill No. 2564

Requires Certain Undergraduate Students to File Degree Plan and Requires Public Institutions of Higher Education to Develop Pathway Systems to Graduation

The state colleges and universities support improving advising to students and believe a legislative mandate is not necessary. Therefore we oppose the bill.

Our institutions are already making improvements to provide better advising to students and keep them on track toward a degree. For example:

Montclair State University

- ◆ is committed to ensuring students are “on the right track” and enrolled in the proper courses. In response to this commitment, the University has a department focused on the oversight of student compliance with the requirement for freshmen to meet with advisors to discuss and gain approval for course selections, prior to registration for their second and third terms of study. To avoid the problem of enrollment in unnecessary courses, every student has received consistent outreach and monitoring. Working collaboratively with the academic departments, a collective effort has resulted in vastly increased student/advisor contact; this past fall, over 97% of the freshmen met with an advisor and went on to register for the next semester.
- ◆ Students who have attained 45 or more credits but have not selected a major are now required to meet with advisors. To enable juniors and seniors to make smart choices and to prevent enrollment in courses that ultimately do not count toward their degrees, all students who acquire 60 credits must declare a major. There is intensive outreach to all students in this category and has ensured 100% compliance with this policy, providing these students (as well as those who change their majors) with specific options and resources that are necessary to facilitate major selection.
- ◆ To identify and eliminate roadblocks that may be preventing timely graduation, there has been extensive outreach to students who entered the University in fall 2008, 2009 and 2010. As an adjunctive support to the efforts made by the academic departments, students are provided overall guidance to help facilitate program completion. Monthly contacts to 100% of this student cohort have helped to encourage increased course enrollment and course completion; our 4-, 5- and 6-year graduation rates continue to climb.
- ◆ Four-year graduation and two-year graduation plans are provided as **outlines** for students to follow so that they complete their degree requirements within the University’s recommended timeframe.

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*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Rowan University*

*Stockton University
Thomas Edison State University
William Paterson University*

New Jersey City University

- ◆ keeps students on track with their career goals through Supplemental Instruction (SI), a trademarked method of delivering academic support to students through a “collaborative learning environment.” Through this peer mentoring initiative, students learn effective ways to study and learn. SI serves historically challenging gatekeeper courses, providing several 1 – 1½ hour sessions per week, facilitated one-on-one by student leaders who attends classes with the students. These sessions target study skills, collaborative exercises and integration of course concepts without “re-lecturing” the material. SI, which targets subjects and not students, is voluntarily attended and is not a course requirement. SI helps students to develop study strategies and self-evaluate their progress.

Ramapo College

- ◆ has instituted two academic policies to streamline students’ time to degree as well as help keep them on track with their degree goals. The first is that all students must declare their major by the time they reach 64 credits. This ensures that after a student has completed his/her general education requirements, they are decided on the degree path they want to pursue and begin to work on meeting the requirements of those degrees. The second is that Ramapo College requires all students to complete two core courses as well as any developmental courses attached to those courses to make sure that students have the required skills and competencies to be successful in their upper-level core requirements. These two courses are Critical Reading and Writing 102 as well as General Education Mathematics.
- ◆ is currently in the fourth year of a five year academic advisement development plan. In this stage, students must meet with their assigned advisor in their first, second, third, and sixth semesters to review their academic four year plan, discuss performance in key academic courses relative to their intended majors and begin to discuss plans for participating in extended experiential learning activities (internship, co-op, study abroad) before graduation. This year’s graduating class, the class of 2014, will be the first class to have gone through a multi-stage mandatory advisement program in Ramapo’s history. Each of the touch points of the advisement plan has assigned intentional student learning outcomes that were created by a campus-wide Academic Advisement Council which includes faculty representatives from each of the College’s five schools as well as professional advisor representatives from various units on campus.
- ◆ Ramapo signed on with Starfish Retention Solutions to purchase both their case management and early alert software programs. In the first year of its roll out, all faculty and instructors who have first-year students and all Educational Opportunity Fund and TRIO grant students are asked to submit progress surveys on student performance in the classroom that might be key indicators that a student is struggling early on in the semester or that the student needs additional assistance. Built into the early alert system is an automatic referral process to our Center for Reading and Writing, where instructors can refer students for help with their writing and an automatic appointment is generated. The

software also has a “close the loop” capability, allowing assigned professional advisors to let faculty advisors know when outreach has been made and discuss follow-up plans. *In its first iteration, Ramapo faculty had a 62.5% participation rate, far outpacing the average participation in a roll out reported by Starfish of only 42%.*

- ◆ In fall 2012, Ramapo College instituted its first living learning community targeted at undeclared students. The program, which links two general education requirements together to explore thematic learning connections across disciplines, also places students on the same floor of housing with their classmates. This intentional connection of living and learning allows for more targeted academic programming in the residence halls as well as allowing students to assimilate quicker into the college community. Plans are underway for an expansion of the living learning community to larger groups of first-year students to allow for similar synergies and targeted programming to be developed around first-year students.
- ◆ In 2012-2013, Ramapo hired its first Director of Student Success, responsible for overseeing the areas of academic advisement, first-year experience, testing and the peer mentorship program. The synergies provided by merging these areas under one director allows Ramapo to focus its energies on the notion of student success and keeps student success on the forefront on all four of those fronts.

Stockton University

- ◆ Stockton University’s Coordinated Actions to Retain and Educate (CARE) Program assists students with their overall experience by helping students navigate and maximize the benefits of various academic and student life resources available to them at Stockton. Upon joining the program, students are assigned a personal mentor (PM) or a peer mentor to guide them. Personal Mentors are Stockton faculty and staff while Peer Mentors are sophomore, junior, or senior Stockton students who have volunteered to assist students in this Program.
- ◆ First-Year Studies (FRST). FRST is a program within General Studies that provides first-year students with coordinated experiences in academic reading, writing and mathematics. The program serves as an introduction to college work by offering materials to build a firm base for academic achievement. The program also provides a wide variety of pedagogical means for expanding the abilities of first-year students in a positive and holistic learning environment. The curriculum includes courses associated with the basic skill competency requirement as well as other courses especially suited to the academic needs of first-year students.

Thomas Edison State University

- ◆ has a pre-graduation quality assurance review is conducted for all students who have completed at least 100 credits towards their bachelor degree or 54 credits toward their associate degree. During this review, any discrepancies or problems are discussed with the student so that they will stay on track towards graduation.

William Paterson University

- ◆ In 2013, WPU reorganized its Academic Development division to more closely align support services (tutoring, academic counseling, and personal counseling) with areas of greatest student need. Three staff members and \$60,000 in additional resources were moved into this area to enhance services.
- ◆ The College uses the Retention Alert module within Ellucian student services system to notify students whose GPA has fallen between 2.25 and 2.5, students who are first time enrollees, and students taking their very first online course at Thomas Edison State College. These are typical touch points where students may need some assurances that we are available to assist them if they so desire. If a student feels that some assistance is needed and notifies us, the college will contact them directly and assist as necessary with suggestions on how to improve their GPA or what course might be a good next course to take to keep them on track.