



May 19, 2022

Higher Education Subcommittee
Legislative Finance Committee
New Mexico State Capitol
490 Old Santa Fe Trail
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Madam Chair Lundstrom and LFC Higher Education Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for addressing the importance of enrollment management today. We truly appreciate all the hard work and outcomes from LFC's Higher Education Subcommittee last year and this past session. Higher Education probably experienced the best legislative session in the last 13 years. We look forward to continue working with the subcommittee this interim, and making collaborative issues a priority of the committee's work plan.

Attached is a document that was introduced to the committee last summer and most recently with the LFC staff. It contains CUP's thoughts regarding key enrollment/retention strategies and related considerations. This document has evolved from discussions starting in 2020 and subsequent LFC and Higher Ed Subcommittee meetings. The document outlines statewide enrollment trends, contributing factors, retention challenges, tools and strategies to address enrollment and retention issues, and specific areas that may require legislative and executive support.

Hopefully this document can be used as a tool to allow the LFC, HED, PED, and other interested groups to work together to address the items in the letter and help improve higher education enrollment in New Mexico. This has to be a team effort to accomplish this goal.

Finally, we look forward to continuing to work with the subcommittee and LFC analyst Connor Jorgenson to advance this vital effort.

Sincerely

Marc H. Saavedra Executive Director,
NM Council of University Presidents

ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES

I. HIGHER ED ENROLLMENT TRENDS

National Trends:

- Declining enrollments are a concern for Higher Ed institutions across the country.
 - The declines stem, in part, from demographics, economic pressures, the COVID pandemic, changes in instructional delivery, and a host of other market factors.
 - Nationally, total post-secondary enrollment increased from 17.2 million students in 2005 to 20.4 million in 2012, but by 2015 it had dropped to 19.1 million. (*US Census Bureau*)
 - Enrollment growth during the Great Recession was largely fueled by a 30% increase in students who had not attended any school in the prior year.
- The pandemic has further depressed enrollment numbers.
 - Fall 2020 reports continued to show downward trajectories nearly across the board in Higher Ed and by late September enrollment was 4% lower than the previous fall.
 - The largest enrollment declines were among first-year students, with 16% fewer freshmen attending college this year.
 - Four-year for-profit colleges were the only group that beat the national trends. (*National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*)

New Mexico Trends:

- The massive influx of students enrolling in NM public Higher Ed institutions (HEIs) during the Great Recession caused degree numbers to skyrocket, beginning 4-5 years after the first Recession cohort enrolled. After six years passed, the number of students declined.
- From 2010-11 to 2019-20, total enrollment at NM public HEIs declined by nearly 23%.

II. CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Demographic Changes
 - The decline in Higher Ed enrollment tracks with a 7% decline in NM residents ages 1-14 since 2012 along with a 5% decline in residents ages 15-24. This represents an overall loss of 40,000 potential new students for NM HEIs between 2012 and 2030. (*PEP Report*)
- Transfer Student Numbers
 - In today's environment, 38% of all college students are transfer students.
 - From 2016-2020 transfer students received more than 40% of all baccalaureate degrees granted by NM public HE institutions.
 - Enrollment at NM's two-year colleges has decreased by more than 9% since 2015, and has fallen by nearly 23% since 2009.

- With fewer students in the system, transfers from NM two-year colleges to four-year institutions have declined by more than 15% in the past five years. (*PEP*)
- Improved Time-to-Degree
 - A paradoxical factor in the enrollment decline is institutions' success in graduating much larger numbers of students in a shorter period of time (*PEP*) through improved advising, student support, and reducing requirements for many baccalaureate degrees from up to 150 credit hours to 120.
 - Eight years ago, 15% of UNM's students graduated in four years; now more than 35% do so. This means that 20 of every 100 UNM graduates who would have enrolled for a fifth and possibly a sixth year no longer need to do so.
 - Similarly, UNM, NMSU and Tech discontinued offering remedial Introductory Studies (IS) courses in 2015, in an effort to transform the first-year experience. This resulted in placing incoming students in college-level courses more quickly, shortened time to degree, and reductions in the financial burden on families.
 - Tech graduated its four largest-ever classes (2017-20) after this change.
- Student Retention and Loss of Financial Aid
 - Increasing the Lottery Scholarship's credit hour requirement from 12 to 15 SCH, in 2014-15, has become the principal reason Lottery recipients lose their scholarship eligibility.
 - Decreasing the percentage of tuition covered by the Lottery Scholarship (to as low as 60% in 2017-18) also contributed to declines in Higher Ed enrollment.
- Commitment: NM Higher Ed institutions are committed to improving recruiting, retention, completion, and time-to-degree.

III. THE HIGH-SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE CONNECTION

- Need for Data Collection & Analysis
 - The NM Legislature recently appropriated funds to improve HED's data collection/analysis capabilities including \$100,000 to purchase national student clearinghouse data, \$401,000 for a longitudinal data system, and \$250,000 to report statewide performance metrics.
- Data Requests re: NM High School Graduates

As noted in our presentations to LFC in October and December 2020, we are seeking some definitive answers about NM's high school (HS) graduates.

 - We know the number of English learners increased from 26.7% of the cohort that graduated in 2016 to 32.3% of the cohort that graduated in 2020, but we need to know what % of those who graduated are English learners.
 - We know the number of economically disadvantaged students increased from 60.6% of the cohort that graduated in 2016 to 64.4% of the 2020 cohort, but we need to know what % of NM HS graduates are economically disadvantaged.
 - We need to know what % of NM HS grads are considered part of the "at-risk" population with respect to the Yazzie/Martinez decision.

- We need to know where NM HS graduates go after graduation (i.e., community college/university, in-state/out-of-state institutions, public/private colleges, Gap Year, religious mission, military, employment/unemployment).
 - We need to know how many NM dual credit students graduate high school and enter college as sophomores and above.
 - We need to know what % of NM HS graduates arrive at our Higher Ed institutions prepared for college-level work in their chosen field.
 - We need to know if NM's four-year public Higher Ed institutions have lost market share – or if they have simply right-sized enrollment after the Great Recession.
- Data requests re: Community College graduates and transfers
We also seek some definitive answers about our 2-year college graduates.
 - How have two-year colleges' associates' degree numbers, and their transfer missions, been affected by the increasing emphasis on awarding certificates?
 - What percent of two-year college graduates go on to baccalaureate institutions and where do they go? (In-state/out-of-state, public/private)
 - What percent of NM community college graduates arrive at their baccalaureate institutions prepared for university-level work in their chosen field?
 - Other Key Questions
These questions must also be addressed in formulating enrollment targets & strategies.
 - How much time do NM High School counselors spend helping their students plan, prepare and apply for college?
 - Is there a mis-alignment of NM High School curricula and college requirements?
 - If a mis-alignment exists, how does it affect NM HS graduates' decisions as to whether or where to attend college and their ability to attain educational goals?

IV. SETTING GOALS / DEVELOPING WORK PLANS

- New Mexico needs to set its direction so Higher Ed can follow its lead
 - Develop a consensus-based, long-term state economic plan focused on the professions and industries of the future.
 - Establish an advanced workforce to complement NM's existing workforce.
 - Tie education to this strategy – and let Higher Ed focus on fields that prepare workforce for emerging industries and professions. Higher Ed to align students' educational paths and award attainment to NM's workforce needs
 - Build upon Higher Ed institutions' RPSPs and link this strategy to core research areas, and innovation/commercialization activities.
- Higher Ed's Role in Building NM's economy
 - Research universities can lead in creating an ecosystem that supports an innovation-based economy.
 - An innovation-based economy will offer more opportunities to students graduating from NM HEIs – this creates positive feedback in system.

- Universities and colleges must examine how their courses offer real-world experience to students to remain competitive and do their part to prepare graduates for the labor market.
- Focus on keeping students in NM/give them a reason to stay. Consider incentivizing career-focused internships that develop applicable skills.
- Work to expand and strengthen NM's entrepreneurial culture.
- Graduate students who create jobs, not just fill them
- Establishing Goals for Higher Ed
 - Need LFC, HED & institutions to establish the direction and set appropriate goals for Higher Education.
 - Enrollment increases will not boost state's economy unless we can get more graduates into the workplace faster – and keep them in NM.
 - Institutions will need to increase the number of college graduates in defined areas to facilitate economic development.
- Role for Out-of-State and International Students
 - Important for NM HEIs to reach/recruit/educate a reasonable share of college-bound population, but NM's lack of growth and aging population may make true long-term growth difficult to achieve.
 - Consider what role we want out-of-state and international students to play in bringing new dollars into the state, developing an educated workforce, and enhancing tuition revenues.
- Role of Research
 - An advanced workforce is built upon attracting and retaining students through leading research endeavors; promote HEI research institutions' productivity to attract students to HEIs.
- Degree Alignment, Articulation & Transfer
 - Continue working with HED on degree alignment, articulation and transfer.
 - Given that NM has multiple colleges of education, etc., better alignment of degrees in name and licensure would help. (Example: UNM does not offer a degree titled Early Childhood and Multicultural Education, but this specialty is a key component of its Family and Child Studies baccalaureate program.)

V. TOOLS / STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ENROLLMENT, RETENTION & COMPLETION

- Improving Student Success
 - Wraparound Student Support Services: Data mining to improve support for students, increase graduation rates (text alerts, etc.)
 - Guided Pathways (like meta-majors) to reduce excess credit & time-to-degree
 - High-engagement teaching and learning practices increase student success
- Facilitating Transfer
 - Common Course Numbering

- Ensure all Gen Ed credits transfer; use shared student learning outcomes (SLOs)
- Articulation Agreements, establishing (non-Gen Ed) course equivalencies with partner institutions
- Transfer Center with guides assigned to help transfer students navigate system
- Reverse Transfer – allowing CC students to transfer to university, which awards them Associates’ upon completion of 60 SCH
- Commonalities in training and credentialing of advisors – UNM is hosting Advisor Transfer Summit/Institute, Sept. 29-30, 2021.
- Greater collaboration between 2-year & 4-year schools, like TX Transfer Alliance
- Handling “Swirlers” (students who attend multiple schools simultaneously)
 - Swirling requires coordination and complicates advising – and issues have increased with the increased availability of virtual class offerings.
 - Doing warm hand-offs with virtual classes requires that advice from both institutions align.
 - NM Institutions must keep up with navigation issues, aligning processes, credit transfer, transcript delivery, etc.

VI. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Legislative Lottery Scholarship
 - Number of recipients losing scholarship because of 15 SCH requirement
 - Unpredictable funding
- Transfer Students
 - Limited Financial Aid Opportunities
- High School & College Curriculum Alignment