SUBJECT: Non-Traditional No More – Year One Report

The Non-Traditional No More project is drawing to the close on its first year, and the five working teams (data, academic affairs, student services, finance, and communication) have sought to identify a complete array of policies and practices that serve as barriers to student re-entry into the Regental system. A set of recommendations have been compiled by the various teams for review and Non-Traditional No More: South Dakota 2010 Recommendations report provides an overview of the issues worthy of policy revision or additional review during the second year of the project.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discussion and approval.
Non-Traditional No More:
South Dakota 2010
Recommendations
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At the national level, public higher education is facing an urgent crisis in its ability to remain globally competitive as other countries continue to outpace our ability to foster postsecondary degree attainment for its citizens. Last year the South Dakota Regental system was selected along with four other states (New Jersey, Arkansas, Colorado, and Nevada) to participate in a grant project entitled Non-Traditional No More: Policy Solutions for Adult Learners sponsored through a joint effort with the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

The goals of Non-Traditional No More are to 1) increase adult learners’ access to and success in postsecondary education; and 2) stimulate and guide policy and practice changes that will create a more navigable path to degree attainment for Ready Adults. Specifically, WICHE and the Lumina Foundation aim to assist the five states as they identify their “ready adult” population. As the project achieves data solutions for identifying adult learners in each state through a data working group, it will concurrently help create a navigable path to college success for adults through a comprehensive focus on four other policy areas (academic affairs, student support services, financial aid and financing, and communications). Working groups based on these five areas have been established for the Regental system, and an initial WICHE facilitated meeting was held in Pierre on May 14th which hosted more than 40 representatives from the six Regental institutions in attendance.

Remaining Competitive

The United States currently ranks first in the world for the number of high school students going on to participate in some form of postsecondary experience after graduation representing 62% of all high school graduates. South Dakota consistently ranks 1st in the nation in this area with more than 69% of our graduates going on to some type of postsecondary experience. The United States currently ranks 10th among developed countries in the proportion of 25-34 year-olds with a postsecondary degree, dropping from 7th last year. For example, 55% of Canada’s 25-34 year old population has completed an associate’s degree or higher, compared with only 39% of this same population in the United States. According to data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, South Dakota must dramatically increase the number of college graduates in the coming years to remain competitive.
competitive. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau depicts the outlook that South Dakota faces as it strives to ensure that at least 55% of its adult population has the necessary postsecondary credentials. Their findings report interesting numbers for South Dakota if the state is attempting to become competitive by 2025 (see Table 1). Overall an 8.3% increase in annual associate’s and bachelor’s degree production is needed in the public sector only at approximately 411 more degree completers each year.1

As with many other Midwestern states, South Dakota has experienced consistent declines in its secondary education enrollments. When examining the data presented in the High School to College Transition Report for the past six academic years, there has been a decline of 634 graduates when comparing the 2002 totals with those students who graduated in 2008. While the Regental system has not seen enrollment declines at similar levels, data demonstrate that a smaller number of high school graduates are going on to public postsecondary education in South Dakota each year. Specifically, the system reported a decline of approximately 100 students in 2008 when compared to numbers reported in 2002 (see Figure 1). This continued decline warrants that the state may begin to make concerted efforts to foster retention of existing students, or facilitate efforts to encourage the return of its Ready Adults.
With this context in mind, representatives from the Board of Regents staff and campus leadership from throughout the Regental system have worked this past year to identify policies and practices that may be adversely impacting ready adult re-entry into the system. Based on the conversations that occurred in each of the five policy teams, a set of recommendations are forwarded for Board of Regents consideration. The report that follows provides detail behind each of the 21 recommendations which include:

**Data Team**

1. **Early Exit Analysis**: Evaluate the success of the change in the pre-registration calendar to determine whether it has allowed campus personnel the opportunity for identifying stop out students prior to becoming Ready Adults.
2. **Department of Motor Vehicle Data Matching**: Match the Ready Adult student data with information available through the South Dakota DMV and provide to the communication team for direct marketing opportunities.

**Academic Affairs**

3. **Integrated General Studies Program**: Approve the new program request for the General Studies programs at BHSU, DSU, NSU and USD to serve as a useful parachute options for Ready Adult students.
4. **Institutional Credit Hours and Academic Amnesty**: Continue with the existing credit hour and academic amnesty policies while encouraging institutions to work with campus concierge representatives to highlight the flexibility that exists with these two policies.
5. **Transfer of Credit**: Modify the existing BOR policy to allow for credit by examinations to count toward the globalization requirement campus IGR’s.
6. **Online Learning Student Services**: Create online learning seminars or workshops as a fundamental student service for Ready Adult students who may be completing coursework through this delivery method.
7. **Hybrid Course Expansion & Coding**: Expand the number of hybrid courses offered in the system and create a tracking code that better identifies courses that use this approach to course delivery.
8. **General Education & Remedial Courses**: Further evaluate the general education courses that are impacting Ready Adult completion, and expand the use of developmental refresher programs that can assist transfer students as course placements are determined.
9. **Prior Learning Assessment**: Create a common set of guidelines throughout the system for evaluating student prior learning assessment.
10. **Academic Calendar**: Encourage campuses to expand alternative scheduling (i.e., night courses, 3-4 week sessions, etc.), that would better meet the schedules for Ready Adult students.

**Student Services**

11. **Convenient Admissions Process**: Allow student service representatives at the off-campus locations the authority to make follow-up queries and admission decisions based on
existing practices employed at the on-campus locations.

12. **Transfer of Credit**: Develop a comprehensive transfer of credit matrix that would aid in expanding the capacity for off-campus personnel to make transfer of credit decisions for Ready Adult students and determine the most likely path toward degree completion.

13. **Conditional Admissions Status**: Allow for conditional admission status for Ready Adult students that would allow them to complete preliminary coursework as they are determining the most appropriate degree path.

14. **Cohort Learning Groups**: Monitor the success of the cohort learning groups at University Centers and determine whether unique characteristics of Ready Adult students could be used to create a similar approach for specific degree programs.

### Finance & Financial Aid

15. **Special Tuition Rates**: Continue to explore the merging of Self- and State-Support tuition, while currently allowing institutions the authority to grant state support tuition rates to those students who meet the Ready Adult criteria.

16. **Financial Holds**: Allow each institution the authority to remove non-academic level registration holds. Grant discretionary authority to remove financial holds up to $1000 for Ready Adult students or create alternative repayment opportunities that would allow re-entry.

17. **Need Based Scholarships**: Continue with efforts to develop a need-based scholarship program funded through a general state appropriation and seek statutory authority for campuses to offer reduced tuition for Ready Adult students who meet the criteria defined by the Board of Regents.

18. **Admission & Re-Admission Fee**: Remove the Re-admission fee for students who have previously been enrolled in the Regental system, and allow individual campuses the authority to waive the admission fee for students who meet the Ready Adult criteria.

### Additional Issues & Communication

19. **Concierge Model**: Implement a concierge model or point of contact on each campus who will be responsible for assisting Ready Adults with the important academic, student service, and financial issues they will face as they attempt to re-enter.

20. **System Orientation Toward Graduation**: Create a new metric for more accurately evaluating institutional completion rates that accounts for the growth in Ready Adult and transfer students toward campus graduation totals.

21. **Comprehensive Communication**: Integrate the College Preparatory project with efforts to encourage Ready Adults, non-traditional and transfer students to enter the Regental system.
To better understand the Ready Adult population in the Regental system, a series of data extracts were explored using the common student identification number. Students with 90 or more credit hours during the Fall 2003 semester were compared against the following academic terms to determine the number of students who “stopped-out” within the system and have yet to return to complete their degrees. This analysis was then performed for each subsequent semester leading up to Fall 2008, and each new academic term was then compared forward to identify the entire Ready Adult population during the past five academic years. Using this data mining procedure, an unduplicated count of “stop-out” students were identified and evaluated to determine their degree progression prior to exiting the system. Only degree seeking students with 90 or more credits toward graduation were identified, and over the last five years a total of 1,889 Ready Adults had left the Regental system (see Figure 2 for a distribution of these students across the five academic terms). This represents an average of 378 students each year that are lost in the system, and with retention rates similar to the overall campus enrollments at the six Regental institutions (see Figure 3). The report that follows details a variety of key data elements related to these students in the Regental system.

**Academic Indicators**

Two different academic indicators were examined to determine the extent that student academic success was a predictor for determining their departure from the Regental system. First, each year the Board of Regents reviews a report that details those students in the system who have maintained good academic standing (maintained a 2.0 cumulative GPA). Over the past five years, 90% of all students in the system have maintained this GPA requirement; those failing to do so are either placed on probation (6%), or suspended (4%) due to their inability to raise their GPA above 2.0.
When examining the cumulative GPA for the Ready Adults in this population, only a small percentage of them had failed to maintain their academic good standing and had been placed on probation (2%) or had been suspended (2%). Second, all baccalaureate (48 credit hours) and associate (32 credit hours) degree seeking students are asked to sit for the proficiency examination each year once they have met the credit hour threshold established by the Board of Regents. These students are asked to meet established qualifying scores on four content areas for the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), and annual pass-rates for each of the four areas have remained consistent over the past five years. As a whole, 9% of the students in the system fail to pass at least one of the exams that measure student proficiency in Reading (3%), Writing (6%), Science Reasoning (1%), and Mathematics (2%). Ready Adults in the system did not appear to be students who were struggling with the CAAP examination as less than 1% of these students failed to pass or refused to sit for the exam.

Ready Adults face a number of exigencies that may cause them to withdraw just short of degree completion (change in career, work full- or part-time, have dependents, are single parents, are primary caregivers, etc.). An evaluation of the Ready Adults’ data (including those that had enrolled outside the system after departure) indicates that the average cumulative GPA for these students was a 2.87, yet their final semester GPA was significantly lower at a 2.12. Comparison of this data when classified into one of five GPA categories demonstrates that 860 of these students had received a 0.00 term GPA in their final semester of enrollment suggesting that many simply walked away from their semester. A small number (142) had received below a 1.0 GPA which is likely to include students who walked away before the end of the semester but had completed enough of their courses to warrant a grade higher than an F. What is most significant is the fact that 762 of these students obtained a 3.00 or higher in their courses during that final semester, yet failed to return the following semester to advance toward degree completion (see Figure 4).

A limited amount of financial data does exist on these students, and data in the student information system was merged with financial aid information to better understand the amount of financial assistance received by Ready Adults. The largest portion of Ready Adult funding came in the form of loans with 54% of these students relying on this revenue source to continue their education. Only 25% of these students received grants, and 16% drew from other (e.g., institution specific scholarships, state scholarship programs, etc.) revenue sources. Figure 5 depicts the funding allocations from these three sources broken into five funding amounts. Most troubling in this data is the fact that the majority (33%) of those students who did utilize loans borrowed $3,000 or more to cover educational expenses.
The function of the communication working group is to develop marketing plan(s) that can aid Ready Adults in their return back into the Regental system for degree completion. Two different programs should aid Ready Adults in South Dakota to complete their degree. First, the Electronic University Consortium (EUC) was created in 2000 by the South Dakota Board of Regents to coordinate distance education course offerings of the six public universities. The mission of the EUC has been to leverage state technology investments and make effective use of the unique strength of each public university to better serve the people of South Dakota.

Second, the six public institutions have extended their program offerings to the University Center (Sioux Falls), Capital University Center (Pierre), and the University Center (Rapid City) in an attempt to attract a growing number of adult learners to pursue postsecondary degrees. It became clear in our discussions regarding practice that the issue of place was an important factor. As we considered issues relating to services or organizing those services it depended on where we were serving the student. The university centers are organized specifically to serve the non-traditional student which affects the scheduling of classes, the services provided and the hours of operation maintained. Nevertheless, even at the centers there are differences in organizational models, staffing, programs, etc. that affect the ability to provide certain services at a certain level. Thus, “best practice” recommendations for better serving non-traditional students are not necessarily made with one place or another in mind. Using permanent home zip codes for Ready Adults, spatial maps were created to determine the county locations for the highest proportion of these students in South Dakota.

When examining the geographic placement of the Ready Adults during their final semester in the Regental system, it is evident that a systematic approach will be necessary to best ensure that the largest number of students is given opportunities for degree completion. For instance, Figure 6 demonstrates that a sizable portion of these students are located in the counties where the three off-site centers have been established in addition to the counties where the six Regental institutions are located. However, there are a significant number of these students who are located in rural areas throughout the state who may benefit from programs offered through the EUC.
Employment growth out to 2014 will be strongest in career fields that require some level of postsecondary education, with at least 17% or more of the new job growth in the next five years requiring associate, baccalaureate, or graduate degrees. The percentage is even higher in South Dakota with 27% of our job growth expected in fields that require postsecondary degree completion, suggesting that our state must take action if it is to remain competitive in an ever-changing innovative knowledge-based economy.

**Establishing Recommendations**

Using this data as a framework for understanding the Ready Adult population in South Dakota, the five teams have been working during the past year to identify the complete range of policy and practice barriers that exist within the Regental system. As these issues surfaced, a policy matrix (see Attachment I) was used to help focus team discussions on the policies/practices that reside within their purview of control. The non-traditional student is markedly different than the traditional student and those differences manifest themselves in the environments we create to serve both types of students. Traditional student-oriented campuses create robust social and cultural environments where young men and women are encouraged to learn, grow, participate, and experiment. Non-traditional focused campuses create career-oriented learning environments with highly-focused services that directly support learning and progression to degree. This does not mean that a traditional student-oriented campus cannot serve non-traditional students, but rather that it must thoughtfully adapt its practices, developed over many years, to effectively do so.

Many of the decisions made on a daily basis throughout the system have unintended consequences as it relates to the Ready Adult and non-traditional student populations. Having a number of council members serve on the taskforce teams has helped ensure that each council considers the impact decisions will have on Ready Adults. As councils have taken action on a
number of issues over the past year, the system has been forced to be quite reflective in assessing how system goals often work in opposition to providing opportunities for the re-entry of these students. In the short period of time that we have been working with this project, campus and system personnel have learned to examine policy changes with a new lens, while also becoming more self-reflective when considering how existing policies and practices might be reshaped to help Ready Adults, non-traditional, and traditional students within the system. In the end, the impetus for the system efforts here are to seek changes that would first help us attract “ready adults” to our system to finish their degree. In the longer term, these changes should also be good for all non-traditional students.

**Maintenance of Effort & Concierge Model**

Although we are only completing the first year of a two year project, we have focused considerable emphasis on establishing mechanisms that allow institutions to maintain the level of effort needed for targeting Ready-Adults in the future. One key feature discussed at the first intrastate meeting is the fact that success for this project will ultimately rest on the development of a “point of contact” who will serve as the designated individual responsible for working with Regental and non-Regental students interested in returning. Having someone who is well versed in the issues these students face, and helping them to overcome barriers that are beyond system or institutional policies will be extremely important. Other institutions have referred to these as “campus champions” who have a primary responsibility for assisting this student population.

At the bottom of the Policy Matrix depicted in Attachment I, one will find a column that denotes the point of contact which spans the complete range of academic, student affairs, and financial areas under review in the project. In line with the ‘campus champion,’ or “point of contact” has been the concierge model employed by institutions, whereby one single individual or office takes responsibility over the comprehensive array of services that reduce the burden brought about by re-entry. As we work through the various recommendations from the various teams, you will find references to this individual/office for ensuring that the ongoing maintenance is in place for capturing a larger pool of Ready Adults, as well as non-traditional students that will continue to be an important enrollment base for the South Dakota public university system.

Secondly, a number of institutions have instituted campus level coordinating committees which include representatives from each of the five teams involved with this project. Although to date this project has focused on a system level approach, it has been recognized that institutional level practices must be changed to ensure successful integration into the future. To further encourage this institutional level work, we hope to recast the original five teams into separate institutional teams. Creating this framework during the second year of the project is intended to provide a model where best practices can still be shared within an organizational structure at the campus level needed for fostering institutional level changes as we move forward. Potentially, the institutional teams would be led by the institutional point of contact. A number of these individuals would also serve on a system level committee responsible for ongoing policy and practice review.
Data Team Recommendations

The fact that the system has a common Student Information System (SIS) in place has made it relatively easy to mine the data to identify potential Ready Adult cohorts. Routine procedures have been created for identifying students with 90 or more credits who have stopped out prior to degree completion. We continue to monitor these data, and additional analyses are still underway to include associate degree students into the Ready Adult framework. Attempts to evaluate outside data sources have been unsuccessful as it has been difficult to locate additional databases that would provide us with employee post-secondary experience. Additionally, conversations with the Department of Labor have also produced limited results, as they do not have this level of data available in their existing data system. Our ability to coordinate efforts with a longitudinal data system that includes K-12, technical institutes, and labor will be instrumental in ensuring that we cast a large net that can successfully capture the Ready Adult population in South Dakota.

Early Exit Analysis

One particular goal has been to better target students before they have exited the system by monitoring pre-registration patterns. The entire system operates on a common academic calendar, whereby pre-registration dates are set by representatives on the Academic Affairs Council (AAC). During the Spring 2010 semester, AAC approved a change to the registration calendar in an effort to better identify and then communicate with students who fail to pre-register for the upcoming semester. Because the majority of the registration process occurs through an online portal managed by the Regents Information System, we were able to successfully move registration forward and condense the window by more than a week. Success from this effort will be available in the upcoming weeks.

Department of Motor Vehicles

One of the most useful tools for locating Ready Adults is to match SIS data with information available from the Department of Motor Vehicles. The current statute that governs the data sharing practices of the DMV warrant matching of data from other state agencies and a MOU is currently in place that would allow for a broader sharing of information on an annual basis to determine whether stop out students are still located in South Dakota. DMV procedures require that they conduct the data match and Board staff should be encouraged to coordinate efforts in the coming months to determine the location of the 2,500 Ready Adult students who have been identified from the data analysis employed for this project.

Data Team Recommendations

1. Early Exit Analysis: Evaluate the success of the change in the pre-registration calendar to determine whether it has allowed campus personnel the opportunity for identifying stop out students prior to becoming Ready Adults.
2. Department of Motor Vehicles Data Matching: Match the Ready Adult student data with information available through the South Dakota DMV and provide to the communication team for direct marketing opportunities.
As conversations have unfolded, groups have been able to target potential system policies that are perceived to hamper institutional flexibility for accommodating Ready Adults. Specifically, the Academic Affairs team has targeted a range of issues that warrant approval by the Board, and AAC representatives from each campus have discussed each of the proposed modifications that are detailed below.

**Integrated Studies Major**

During its February 2010 meeting, AAC considered BHSU’s Intent to Plan a BS in Interdisciplinary Studies and related to this item was a proposal by USD for a Bachelor in General Studies degree. During AAC discussion, it was noted that the Education Discipline Council has been discussing the need to have this type of program at the system level. Campus representatives reviewed the benefits of approaching this degree program as a system resulting in a BA or BS in General Studies to take the place of the BS in Interdisciplinary Studies. USD, BHSU, DSU, and NSU indicated a desire to be part of the general studies program. SDSMT did not want to participate (SDSU already has the interdisciplinary studies program) and BHSU requested an expedited review on a joint proposal to ensure that the degree be offered as a part of the Fall 2010 academic catalog.

The intent behind the degree is to serve a unique group of students which would require flexibility for students who meet Ready Adult characteristics. A number of institutions throughout the country attempting to target Ready Adults have developed what they described as “parachute programs” intended to provide a lifeline for individuals who fall short of completing degree requirements in professional fields. A sizable number of the Ready Adults identified in the Regental system have come from programs such as teacher education, nursing, pharmacy, and engineering. Many are within just a few credits of degree completion when considering the total number of credit hours completed. However, many of their degree paths are derailed due to an inability to be admitted to programs with enrollment caps, or a failure to recognize career interests until just prior to graduation. When these students reach this particular benchmark (sometimes just a semester away from graduation), it is difficult to transfer into other degree opportunities without a future that requires 2-3 additional semesters of...
coursework. USD agreed to take the lead on creating the joint proposal with an orientation to creating a Bachelor of General Studies program to ensure that students would not need to meet college specific degree requirements (BA degrees require foreign language and BS programs require additional coursework in math and science). A common curriculum has been recommended with SDSU’s Interdisciplinary Studies program serving as a starting point for the program. The item is up for approval by the Board during the June meeting.

**Institutional Credit Requirement**

Section 1.C of Board policy 2:29 specifies the minimum credit hour requirements for baccalaureate and associate degree programs in the Regental system. As other states have recruited Ready Adult students, it has been noted that a sizable number will seek out a degree at institutions where they are just short of meeting program requirements. For example, the system has an institutional graduation requirement where students must complete 32 credit hours at the institution to receive a baccalaureate degree. Students need to complete 32 (baccalaureate) or 16 (associate) credit hours within the system or at the institution itself before they can get a degree granted from that campus. Current BOR policy notes the required number of institutional credits required for graduation. It also notes that “this requirement may be waived for students enrolled in the set of majors offered at the system’s Centers which include in the established programs of study common courses offered by one of the other Regental universities.” At our centers we encourage university cooperation and we seek to eliminate course offering duplication. It may be better policy to more strongly mandate that courses at the Centers or through the EUC are, by definition, institutional. Beyond that issue, the policy does provide flexibility for the Vice President for Academic Affairs to waive this policy in situations where just cause is shown. Such flexibility is common in the language used to describe a majority of system level policies, and it appears that institutional practice has often been to readily enforce as mandated from the system office.

**Academic Amnesty**

Although Board policy 2:10 provides guidance on academic amnesty, concern has been raised that the policy in its current form focuses more on traditional students. Section 5.2 and 5.3 in particular presents specific timeframe requirements that were discussed by AAC. Regardless of the
policy, it is apparent that broader student recognition of this particular policy appears necessary as recruitment efforts are undertaken. There appears to be places where a little bit more flexibility might be warranted for Ready Adult students that fall outside of the scope of what we have for more traditional students. Ultimately, the policy itself allows flexibility already for Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs on each campus to waive that policy/requirements for certain circumstances; this won’t be changed and will remain in place. When a possible concierge model for the system is put into place, over time these individuals should develop a fairly grounded idea of what the President or Vice President on each campus would be willing to grant those exemptions for.

Transfer of Credit

Considerable discussion has occurred focusing on transfer of credit for those Ready Adults who may be located in South Dakota, but have not yet taken courses in the Regental system. Much of the focus here has been on the timeline for reviewing student transfer coursework, yet two issues in section 3 and 10 of Board policy 2:5 are worthy of discussion. Section 3 notes that life experience is not a transcriptable option, yet prior learning assessments are becoming more commonplace for non-traditional students being recruited around the country. Additionally, section 10 places a threshold on the number of credit hours that can be obtained via validation methods which is a policy worth reconsidering in light of this initiative. One thing noted in policy in the area of credit by examination is that it is not allowable for students to be able to use credit by exam or credit through portfolio to meet the globalization and writing intensive graduation requirements that are specific to each campus. AAC agreed that removing the globalization criteria from that policy would be a good choice, but they were still insistent that the writing intensive portion be kept and not be allowed to CLEP out of it or any other type of portfolio assessment.

Online Learning Student Services

The delivery of distance based courses continues to grow for internal and external students in the Regental system. This growth has increased the need for providing students with a different range of services that assists them in being successful in the learning environment that exists in this new instructional setting. This is further warranted for non-traditional students who may not be as familiar with the technology based skills needed to complete coursework delivered through mediated channels. To address this issue, DSU has been offering a CSC 292 Topics: Online Learning course that seeks to prepare students for the technology based skills that are useful for successfully completing online courses. Developing this course as a workshop or seminar as a general service for students may be warranted if a larger percentage of non-traditional or Ready Adult students are returning to the system.

Hybrid Course Expansion

A successful model for course delivery has been the use of hybrid courses. These courses blend face-to-face instruction and distance delivery by allowing students to interact directly with faculty for a limited number of class periods and then work asynchronously at a distance for the remainder of the course time. Hybrid courses are used routinely in the system. For example, the University Center used this delivery method for the two year AS in Business hybrid program with mixed results.
However, hybrid courses are difficult to track since no specific tracking code is used to differentiate these course types from face-to-face or online courses. It is recommended that a code be used for better tracking this course type while also seeking to grow the number of hybrid courses offered throughout the system.

**General Education & Remedial Courses**

Certain general education courses as well as developmental courses do serve as barriers for degree completion for some students. For example, Committee A reviewed a report during the May meeting describing the success of a MATH 103 course offered at USD and BHSU for improving student success at a level higher than that achieved in College Algebra. Other courses are likely to exist that have made it difficult for students to complete just one or two courses required to obtain their degrees.

Additionally, developmental courses can be a bigger issue for students that have migrated to South Dakota with some college coursework but no degree. These students are asked to take the COMPASS exam and, eventually, they find themselves needing remedial math or English to finish. It was discussed that a number of institutions have some software or programming in place that allows students to get some math, English, and other refreshers that help them overcome the remedial requirements that they might have. Expansion of such services throughout the system appears to be warranted.

**Prior Learning Assessment**

A number of institutions throughout the country have expanded the approach to Prior Learning Assessment which provides students with the opportunity to have life or work experience count toward college credit. Currently, the BOR credit by examination policies include prior learning assessments, but there are no uniform guidelines used throughout the system as each institution has worked to develop their own approach to reviewing and evaluating these experiential learning options. A common set of guidelines would be beneficial and it is recommended that the system assessment committee review existing guidelines and determine the feasibility for developing a common system approach.

**Academic Calendar**

Adult students look for institutions that are conveniently located to their home or office. However, location is not the only
important convenience factor for this market. Courses should be offered at times and in formats that fit adults’ busy schedules (e.g. accelerated, evenings, weekends, online). Examples might include offering more courses at night or offering block scheduling in 3-4 week sessions during the regular academic term. Where applicable, the summer schedule should be expanded to recognize that adult students do not necessarily want to discontinue their studies for the traditional summer break. Many want to continue their progression toward degree even if it means just one class in the summer. Board policy itself does not exclude institutions from offering a much wider range of choices for students. The driving question is whether a large enough pool of students will take advantage of alternatively scheduled courses to warrant further development across the campuses.

### Academic Affairs Recommendations

1. **Integrated General Studies Program**: Approve the new program request for the General Studies programs at BHSU, DSU, NSU and USD to serve as a useful parachute options for Ready Adult students.

2. **Institutional Credit Hours and Academic Amnesty**: Continue with the existing credit hour and academic amnesty policies while encouraging institutions to work with campus concierge representatives to highlight the flexibility that exists with these two policies.

3. **Transfer of Credit**: Modify the existing BOR policy to allow for credit by examinations to count toward the globalization requirement campus IGR’s.

4. **Online Learning Student Services**: Create online learning seminars or workshops as a fundamental student service for Ready Adult students who may be completing coursework through this delivery method.

5. **Hybrid Course Expansion & Coding**: Expand the number of hybrid courses offered in the system and create a tracking code that better identifies courses that use this approach to course delivery.

6. **General Education & Remedial Courses**: Further evaluate the general education courses that are impacting Ready Adult completion, and expand the use of developmental refresher programs that can assist transfer students as course placements are determined.

7. **Prior Learning Assessment**: Create a common set of guidelines throughout the system for evaluating student prior learning assessment.

8. **Academic Calendar**: Encourage campuses to expand alternative scheduling (i.e., night courses, 3-4 week sessions, etc.), that would better meet the schedules for Ready Adult students.
The Student Service team serves as a nice bridge between the Academic and Financial teams due in a large part to the fact that policy and practice decisions in these two areas have direct and indirect effects on student affairs staff at the six Regental institutions. For example, a core issue that emerged was the admissions process which encompasses a number of academic based requirements. In short, there are few policy related issues in this section. Rather, the emphasis here is in attempting to make minor modifications to who is granted the potential to control some of the decision-making that occurs as admission and transfer decisions are made.

Convenient Admissions Process

In Fall 2008 (for enrollment in spring 09) a study was conducted at University Center-Sioux Falls with 100 randomly selected students. These students were tracked to determine the amount of time it took to transition from the application to admission, admission to student, and from student to registered. On average, this process took approximately eight weeks for those students who went through all of the steps. Of those who had applied, only 41 eventually registered for courses with a majority being lost to either lack of interest, time delays, failure to meet admission criteria, or lack of follow-up by campus personnel. Additionally, a follow-up study on a separate market study surveyed students that applied to University Center-Sioux Falls but failed to register. The report found many instances where students expressed frustration with the lack of follow-up regarding admissions status, transfer of credits, financial aid, etc. as their reason for not enrolling at the off-campus location. These follow-up procedures continue to be a responsibility of personnel at on-campus locations.

The recommendation is to move the responsibility for admissions follow-up and admit decisions to the on- or off-campus location where the student is planning to complete the majority of their coursework. This would place the responsibility on the campus location to conduct the appropriate follow-up procedures and remain in compliance with the home institution’s admission standards and requirements where the student is planning to attend.

Transfer of Credit

It is anticipated that a large number of Ready Adult students will be those who have migrated to South Dakota and have completed considerable credit at outside institutions. This will require significant time on the part of campus personnel to evaluate these credits and determine the closest path toward degree completion. For those students who are planning to attend off-campus locations or complete online degree programs it is difficult for them to work closely with campus personnel to expedite this review process, which further warrants that off-campus personnel (in addition to campus concierge representatives) be given authority to evaluate transfer of credit. It is important to remember that criteria established at a student’s home institution are used in determining transferability of credits and degrees. Individuals are responsible for determine how well the credits align with the curriculum offered or the degree program a student is planning to pursue. In those instances where transfer credit evaluation requires specific expertise, it
would still be referred to the university registrar who works in consultation with discipline specific faculty members for reviewing course equivalencies. Transfer students at all levels of degree completion would benefit greatly from a system-wide course equivalency matrix that allowed center admission personnel to facilitate the transfer of credit. Such matrices exist at the institutional level, yet a more comprehensive matrix would allow for greater transparency for students seeking enrollment.

**Conditional Admission Status**

Today, we hold the registration step to the very end after every detail of the admissions process is complete. However, admissions facts should permit us to change since we accept some 95%+ of all applied students, but we act as though we are moderately selective. A new process could permit us to both conditionally accept and register the student often in their first visit. Of course, the student must follow-up by a certain date to complete the process. When a student walks away with registration in hand, they are much more motivated to follow-up and preserve their schedule. As a result, it may be best to reconsider the order of the steps in the process and create an Express Registration process.

**Cohorts/Learning Groups**

Learning communities or team based learning has been employed throughout the Regental system with moderate success during the past decade. Placing students with similar backgrounds (socio-economic, first family, etc.) or program trajectories together has helped increase retention and engagement as they collectively pursue common goals. Most recently a learning community cohort at University Center has identified unique student service needs (financial, social, student service and academic support) to encourage student engagement and persistence by providing need-based scholarships to reduce the cost of attendance and offering uniquely designed student services (i.e., a common academic advisor, required college success courses). Even the curriculum is designed to encourage confidence and skill building before taking some of the traditionally more difficult classes that cause adult students so many problems. The proposal being considered at University Center should be closely watched, adapted and likely expanded to meet needs in other places.

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**Student Services Recommendations**

1. *Convenient Admissions Process:* Allow student service representatives at the off-campus locations the authority to make follow-up queries and admission decisions based on existing practices employed at the on-campus locations.
2. *Transfer of Credit:* Develop a comprehensive transfer of credit matrix that would aid in expanding the capacity for off-campus personnel to make transfer of credit decisions for Ready Adult students and determine the most likely path toward degree completion.
3. *Conditional Admissions Status:* Allow for conditional admission status for Ready Adult students that would allow them to complete preliminary coursework as they are determining the most appropriate degree path.
4. *Cohort Learning Groups:* Monitor the success of the cohort learning groups and determine whether unique characteristics of Ready Adult students could be used to create a similar approach for specific degree programs.
Many states have a community college model that provides expanded access to traditional and non-traditional students at a lower rate than 4-year institutions. Unfortunately, South Dakota does not have a community college access point and the system charges a premium for off-campus education offered at a distance and at university centers. Additionally, only modest need-based scholarships are available within the state when compared to states in the region (see Figure 7). As a result, the Financing and Financial Aid team approached this project with intent to explore these issues and other financial barriers that impact Ready Adult degree completion. Four primary areas were identified for consideration by the Board of Regents including: Tuition Equalization, Financial Holds, Need Based Scholarships, and Admission & Re-Admission Fees.

Special Tuition Rates

The Regental system currently employs differential self- and state-support tuition structures that require on-campus and off-campus students to pay unequal tuition rates. On-campus students are defined as those students who enroll in coursework completed at one of the six primary campus locations, while off-campus students complete courses via distance or at one of the university centers. On average, residential students are charged $215.60 per credit hour (minus additional discipline or lab fees) compared to $253.95 per credit hour paid by non-residential students. A critical question discussed by this team is whether bringing off-campus self-support tuition into alignment with what students pay on the residential university campuses would increase enrollment.

The Business Affairs Council (BAC) has been discussing this issue for the past two years with the potential of establishing a single self-support rate that would equate to the total of state-support tuition, University Support Fee (USF) and General Activity Fee (GAF). Although the Board of Regents approves the fee structure each year, the distinction between the fee structures was established in negotiations with the legislature making it difficult to move away from the existing model without legislative approval.
Modifications were recently made to the fee structure, whereby prior to Fall 2009 students who were simultaneously enrolled in on-campus and distance courses were charged the state-support rate. This was changed last year to ensure that all students taking distance courses were charged the same rate, yet the precedence is in place to charge self-support tuition to a particular group of students. However, justifications could be made that allow for students that fit the Ready Adult definition to receive the on-campus student rate, especially for those who had started their education as a residential student and now must complete coursework under the self-support model due to life circumstance.

Financial Holds

One of the initial issues identified by the finance working team was the fact that student restriction holds may be hindering a student’s ability to re-register in the system. These data were analyzed and it appears that a sizable number of the holds are in fact related to student fees (parking fees, library fees, etc.). However, a number of other holds appear to make it difficult for students to re-enter (i.e., Perkins loan exit interview) without actually making a trip back to the institution where the hold was placed. It appears that institutional representatives agree that a number of these holds are likely to be waived for these students.

Two issues exist here in the South Dakota area including the reduction in registration holds for students who may have existed in the Regental system in the past (parking fees, library fees, Perkins loan exit interview) which require students to make a trip back to the institution where the hold was placed. The recommendation would be to allow the new home institution the ability to remove these holds. Also, Campus personnel agreed that language could be added that allowed institutions the authority to “Waive all financial holds at or less than $1,000 that fall under school’s control for students with inactive status for a minimum of three years.” During the state leader meeting in November, a number of institutions from around the country noted the success they have achieved by reducing or eliminating such fees through increased tuition revenue. Some even employed a service oriented requirement that allowed Ready Adult students to buy down their old debt through work study programs at the campus (i.e., working in an office for non-traditional students), or service project for the university/community.

Need-Based Scholarships

South Dakota has a limited need-based program set at just under $200,000 in state and federal funds which are awarded to students through the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership grant program. Other need-based programs have also been implemented in the past two years namely through the South Dakota Educational Assess Foundation which awards grants to participating institutions for targeted need-based programs determined by the specific campus criteria. Funds from these two efforts come primarily from private funds and it is warranted to continue to introduce legislation that would develop a need-based program funded with state dollars. One particular approach is to use a pool of state dollars to leverage private donations similar to what is done with the LEAP grant program. Legislative efforts to acquire general fund appropriations for a need-based program failed during the 2010 Legislative session, making it unlikely that general funds will be available in the next 2-3 years.
With the future for a state level need-based program in doubt, the Regental system would benefit from exploring how institutions could draw upon tuition revenues to either support need-based scholarships or allow for reduced tuition rates. Specifically SDCL § 13-55-1 prohibits the grant of scholarships in the form of free tuition. It is recommended that the Board of Regents seek to modify legislation that would allow institutions the discretion to offer reduced tuition. Such legislation would make it possible to offer a Ready Adult Scholarship Program which would encourage students to return and complete coursework necessary for obtaining a bachelor degree at a postsecondary institution in the state. To become eligible a South Dakota resident must: 1) Have stopped-out for more than one year; and 2) Be no more than 30 hours away from degree completion. Students would be eligible for a maximum of $3,500, with the amount of the award to be one-half the cost of tuition (maximum not to exceed highest state self-support rate) for up to 30 credit hours. Additionally, the amount of the award shall not exceed the total cost of tuition for students participating in an employer reimbursement program.

**Re-Admission Fee**

One area initially identified by personnel on the finance team was a re-admission fee that had been approved by the Board of Regents and first applied starting with the Fall 2010 semester. This fee is assessed to all students who had sat out for more than three semesters and are now required to pay a $25 admission fee before they can re-enter and register for courses. Although this fee was imposed with clear rationale related to the administrative time campuses were incurring for tracking students, it has become evident that it is difficult to meet the broader goals for this project when minor policy changes such as these are implemented. The recommendation is to eliminate this fee for students who have previously attended a Regental institution. Furthermore, it is recommended that institutions have the ability to waive the regular admission fee for students who meet the Ready Adult criteria.

**Financing & Financial Aid Recommendations**

1. **Special Tuition Rates:** Continue to explore the merging of Self- and State-Support tuition, while currently allowing institutions the authority to grant state support tuition rates to those students who meet the Ready Adult criteria.
2. **Financial Holds:** Allow each institution the authority to remove non-academic level registration holds. Grant discretionary authority to remove financial holds up to $1000 for Ready Adult students or create alternative repayment opportunities that would allow re-entry.
3. **Need Based Scholarships:** Continue with efforts to develop a need-based scholarship program funded through a general state appropriation and seek statutory authority for campuses to offer reduced tuition for Ready Adult students who meet the criteria defined by the Board of Regents.
4. **Admission & Re-Admission Fee:** Remove the Re-admission fee for students who have previously been enrolled in the Regental system, and allow individual campuses the authority to waive the admission fee for students who meet the Ready Adult criteria.
Additional Issues & Communication Models

Three interrelated issues persist with this project that are not easily situated with one of the four team recommendations presented in this report: Concierge Model, System Orientation Toward Graduation, and Comprehensive Communication.

Concierge Model

Ready Adults and non-traditional students are often discouraged from completing their degree because of the perceived bureaucracy associated with obtaining the necessary academic, student support, and financial services. At most institutions these services are located within different units, in separate facilities, and operate at conflicting times for allowing a Ready Adult to determine whether continuation of re-entry is feasible. To address this issue, a concierge approach has been employed at institutions that offer an office (or individual) that can successfully navigate these students past the complete range of institutional barriers that have served as road-blocks in the past. Where applicable, universities should designate specific staff and offices that are charged with serving non-traditional students and meeting the unique needs of these learners. This office would have hours that better matched the use patterns of non-traditional students.

This sort of concierge approach would help with academic success and process navigation and negotiation for these students. On the matrix, there were a few services listed including tutoring, library, daycare, placement, and student organizations. However, it is likely that many other student services are applicable to non-traditional students when tailored to their needs. Other things might include counseling, internship development, academic advising, etc.

In some instances, as noted in the matrix, it may well be important to establish and deliver services that specifically target a group of students. Listed as “Peer-to-Peer Programming” the notion is to understand what a particular group needs. Veterans are one group for example, as are local immigrant populations.

System Orientation toward Graduation

During the first year of this project, the significance for targeting Ready Adults has been discussed with institutional leadership by attempting to place a stronger emphasis on graduates and completion rates. However, one of the primary metrics used in the Regental system has been fall enrollment and student headcount. Graduation rates have experienced limited importance due to the fact that the federal methodology excludes a large percentage of the students served by many of our institutions (i.e., transfer and swirling students). A number of our institutions have rather small graduation percentages when using the methodology employed for federal reporting to NCES. Using a metric that discounts the input of transfer students makes it difficult for institutional leaders to embrace the transition of institution energy (resources and personnel) toward capturing and sustaining a larger portion of students who would have little to no impact on graduation rates. We believe that this approach to documenting completion percentage provides a mechanism that captures Ready Adults...
Adults, making them a considerable priority for institutional leaders.

To address this issue, an alternative metric has been developed to create a degree completion methodology which allows institutions to count transfer students in the equation for completion. This methodology places a stronger focus on total graduates produced by creating a graduation percentage which divides the total number of first-time students by graduates produced at each institution in a given year.

**Comprehensive Communication**

For approximately ten years, the system has been aggressively pursuing traditional students through its College Prep program. State statute requires that public high schools in South Dakota submit contact information for middle and high school students, which is then used to deliver a variety of personalized college preparatory materials to parents and students (i.e., college readiness curriculum, scholarship opportunities, etc.). The goal behind the program is to begin shaping the postsecondary aspirations of parents and high school students at an early age and then solidify the decision making that occurs to ensure educational careers beyond high school. A number of states have employed similar approaches, while others have slightly modified their models to parallel national level campaigns that seek to encourage college readiness. For example, KnowHow2Go is a national initiative which has partnered with numerous states to target these two audiences to ensure that the path to postsecondary is achievable.

The Kentucky Higher Education system has successfully merged their college preparatory program with the need to target a growing number of non-traditional students. They have adapted their KnowHow2Go portal (from a generic platform that highlights information for 7th-12th grade students) to include opportunities for Ready Adults, Transfer students, students seeking their GED, and non-traditional students with no postsecondary experience. Using the efforts undertaken in Kentucky, we recommend developing a model that would merge the efforts from this initiative with our existing College Prep program. A model will be discussed with the Board that will seek to address not only direct marketing for Ready Adults, but also highlighting the value of high school graduation requirements and NCAA eligibility.

**Additional Issues & Communication Recommendations**

1. **Concierge Model**: Implement a concierge model or point of contact on each campus who will be responsible for assisting Ready Adults with the important academic, student service, and financial issues they will face as they attempt to re-enter.

2. **System Orientation Toward Graduation**: Create a new metric for more accurately evaluating institutional completion rates that accounts for the growth in Ready Adult and transfer students toward campus graduation totals.

3. **Comprehensive Communication**: Integrate the College Preparatory project with efforts to encourage Ready Adults, non-traditional and transfer students to enter the Regental system.
### Ready Adult Project: Policy/Practice Review Matrix

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| Tuition | • Free Course/Starter Course  
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i U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey, Public Use Micro Data Samples