

*Leading the Way:  
Access. Success. Impact.*

**West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission  
2013-18 Master Plan**

## Introduction

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (Commission) has statutory responsibility for developing a five-year state-wide master plan for higher education that sets forth system goals, objectives, and strategies and is aligned with meeting the goals of the state. The Legislature has identified in state code eight areas of special emphasis: economic and workforce development, education access and affordability, innovation, student preparation, degree and/or program completion, intra-and inter-system cooperation and collaboration, research, and teaching and learning. This new master plan meets the Commission's statutory obligation for the years 2013 to 2018 and is titled, *Leading the Way: Access. Success. Impact.* It sets forth the overarching goals of the state's system of higher education and articulates strategic objectives to be met over its five-year scope. The master plan sets forth how the Commission will work toward the system's goals and provides recommendations for how institutions can help achieve these goals. The role of this master plan is to coordinate the efforts of the various institutions of higher education in the state in a way that recognizes and capitalizes on each institution's unique mission and contributions. Through the compact reporting process, the Commission asks each college and university to set goals consistent with this master plan and the institution's mission and to account for progress toward those goals.

West Virginia stands at a critical juncture economically. The state is pursuing new opportunities to diversify business and industry by transitioning from a dependency on a few, core, manufacturing and resource gathering industries, in order to develop and sustain a more diverse marketplace. This shift demands that the state reexamine and retool its entire education system in order to meet the demands of a new and varied state economy. Both young people and adults, including those already in the workforce, will need the ability to move from one highly skilled job to another throughout their career. The Commission and its institutions are currently adapting to this new economic environment. Not only will the state's public higher education institutions have to meet the current demands of traditional enrollees, but they will also have to meet the needs of students who will need continual advanced education and training for the rest of their lives. The result is a responsive public university system that significantly contributes to the economic vitality of the state, through encouraging and developing a high skilled and flexible workforce.

These economic realities situate public higher education as vital in meeting current workforce demands and pushing West Virginia's economy forward. However, it is also important to remember that the primary purpose of West Virginia's four-year public colleges and universities is to develop an educated citizenry. The outcome of an education citizenry is not as tangible as employment figures and revenue sums, but it manifests itself in a population that understands how our society operates and has the ability not only to maintain it, but also to improve it. Each West Virginia community faces a distinct set of complex challenges. Whether it is funding local K-12 education and social services, maintaining basic public works, promoting tourism and local businesses, or seeking to strike a balance between environmental concerns and resource gathering, there is need for people to be knowledgeable on matters that affect the public good. West Virginia not only needs well-informed leaders at all levels, but a groundswell of invested and responsive citizens that add value to public discourse and work to meet the needs of their community. In a complex, ever specializing, world, a well-rounded education enables more citizens to fully participate in their democracy.

West Virginia's public postsecondary institutions strive to prepare their students to face the challenges within their local communities, as well as at the state, national, and international levels. Not only does higher education need to impart a higher order set of academic and professional skills, it also inspires students to think creatively in relation to complicated social and scientific phenomenon. College and university faculty encourage students to be curious about the world within and outside of their respective institutions. Thus, faculty and staff have labored to create curricular and co-curricular based programs that allow students to explore via course-based projects, internships with business and government agencies,

and study abroad programs. In addition, institutions have invited private sector and non-profit organization leaders to campus and have recruited international faculty members in order to expose students to cultures and ways of thinking that extend beyond the institution and the state. These efforts introduce students to opportunities and rigorous challenges that will allow them to apply their education to a range of issues prior to their graduation. Later on, graduates will be able to apply the knowledge gleaned from these comprehensive experiences to real problems at home, at work, and in their community.

The new master plan for higher education renews a broad public agenda for higher education articulated in the previous master plan *Charting the Future*, but, consistent with present and future economic needs and specific system challenges, brings to the fore pressing strategic priorities. It sets forth a central role for higher education in improving the economic, civic, and social future of the state. Higher education plays a vital role in educating West Virginia's citizens, providing students the tools they need to be productive in the workforce and be contributing members of a democratic society. Higher education contributes not just through providing graduates who enrich the workforce and improve the economy, but also through raising the educational attainment of the state which in turn attracts and retains entrepreneurs and businesses to locate and invest in the state. To maximize the contribution higher education can make to the state through its graduates, the Higher Education Policy Commission commits to offering postsecondary education access to all its citizens across all regions of the state and across all age, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic groups. Further, the Commission reaffirms that access to opportunity is not sufficient and addresses issues key to ensuring that opportunity is followed by success: student academic preparation; programmatic quality; assessment of student learning; improving retention, progress toward degree, and completion; and helping students understand and transition to workforce opportunities and civic engagement. It is recognized that to maximize the impact of higher education within an environment of limited financial resources, the Commission and its constituent institutions must exercise fiscal stewardship through containing costs and seeking new sources of external funding to maintaining the affordability of education for students, collaborate within and across institutions and outside entities, and continually assess progress to determine how best to determine future actions to meet goals.

### **The Importance of Higher Education in West Virginia**

The importance of higher education is continually reinforced. During the Great Recession, national unemployment rates for those with college degrees were lower and rose more slowly than for those without degrees (Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Cheah, 2012). At the same time, the wage gap between those with a bachelor's degree and those with only a high school diploma has continued to grow over time. Projections indicate that by 2018, the United States will need 22 million new college degree holders and that 63 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, Strohl, 2010). In West Virginia, from 2008 to 2018 the number of jobs requiring postsecondary credentials is estimated to grow by 20,000 and 49 percent of all jobs in the state will require some postsecondary training. These numbers emphasize the importance of postsecondary credentials to the economic futures of both students and the state.

Although this economic role is important, higher education improves the state and its citizenry in a number of other ways as well. College educated adults have been shown to have higher rates of voting and volunteerism, have more positive health behaviors, and are more likely to participate in educational activities with their children and have children who in turn go on to postsecondary education (Baum, Ma, and Payea, 2010). Furthermore, in addition to the teaching function of colleges and universities, institutions of higher education also engage in service and research. Faculty, staff, students, and alumni regularly engage in volunteerism and work with communities to understand and address local issues. Increasingly faculty are integrating this sense of civic duty and the skills to approach community problems into their courses. These activities provide benefits immediate to the state and also create long

term benefits by building connections between students and the communities in which their institutions are located.

The research activities of faculty also benefit the state in a myriad of ways. In a broad sense, research moves society forward. In a more tangible sense, research efforts attract external funding and lead to technology transfer, new business creation, licensure income, and the awarding of new patents. Research benefits students through the integration of the newest ideas and discoveries into their coursework. The involvement of students in faculty research also has benefits to the students themselves as well as creating a pipeline of future graduate students, researchers, and entrepreneurs.

### **The Development of the Master Plan**

The National Commission on Higher Education Accountability, which included governors, legislators, educators, and private sector leaders from every region of the country, argued that improvement in higher education would come when “accountability in higher education is a democratic process through which shared goals are explicitly established, progress is measured, and work to improve performance is motivated and guided” (2005). They also noted that the success of American higher education has been achieved through a diversified system of responsive, independent institutions and that this system has employed a division of labor based on the distinctive but interrelated capabilities and responsibilities of policy makers, institutional leaders, and faculty and students. They argued that a distributed decentralized approach to accountability reinforces a sense of obligation and empowerment with each group focusing on goals within their respective domains. Burke (2004) similarly argued that accountability would best function at the center of a triangle balancing (1) *state priorities*, public needs and desires for higher education programs and services; (2) *academic concerns*, the issues and interests of the academic community, particularly professors and administrators; and (3) *market forces*, the needs and demands of students, parents, and businesses, as well as other clients of colleges and universities. He argued that each of these forces has a contribution to make in furthering higher education accountability and that integrating the concerns of all provides a check against imbalances that can occur if any one of them is given complete sway.

This master plan is an effort to articulate the shared goals of the state’s public four-year colleges and universities and to set forth objectives on which system progress can be measured. It is recognized that policy makers and state level boards, institutional leaders, faculty and students have distinct responsibilities and capabilities that must be respected and harnessed to make progress. Finally, to best achieve a balanced accountability system, state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces must each be given consideration. To that end, the Commission in creating the master plan sought to identify and articulate state priorities, provide institutions flexibility in utilizing their unique missions and assets to work toward these goals, and encourage responsiveness to and collaboration with citizens and businesses. In order to identify those state priorities, the Commission undertook a comprehensive assessment of the status of the higher education system and the progress made under the prior master plan, *Charting the Future*, gathered data on the state educational and economic context, and solicited input from stakeholders across the state. Finally, the Commission reflected on the previous master plan itself, seeking to renew its best aspects but also identifying where changes could better frame and encourage the work to be done over the coming master planning time period.

### ***Progress on Charting the Future***

First, there was an analysis of the progress made on *Charting the Future* in its five focal areas. In the area of access, there have been considerable increases in enrollment over the five-year period with notable growth in adult enrollment and increased participation of low-income students. This progress here is laudable and continual efforts must be made moving forward to maintain access for all West Virginians.

In the area of cost and affordability, tuition and fees for in-state students increased \$933, or 22.1 percent from 2007 to 2011. While any increases present a challenge for students struggling with affordability, West Virginia's public four-year institutions throughout the time period have had very low tuitions in comparison with their peer institutions. Nevertheless, undergraduate loan debt for bachelor degree graduates rose by 9 percent over the time period. Maintaining affordability through cost reduction and effective allocation of aid as well as reducing debt of students require increased focus in the coming years.

In the area of learning and accountability, the system has seen the retention rate of first-time, full-time freshmen decline slightly, whether measured as returning to the same institution or any public institution. Furthermore, West Virginia retention rates lag behind regional and national figures. Six-year graduation rates of first-time, full-time freshmen have also declined slightly from 47.9 percent for the 2002 cohort to 47.5 percent for the 2006 cohort and are below regional and national figures. However, the passage rates of bachelor's degree earners on licensure and certification exams have increased in six of seven areas from 2007 to 2011. Also, the passage rates of graduate and professional degree earners were 90 percent or above in 10 of 13 exam areas in 2011. Further attention is needed to improving retention and completion while maintaining programmatic quality.

The area of economic growth has seen progress in terms of degrees awarded with over 900 more degrees awarded in 2011-12 than 2007-08. The largest increase has been in bachelor's degree awards. Furthermore, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degree production increased 12.1 percent over the same time period. The workforce participation rates of recent higher education graduates have increased slightly in spite of the recession. Finally, externally-sponsored research grants and contracts have grown by over \$51 million. These data show that there have been clear successes in the area of economic growth.

The last area of *Charting the Future* was innovation. Innovation in higher education can refer to the transfer of research into the commercial realm. This activity occurs primarily at the state's two research universities, Marshall University and West Virginia University, who together from 2007 to 2011 filed 253 invention disclosures, were issued 25 patents, signed 51 license agreements, created 14 start up companies, and earned over half a million dollars of license royalty. The innovation section of the Higher Education Report Card the past four years has defined the concept of innovation more broadly as imaginative new initiatives to improve higher education in West Virginia. The system efforts described here, as well as the numerous initiatives described in each campus's compact reporting their efforts in meeting the recommendations of the master plan, are evidence of systematic attention to innovating in order to improve.

#### *Feedback from Stakeholders*

Also, as part of bringing the *Charting the Future* master plan to a close, Commission staff hosted public forums at system institutions on each of the plan's focal areas. These forums featured campus representatives as speakers but also provided an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members to offer concerns, questions, and suggestions. Major themes that emerged from these discussions were: continuing to increase access through outreach, flexible scheduling, technology, and cost containment; the need for partnerships with businesses to create better linkages with the workforce; better collaboration with K-12 education to promote readiness; focusing on basic skills and high needs workforce areas; and making higher education institutions accountable for student outcomes.

Another avenue through which the Commission has received stakeholder input is through its participation in and assistance to the legislative Select Committee on Outcomes-Based Funding Models in Higher Education. This committee is charged with investigating methods of allotting higher education funding based upon institutional performance on state objectives has made explicit the priorities of the legislature:

improving access overall and for important subpopulations, such as adults and low-income students; increasing the number of students reaching certain credit thresholds or momentum points; and improving overall and on-time completion rates.

The third way in which stakeholder opinion has been included is through attention to the recommendations of the West Virginia College Completion Task Force which was convened by the Chancellors of both the Commission and the Community and Technical College System. The Task Force consisted of state policy and business leaders; higher education faculty, administrators classified staff, and students; and public education representatives. It analyzed state and national data to diagnose the challenges in college completion in the state and make recommendations for improving these outcomes. Those recommendations included making graduation a visible and tangible priority across the state; reducing the time it takes for student to earn a credential; improving developmental education; increasing adult completion rates; and connecting funding to priorities.

Finally, the Commission solicited campus feedback about the metrics chosen to monitor progress toward the objectives in the master plan and asked campuses to provide challenging but reasonable targets on these metrics based on their historical data and local knowledge. These institution targets were used to formulate the system targets set in *Leading the Way*.

#### *Learning from Charting the Future*

Discussions were also held about the nature of the prior master plan among Commission staff and Commissioners. There was consensus that the vision of *Charting the Future* is equally as applicable today as it was five years ago. It paints a vital role for higher education in the economic, civic, and social vitality of the state through attention to five important focal areas. It offers a number of reasonable and well-supported recommendations to help move the system and its institutions in a positive direction in each of these areas. The general consensus is to continue in the spirit of *Charting the Future* and pursue the vision that it offers. As higher education accountability experts have noted, the focus in higher education accountability has shifted over time and new goals are added, but earlier goals are rarely abandoned (Burke, 2004). However, there was also agreement that the new master plan would be a departure in several ways. First, it needed to be more strategic. Colleges and universities have many purposes but the Commission needs to weigh the current state context needs, stakeholder input, and past system performance to prioritize among its numerous overarching long-term goals. In doing so, the plan focuses its efforts and those of its campuses on the most pressing needs for the five year period. The second change is the articulation of more concrete objectives for the system to strive for with defined system-level metrics and targets. The setting of system targets on metrics enhances the accountability of the system as a whole and provides benchmarks against which progress can be measured throughout the tenure of the plan.

Finally, the annual Higher Education Report Card is designed to provide data that illustrates the progress of the Commission and the Community and Technical College System toward meeting the goals in their respective master plans. However, it was felt that there was not adequate visibility and communication about progress on the master plan at either the system or institution level. Moving forward, there will be an area of the Commission website dedicated to showing progress on the master plan complete with system level data as well as the institutional compacts which are the means by which institutions report not only their progress, but also the initiatives underway to improve outcomes. This website can function not only as a means of accountability and transparency, but also as a place where successful institutional efforts can be showcased and shared with other campuses.

### **The Strategic Focus for 2013-18**

In keeping with best practice, developing the strategic focus has involved a thorough examination of the state's economic and educational context (Davis, 2006). According to 2010 Census data, in West Virginia, 26.1 percent of the state's 996,000 working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree; the higher education attainment rate of young adults — those 25 to 34 years old — is slightly higher at 29.9 percent, illustrating recent educational attainment progress. The proportion of adults age 25 and over that have completed a bachelor's degree is 17.3 percent as compared with 27.9 percent nationally. At the same time West Virginia is projected to need an additional 20,000 degrees by 2018 to fill the estimated 49 percent of jobs requiring postsecondary credentials (Carnevale et al., 2010). Raising the educational attainment of the state is required to meet workforce needs as well as to improve income levels, which are well below southern and regional averages, and general quality of life.

Looking at the state's demographic trends, however, demands that efforts are undertaken on several fronts. First, only paying attention to bringing in recent high school graduates does not satisfy the immediate need for college credentials. Second, this population is actually declining until 2018 (SREB, 2010) so growth in college degrees will have to come from elsewhere. Research conducted by Commission staff in 2010 found that there were over 200,000 West Virginia adults who had begun attending college but never completed a credential. More than 32,000 individuals have over 60 hours earned but no degree. These figures have fueled the Lumina Foundation funded *DegreeNow* effort which has reached out to these students to encourage their return to college and worked to provide professional development to campuses on how best to meet the unique needs of returning adults. Efforts such as these must be continued and expanded to raise the educational attainment of the state. Finally, data on the retention and completion rates of system students suggests that improvement is needed in order to increase degree production. Equally important is following through on the opportunity offered to students who enroll and being good stewards of the investment both students and the state have made in their education.

Thus the strategic focus of *Leading the Way* centers on college completion and efforts to retain students and promote timely progress toward their chosen degree. However, the college-going rate of recent high school graduates still lags the national average. Furthermore, traditionally underserved populations such as low-income, minority, and first-generation students are less likely than their peers to attend college. These trends demand a continued focus on access and opening the doors of opportunity to as many West Virginians as possible. In order to maximize the impact of access and success on the state, it is critical that pathways from education to the West Virginia workforce are communicated to students and that institutions engage with their communities and instill civic values and problem solving skills into academic programs. Finally, the impact that the system's institutions have on the state through pursuit of their research missions must be continued. These activities enhance undergraduate learning, bring in needed external funding, and create jobs and new businesses - all of which improve quality of life for West Virginians and help to diversify and grow the state's economy.

The areas of focus of *Leading the Way* are access, success, and impact. As shown in figure 1, these three concepts are imagined to reinforce one another. Access maximizes education opportunities while making available the benefits of academic success. Student success makes an impact on the state's civic, social, and economic future. Higher levels of access and student success, as well as their impact on West Virginia through an increase in educated graduates, community engagement, and research contributions to the economy, make it increasingly likely that more students will invest in higher education in the future. It is an amplifying cycle from which everyone benefits.

Figure 1. 2013-18, *Leading the Way: Access. Success. Impact.* Conceptual Model



### Tools

In addition to these three focal areas, the master plan envisions a central role for three best practices or tools. These tools are not ends in and of themselves, but essential means for accomplishing the goals in the focus areas. In an era of limited funding and an imperative for increased output, it is vital to employ collaboration to maximize resources and effectiveness while avoiding duplication; engage in fiscal responsibility to keep tuition, aid, and spending aligned with goals; and utilize assessment of all initiatives, especially learning, to ensure continual progress toward the Commission's aims.

### *Collaboration*

Effective collaboration occurs not only within an institution, but also transcends organizational and institutional boundaries. Working with other sectors of education, community organizations, and the private sector maximizes resources, reduces duplication, and approaches problems in a comprehensive manner. Collaboration engages relevant stakeholders to ensure responsiveness and leverages the input and resources of partners to support internal resources. Cooperation is essential in difficult financial times when more, not less, is expected. While collaboration is intuitively attractive and is often encouraged by policy makers, sustained effective collaboration is difficult and entails the adoption of shared goals, reliance on each other to accomplish them and the development of shared norms and processes across entities accustomed to working along (Kezar and Lester, 2009). Collaboration for access involves the Commission and institutions working with K-12 education and community organizations to reach students and their families with information about the importance of college and how to prepare academically and financially early enough to shape vital behaviors that contribute to their success as college students. It also means partnering with local businesses and service agencies to create innovative work and education pathways that reach adults. Collaboration for success means breaking down the walls within the Commission and within institutions between information, academic, and student support divisions to provide just in time data that allows for strategic interventions that assist students at a moment of critical academic and personal need. Collaboration for impact entails partnering with the



private sector to meet regional economic needs and highlighting these opportunities to students. Furthermore, working with community and government agencies to address local problems, and conducting research that transcends disciplinary boundaries to tackle society's most intractable problems provides invaluable experiences for both faculty and students and benefits the public good.

### *Fiscal Responsibility*

Fiscal responsibility is a vital consideration in an era of tight and even contracting state budgets and rising concerns about the affordability of higher education. Public higher education in West Virginia weathered the Great Recession with federal stimulus funds backfilling budget cuts, but there are still challenges. West Virginia tends to lag the rest of the country in both entering and recovering from recessions and state budget officers predict current services deficits through 2015. Furthermore, as policy makers struggle to balance competing needs in other statutorily mandated areas such as K-12 education, health care, and corrections, the concepts of increased learning productivity and value in higher education are growing in importance (2011). Fiscal responsibility recognizes that the state of West Virginia and institutions of higher education play a role in the cost of education through financial aid, finance policy, and institutional efficiency. Additionally fiscal responsibility entails the strategic allocation of limited resources to efficiently enhance educational opportunities and economic growth. In 2010, the Commission's Task Force on Efficiencies was convened to assess ways that institutions could achieve sustainable cost containment while enhancing quality. The Task Force made recommendations that the system office should provide leadership in cost and efficiencies reporting by institution, identifying and sharing best practices, and streamlining regulations. Institutions were implored to find ways to reduce costs consistent with their unique missions and contexts and to use savings to make strategic investments in ways that are most likely to increase academic performance. Fiscal responsibility in the area of access means aligning tuition, financial aid policy, and mission to keep education as affordable as possible. Fiscal responsibility for success can entail directing scarce funds toward retention and graduation efforts and utilizing information about academic program costs, demand, quality, and output to inform future investment. In the focal area of impact, fiscal responsibility involves making investments in research infrastructure that leads to external funding and development of technologies and businesses than enhance the West Virginia economy.

### *Assessment*

Assessment is the means by which the system and institutions determine if their academic programs and innovative strategies are effective in meeting intended objectives. A culture of assessment that utilizes results for continuous improvement will address how well strategies were implemented and how the results of the assessment are then used to inform future efforts. Alexander Astin, an expert in the area of higher education assessment, argues that an assessment-oriented institution will be characterized by a widespread spirit of inquiry and self-study as well as a spirit of experimentation and innovation to improve - accompanied by built-in mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of these innovations (1993). Assessment of learning outcomes is particularly important given recent research indicating limited learning gains among traditional age students at a large sample of four-year colleges and universities (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Furthermore, as the Commission encourages institutions to retain and graduate more of their students, learning assessment is the means to ensure that rigor and academic quality are not sacrificed. The Commission, as a coordinating board, does not dictate a standard learning assessment, but directs the institutions with their unique missions, student populations, and programmatic offerings, to continue and broaden efforts to assess programmatic quality and student learning. Assessment in the area of access entails setting goals for outreach and financial aid outcomes and using progress to determine the direction of future efforts. Assessment for success means utilizing student-level data to understand the factors shaping student persistence and completion and tracking the outcomes of retention and graduation initiatives. It means assessing student learning both in general education and within academic programs to ensure achievement of learning outcomes and to shape curricular improvement. Assessment in impact tracks student employment outcomes, especially with regard to

institution career readiness efforts. Furthermore, data on the contributions of institutions, faculty, staff, and students to tackling community challenges, filling workforce needs, and developing inventions and businesses through research makes clear the return on the state's investment that higher education provides.

### **The Role of the Commission in *Leading the Way***

The National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education argues that “a practical division of labor combined with a rigorous focus on priorities at each level of responsibility can transform accountability from a political struggle to a collaborative effort” (2005). The role of statewide policy boards, it argues, is to understand public goals and recommend strategies for achieving them. State boards can add expertise and continuity, facilitate the collaborative development of sound policy, collect and analyze data, facilitate working relationship with campus leaders, and monitor and report on progress toward state goals. It is the role of the board to undertake these without increasing regulation of institutions and to provide institutions autonomy to undertake the academic concerns that are their purview. In keeping with this vision, the Commission sets forth state goals in this document. The master plan takes life, however, through the Commission working with each institution to develop a compact. Each institutional compact will address how the college or university will meet statewide goals and, where appropriate, establish institutional goals for the duration of the master plan. Institutions will update their compacts annually reporting on progress toward goals and summarizing significant developments. The Commission has responsibility for reviewing, responding to, and approving these compacts each year and will also make them publicly available. The Commission also sees itself as having a role moving forward in facilitating system progress toward meeting the goals of *Leading the Way*. The Commission's role will be to inform, support, and coordinate.

### ***Inform***

Recent examples of how the Commission informs institutions include provision of data on each institution's adult student population who are not enrolled but have some credits and no degree, the Senior High School Opinion Survey, the Financial Aid Comprehensive Report, and in-depth research on outcomes for students participating in developmental education, transfer students, and recipients of state financial aid programs. The Commission also has been working over the past two years on the creation of the P-20 longitudinal data system that will provide invaluable information about how students move through secondary and postsecondary education and into the West Virginia workforce. Moving forward, the Commission staff's most important role in informing stakeholders will be to report on institutional and system progress on meeting the goals of *Leading the Way* through the system website, the Higher Education Report Card, and presentations to the Commission and the legislature. Commission staff will also continue to conduct research, provide data and reports to institutions, and utilize relationships with other state systems and professional organizations to learn of and share information on best practices in the master plan focal areas.

### ***Support***

The Commission has supported its member institutions recently through negotiating statewide contracts on needed software such as the Net Price Calculators that are required by the federal government to be on each institution's website. The West Virginia Network (WVNET), which reports to the Commission, procured institutional licenses for DegreeWorks, a web-based academic advising and degree audit system, as well as Argos, a report creation product which eases data driven decision making and creation of reports. WVNET has also worked to upgrade the state's networking backbone and thereby reduce internet costs; expanded data storage and disaster recovery abilities; and taken over hosting the learning management systems for some institutions.

The Division of Student Success and P-20 Initiatives operates the statewide college-going platform CFVW.com and conducts access outreach that benefits all students and institutions. The Division of

Financial Aid conducts trainings on the state financial aid management system for institution aid personnel. Additionally, the Commission has garnered external grants to help institutions with efforts related to returning adults and redesigning developmental education. During implementation of *Leading the Way*, the Commission is committed to continuing these activities that support institutions in their efforts to enhance access, success and impact.

#### *Coordinate*

Finally, the Commission coordinates gatherings and initiatives that help institutions learn from one another and solve challenges. The Commission regularly gathers representatives from campuses such as presidents, chief academic officers, directors of the Regents Bachelor of Arts program, the Data Policy Advisory Council, etc. to provide a space for information sharing and collaboration. Recent, targeted efforts include statewide meetings to discuss student retention and improving developmental education and entering into a statewide agreement with Quality Matters, a peer review process for online courses. The Commission and WVNET are piloting a web portal, the West Virginia Remote Online Collaborative Knowledge System (WVROCKS), which is a collaboration between all institutions that offer the Regents Bachelor of Arts enabling RBA students across the state to take accelerated, affordable quality online courses. WVNET has also hosted technology conferences both virtually and face-to-face to provide a space for the state's technology communities to learn about advances in educational technology and address common issues. Over the *Leading the Way* master planning cycle, the Commission will continue to coordinate initiatives and gatherings of campus leaders, faculty, and staff on issues related to access, success, and higher education's impact on West Virginia.

#### **The Focal Areas for 2013-18, *Leading the Way*: Access. Success. Impact.**

The upcoming sections provide detailed information about each of the focal areas of access, success, and impact. Within each of these areas, a definition is provided - followed by data and context on this issue in West Virginia, and information about recent Commission efforts. There is a description of what the challenges are moving forward, what the Commission sees as its role, and what the Commission is asking institutions to do to help the system meet its goals. Finally, there is a broad statement of the goal in the focal area, several objectives the Commission is establishing for the planning cycle to move the system toward that goal, and, where appropriate, metrics on the objective and targets to achieve on those metrics.

#### **Access**

##### **Definition:**

West Virginians of all ages have the right to a quality education that empowers them to act as productive members of the citizenry and workforce. Receiving a quality education includes the option to pursue undergraduate and graduate postsecondary educational opportunities that correspond with individual career and life aspirations. By continuing to promote postsecondary education, West Virginia intends to foster a state culture that values higher education as a means to individual, community, and economic development. In West Virginia, access to postsecondary education depends on three central factors: adequate preparation, accessible information, and feasible cost.

#### **Postsecondary Access in West Virginia**

West Virginia has made great strides in the past decade in promoting postsecondary access for its citizenry. From 2007 to 2011, undergraduate first-time freshmen enrollment increased by 9.4 percent at the state's four-year public universities. During the same time period, non-traditional adult undergraduate enrollment also increased by 8.4 percent. Graduate and first-professional enrollment has also increased, growing from 12,701 in 2007 to 12,990 in 2011, an increase of 2.3 percent. The percentage of low-income high school students in the state continuing on to higher education has increased from 18.6 percent in 2005 to 24.8 percent in 2009, the last year this data is available. Although these represent significant achievements for college access in West Virginia, there is additional work to be done in order to reach national college-going benchmarks. In 2009, President Obama set a national goal for the United

States to become world leader in higher education degree holders by 2020. To reach this objective, West Virginia would need to double its graduates, especially among its adult student population (25 and older). About 25 percent of working adults in West Virginia have a two-year degree or higher, compared to 34 percent nationally. The Lumina Foundation, the largest educational foundation in the nation, has established a similar goal to increase college attainment to 60 percent by 2025. At current completion rates, West Virginia would only have a 33.4 percent postsecondary degree completion rate by 2025.

West Virginia's public four-year institutions can help close the degree gap by increasing enrollment in two key demographic groups: traditional aged students graduating from high school and adult students who are already in the workforce. The Commission and its institutions will need to strengthen their access efforts concerning secondary students beyond admissions and recruitment to developing structured programs that promote college awareness and college-going support as early as middle school. These activities will include outreach to students and families for whom college was not a consideration and will most likely require the state's colleges and universities to be more active partners in secondary education. Unlike secondary students, adult students are more dispersed throughout a given region, making it difficult for institutions to concentrate outreach services. Therefore, institutions will have to develop stronger relationships with regional businesses and government agencies to recruit adult students. These relationships will also assist institutions in placing traditional and adult students into the workforce after graduation.

#### **Access Efforts at the Commission**

The Commission has addressed postsecondary access in the state through a number of initiatives and special programs through the Divisions of Student Success and P-20 Initiatives, Academic Affairs, and Financial Aid. These divisions work independently and cooperatively to offer programs such as GEAR UP, DegreeNow, College Goal Sunday, and other projects funded through the state's federal College Access Challenge Grant (CACG).

#### *Student Success and P-20 Initiatives*

The Division of Student Success and P-20 Initiatives coordinate the Commission's access efforts. The division oversees three major programs: the College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV), Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and CACG activities. Central to these grant efforts was the creation of CFWV, which is a collaborative initiative to assist students in planning, applying, and paying for education and training beyond high school. At the centerpiece of the effort is [www.CFWV.com](http://www.CFWV.com), a free, one-stop college and career planning web portal. As of 2011, over 700 college access providers had been trained to use the website. CFWV is coordinated by the Commission, in conjunction with the Council for Community and Technical College Education, the West Virginia Department of Education, and the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts. The CACG grant, coordinated through CFWV, allows staff from the Commission's Division of Student Success and P-20 Initiatives to participate in hundreds of events throughout the state each year, including college fairs and other public events such as the West Virginia State Fair. In addition to staff members in the Commission office, the division has trained educators in each county to assist with college-going efforts. The division also prints thousands of brochures, calendars, and guidebooks each year that are distributed to students across the state.

GEAR UP is a federally funded grant program that has and continues to help thousands of West Virginia high school students and their families in the state's neediest counties navigate the college-going process. Additionally, the HEROs (Higher Education Readiness Officers) program trains high school students to advise their peers on college readiness and awareness program. Currently, this program operates at GEAR UP secondary schools across the state and future plans include a scaled expansion to non-GEAR UP locations.

### *Academic Affairs*

The Division of Academic Affairs has coordinated with the West Virginia Department of Education to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the academic rigor of college-level work. The division supported the adoption of the new K-12 statewide Common Core Learning Standards and Smarter Balance Assessment, and has worked with public institutions to promote awareness of and train faculty on the new standards. The division also helped to develop transition literature and math courses in which high school seniors with deficiencies will enroll, allowing for a smoother academic transition to college.

As part of DegreeNow, a Lumina Foundation funded statewide adult learner initiative, which seeks to re-enroll adults with some college credit but no degree, the Commission and the Community and Technical College System have partnered with NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to enhance adult-focused student and academic services. Another adult learning effort is the RBA Today initiative, a commitment made by institutions to provide more options and supports for students seeking to earn the Regents Bachelor of Arts (RBA) degree, a flexible program designed to meet the needs of adults. The Commission has created adult outreach toolkits for use by the institutions or community organizations and is also developing a Prior Learning Assessment that will allow adult students to earn college credit based on prior educational and professional experiences. Furthermore the development of the West Virginia Remote Online Campus Knowledge System (WVROCKS) will provide enhanced access to quality online course offerings to students pursuing their RBA degree.

The Commission enhances access by participating in the Southern Regional Education Board's Academic Common Market and coordinating Tuition Contract programs, both of which allow West Virginia residents to pursue degree programs not available in West Virginia in other participating states at in-state or discounted tuition rates.

### *Financial Aid*

Financing a college education is a critical step in the college-going process, and for many it is the most complicated and intimidating. Students and parents, particularly from historically underserved populations, are price sensitive to tuition costs prior to the application of aid. Research has shown that these students are more likely to enroll as the price is discounted by aid dollars. Toward that end, in 2011-12 the Commission provided over 34,000 state financial aid awards totaling almost 93 million dollars to West Virginia postsecondary students. Through its administration and stewardship of the PROMISE Scholarship; Higher Education Grant; Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student Grant; Engineering, Science and Technology Scholarship; and Underwood-Smith Teacher Scholarship programs, the Division of Financial Aid has been able to incentivize both recent high school graduates and non-traditional adult students to enroll, helping to eliminate one of the greatest enrollment barriers, cost. In addition to coordinating outreach efforts with other divisions within the Commission, the Office of Financial Aid and Outreach Services also provides presentations and workshops to students and their families around the state. In addition, the division offers financial aid training to high school counselors, college support personnel and other college access stakeholders. The Commission has also facilitated through a statewide software contract the creation of the federally required net price calculators on each institution's website.

### **Access Moving Forward**

Progress continues to be made, but there is still much work to be done regarding college access in West Virginia. Current efforts allow the Commission and its institutions to reach a population of students who are college-ready both academically and aspirationally, or students who have the potential to be ready and only need additional assistance in one or two areas of the college-going process (application assistance, standardized test/advance placement preparation and registration, assistance completing the FAFSA students, institutional choice). Behind this cohort is another population of students that require comprehensive college-going assistance in areas such as aspiration building, secondary curriculum

planning, tutoring, a mentor experience, and parental outreach, in addition to those services that college-ready students require. To meet West Virginia's future educational and workforce goals, the Commission will require additional outreach and support assistance from the four-year colleges and universities to establish a new level of postsecondary access throughout the state. Working together with the West Virginia Department of Education, local school officials, and regional college access organizations, these activities will not only boost institutional enrollments, but also allow institutions to develop stronger ties to the surrounding community.

Although the figure has risen recently, only about 25 percent of the state's low-income high school students enroll in higher education as compared with an overall college-going rate of around 60 percent (Mortenson, 2010). This can be due to any number of factors, but research has shown that academic qualifications, perceived costs, and the lack of knowledge of the college-going process are the main drivers behind recent high school graduates entering directly into the workforce and foregoing postsecondary training.

Especially in West Virginia, rurality remains a major obstacle for postsecondary educational outreach to traditional and nontraditional students. Limited availability of high speed internet results in reduced distance education opportunities, as well as unequal access to web-based college-going assistance platforms such as CFWV, the College Board, or individual institution websites. Rural students also face increased challenges concerning access to transportation, cultural venues, and limited secondary curricular options as rural school populations decline. This can limit both undergraduate and graduate degree options.

Early intervention efforts directed at low-income and minority children as early as middle school has proven effective at helping to develop career and academic plans that involve some form of higher education. The middle school years represent a critical time for students and parents to understand the academic criteria for college entry and the availability and qualifications associated with financial aid, both of which are important in informing decisions prior to the transition to high school. Early intervention programs also allow families and mentors additional time to engage in the financial planning necessary to making dreams of higher education a reality. The adoption of the Common Core Standards will help greatly with aligning standards and expectations between the K-12 and postsecondary. In addition to these efforts, the continuing development of the state's P-20 data system will eventually allow educational researchers and practitioners to identify problematic points in the education pipeline and develop targeted intervention strategies to students throughout their academic career.

Encouraging adult students who are already in the workforce to enroll in postsecondary programs carries its own set of specific challenges. In addition to those same conditions that challenge the traditional student population, adults have to weigh commitments to their family, employers, and financial obligations when considering future educational opportunities. In many cases, these adult students have earned college credits already, reducing the credits and time necessary for degree completion. Given that West Virginia has the highest percentage in the country of veterans in its population, more can be done to provide tailored outreach services to active and former service members. These potential students have demonstrated a propensity for discipline and hard work, and also bring additional grant aid dollars to the state through Veterans Affairs programs such as the GI Bill. Providing opportunities for adults to earn graduate degrees is also an important aspect of providing comprehensive access to higher education.

Furthermore, there will continue to be need for students of all age groups to enter into graduate programs of study. Although the Commission's primary access focus is on the undergraduate population, current and future demands from both the public and private sectors for individuals with advanced degrees necessitates institutions enhancing promotion of their graduate programs. These efforts could be

dovetailed with existing or new outreach efforts, particularly those involving the adult population, and with efforts to strengthen regional partnerships, discussed later in the *Impact* section.

To both sustain and move West Virginia's postsecondary access agenda forward, the state's four-year universities will need to play an increasing role in access efforts. Coordination between the Commission and the individual institutions will be key to ensure that all students have access to the information and services they need while minimizing duplication of efforts. To this end, the Commission will continue to operate access efforts at the system level, working to:

- Produce college-going and financial aid awareness literature for statewide distribution;
- Develop large-scale college-going and financial aid assistance programs and training sessions;
- Continue to develop and support academic alignment and preparation strategies with the West Virginia Department of Education;
- Expand GEAR UP activities statewide, while maintaining CFWV efforts;
- Establish more sustainable sources of funding for state-wide college access programs; and
- Coordinate system learning and sharing about access efforts.

Beyond statewide admissions recruiting, the state's public colleges and universities can provide a range of access related services addressing regional needs through existing staff, facilities, and other resources. In particular, these institutions can provide on the ground access services that specifically address students who are not college-ready, but have potential and are critical to the state's attainment goals. The following suggestions, grounded in both college access research and best practices, represent a small number of opportunities that West Virginia's four-year universities can seize upon to promote college access:

- Commit to helping sustain existing institutional and state-level higher education access efforts for both graduate and undergraduate students;
- Help with efforts to provide educational outreach to the families of regional students who might have reservations in supporting their student's higher education aspirations;
- Assist in providing financial aid literacy and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) preparation to students, parents, and secondary school personnel;
- Work with regional secondary schools to provide campus visits that would afford many students their first opportunity to visit a college campus. This could also include hosting secondary curricular and co-curricular events on-campus, such as science competitions, art events, and athletic camps;
- Coordinate faculty and staff visits to regional secondary schools to continually reinforce institutional specific admission criteria and the need to pursue rigorous academic coursework to prepare for college-level work;
- Develop relationships with regionally based corporations and businesses that would allow future students to easily understand the connection between degree attainment and West Virginia workforce needs. These relationships could also provide outreach opportunities for current employees who are not higher education degree holders; and
- Partner with regional nonprofit groups and governmental agencies to provide outreach to potential adult (25 years and older) student populations. This could include admissions officers, materials, and a web presence specifically focused on adult students.

Together, West Virginia's universities, along with statewide and regional partners, can have a significant impact on increasing the number of traditional and adult students entering postsecondary education in the state.

**Goal: Increase access to postsecondary education for both traditional and non-traditional aged West Virginians.**

Toward the goal of increasing access of West Virginians to postsecondary opportunity, the Commission sets the following objectives to be achieved by 2018:

- Increase **enrollment** in four-year public institutions overall and specifically in important target populations.
  - Increase headcount enrollment to 73,500 students.
  - Increase annualized FTE enrollment to 68,000 students.
  - Increase first-time freshman enrollment to 12,750 students.
  - Increase the enrollment of low-income students to 22,000 students.
  - Increase the enrollment of students from underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups to 6,700 students.
  - Increase the enrollment of undergraduate adults age 25 and older to 11,500 students.
- Increase the percentage of West Virginia high school graduates continuing on to higher education in the following fall to the Southern Regional Education Board average.
- Institutions will provide a plan for a comprehensive, collaborative **access effort** and report on the success and outcomes of this effort. This access effort should incorporate the best practices of: early intervention, family involvement, education in the benefits of attending college, provision of information about college going, financial aid assistance and literacy, academic preparation and promotion of college readiness, and application assistance. The plan should articulate goals aligned with the institution's mission, the institution's strategies to meet those goals, and how the institution will assess the success of those strategies to progress toward its goals.
- Institutions will provide their comprehensive **financial aid plan** that guides institution level financial aid allocation, administration, and outreach and report on the success and outcomes of this plan. The plan should articulate goals which align with the institution's mission and this master plan; the institution's strategies in aid allocation, administration and outreach to reach those goals; and how the institution will assess the success of those strategies to progress toward the goals.

**Success**

**Definition:**

Providing educational opportunity requires not just initial access to higher education, but ensuring that enrolled students are provided a quality postsecondary education that enables them to be productive and contributing members of society. Success entails students achieving intended learning outcomes in general education and their program of study, making steady progress toward completion, and ultimately earning a credential that certifies the acquisition of the program's knowledge and skills. Where necessary, success includes remediating deficiencies students may have in skills required for college-level work. Student developmental education completion, credit accrual, retention, and graduation rates are important indicators of success. These outcomes need to be improved and institutions can accomplish these ends by reducing barriers to student success, implementing structures that support increased student learning and achievement, and maintaining and enhancing academic rigor in programs.

**Postsecondary Success in West Virginia**

Data in the West Virginia Higher Education Report Card points to the need for continued and enhanced efforts to promote student success. Retention rates of first-time freshman to their second year of college declined almost 2 percentage points from 2006 to 2010 (77.8 percent to 76.2 percent). Data from the Southern Regional Education Board show West Virginia to be 13th among the 16 states in first-year retention. While graduation rates have increased from 45.6 percent for the 2001 cohort to 48.5 percent in 2005, that still means less than half of the students who enroll in West Virginia's four-year institutions earn their degree in six years, a rate roughly ten percent below the national average. Of particular concern



are those students that enter college requiring developmental education. These students are less likely to graduate than those who do not require remediation. In the fall of 2011, among first-time freshmen attending West Virginia public four-year institutions, 9.9 percent required developmental English; 17.5 percent enrolled in developmental math with 20.3 percent taking any developmental courses. If semesters beyond the first year are included, these proportions go even higher.

Another indicator of student success is licensure and certification exam pass rates of bachelor's and master's graduates. Data from the past five years indicate this as an area of strength as pass rates are high and exceed national pass rates in most fields. Faculty quality has also increased at four-year institutions with almost all institutions since 2007 steadily increasing their percentage of full-time faculty with terminal degrees.

### **Success Efforts at the Commission**

The Commission has addressed postsecondary success in the state through a number of initiatives related to retention, completion, developmental education, and programmatic quality.

#### *Completion*

In 2010, the West Virginia College Completion Task Force was convened by the Chancellors of the Commission and the Community and Technical College System. This group was charged with examining state and national data on college completion in order to develop recommendations for how to increase the number of West Virginians with high quality certificates and degrees. As mentioned above, by 2018, 49 percent of the jobs in West Virginia will require education and training beyond high school. These needs will require an additional 20,000 degree completers state-wide over current projected degree production. The Task Force's recommendations for improving degree completion include: making graduation a visible and tangible priority state-wide, reducing the time necessary to complete degrees, improving developmental education, increasing adult completions rates, and connecting funding to these priorities.

#### *Developmental Education*

As recommended by the College Completion Taskforce, one way to improve degree completion and reduce the time to completion is to restructure developmental education. According to the national Complete College America initiative, students can get lost in what they label as 'the Bermuda Triangle' of developmental education: they go in but do not come out (CCA, 2011). Commission staff have been working with the public two-year institutions in the state to restructure developmental education as part of a one million dollar grant the state received from Complete College America and a similar effort is underway with the four-year institutions. This initiative supports the acceleration of students through their remedial coursework. The goal is to decrease the time students spend in non-credit bearing coursework while improving learning outcomes and advancing students into credit-bearing college courses as quickly as possible.

#### *Other Success Initiatives*

The Commission has undertaken a number of other initiatives to improve outcomes. Having identified growth over time in the time and number of credits students are taking to complete their degrees, the Commission has set 120 credit hours as the standard for four-year academic programs and monitors progress through the academic program review process. In order to support institutions in the provision of quality academic advising for students, the Commission underwrote a state contract for DegreeWorks software which automates provision of information to students about progress toward their degree. The Commission has annually hosted a gathering of campus academic affairs staff for professional development and sharing related to student retention. Through the DegreeNow adult learner initiative, Commission staff have provided professional development to campus personnel regarding best practices in the classroom and in student services for meeting the unique needs of adult students. Furthermore, the

Commission is exploring expanded utilization of Prior Learning Assessment as a means to advancing adults toward degree completion through acknowledging skills and competencies gained in non-classroom settings.

### *Program Quality*

System efforts to promote programmatic quality have been consistent with its role as a policy commission as opposed to governing board and have focused on having policies in place that direct institutions to assess programmatic quality and student learning without encroaching on institutional autonomy to undertake these processes in a way befitting their unique missions and contexts. Institutions are mandated by West Virginia Code and guided by Commission policy to annually review academic programs and assess them for viability, adequacy, necessity, and consistency with mission. To monitor this assessment of programmatic quality, the Commission receives summary reports of these reviews. Furthermore, as part of the last master plan's institutional compact reporting process, the Commission has required that institutions report on their student learning outcomes assessment efforts.

### **Success Moving Forward**

In order to increase the number of West Virginia students that persist in their academic programs and earn their degrees, it is important to promote progress in retention and completion. Furthermore, given historical gaps in achievement for certain underrepresented groups and the Commission's commitment to improving equity in outcomes in addition to opportunity, it is necessary to target populations related to income and race/ethnicity. To correspond with efforts to re-enroll and graduate adults who have some college credits but no degree, there is a focus here on the retention of returning adults. Adults face additional barriers to completion including balancing home and work responsibilities and constraints related to geographical access to campuses. Finally, evidence that West Virginia transfer students persist and graduate at lower rates than other students demands a focus on the outcomes of this population as well.

To foster these outcomes the Commission will be engaging in a number of initiatives. The Commission will conduct research on factors impacting student success across the state to help inform system and campus initiatives to improve outcomes. Through the Complete College America grant, the Commission will provide targeted professional development related to developmental education, support campus initiatives in this arena, and maintain a developmental education website and other avenues for campus personnel to interact and learn from one another. The Commission will continue to provide campus personnel opportunities for learning and sharing successes and best practices around retention, adult learners, and other completion issues. The Commission will continue to require institutions to review and report on academic program quality including student learning assessment and to utilize these reviews and assessments to inform and direct future efforts.

To both sustain and move the West Virginia's postsecondary success agenda forward, the state's four-year universities will need to play an increasing role in these efforts. Four-year institutions already provide a range of success-related services which they are encouraged to sustain and enhance. The following suggestions, grounded in both college success research and best practices, provide a sampling of opportunities that West Virginia's four-year universities can employ to promote college success:

- Provide students in need of remediation access to restructured developmental education course formats that shorten time until students enter college-level coursework;
- Collaborate across academic and student services units to promote retention and completion;
- Utilize just-in-time data for intervention with students exhibiting behaviors associated with dropout;
- Make specified curricular pathways and full-time attendance the default for students;

- Coordinate with faculty and staff to implement first-year transition programs including freshmen seminars, learning communities, etc.;
- Provide all undergraduate and graduate students with career services such as job fairs, career workshops, internships, etc.;
- Provide incentives for timely degree completion;
- Take responsibility for ensuring that transfer students receive maximum appropriate application of prior credits to their degree program; and
- Ensure that faculty and student services personnel are trained in and implement best practices for returning adult students.

By utilizing these initiatives and employing others, West Virginia's colleges and universities can have a significant impact on increasing student success across the system.

**Goal: Increase the number of students at system institutions completing quality academic programs.**

Toward the end of increasing the success of student enrolled in public four-year institutions, the Commission sets the following objectives:

- Improve the outcomes of students requiring **developmental education**:
  - Increase the percentage of first-time freshman students passing developmental education courses taken in math to 70 percent and in English/writing to 75 percent; and
  - Increase the percentage of first-time freshman students passing developmental education course taken in math and English/writing and the first related college-level course to 60 percent for math and 70 percent for English/writing.
- Increase the **retention rate** of students overall and specifically in important target populations.
  - Increase the first-year retention rate of full-time, first-time degree-seeking freshmen to 80 percent;
  - Increase the first-year retention rate of part-time, first-time degree-seeking freshmen to 50 percent;
  - Increase the first-year retention rate of low-income, first-time degree-seeking freshmen to 75 percent;
  - Increase the first-year retention rate of first-time degree-seeking freshmen from underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups to 75 percent;
  - Increase the one-year retention rate of returning adult degree-seeking students to 65 percent; and
  - Increase the one-year retention rate of degree-seeking transfer students to 76 percent.
- Increase the percentage of fall, first-time **freshmen earning 30 or more credit hours** in their first academic year of college to 65 percent.
- Increase the **four- and six-year graduation rates** of students overall and specifically in important target populations.
  - Increase the four- and six-year graduation rate of first-time, degree-seeking freshmen to 30 percent and 60 percent respectively;
  - Increase the four- and six-year graduation rate of low-income first-time, degree-seeking freshmen to 20 percent and 40 percent respectively;
  - Increase the four- and six-year graduation rate of first-time degree-seeking freshmen from underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups to 20 percent and 40 percent respectively;
  - Increase the four- and six-year graduation rate of returning adult degree-seeking students to 48 percent and 58 percent respectively; and
  - Increase the four- and six-year graduation rate of degree-seeking transfer students to 48 percent and 58 percent respectively.

- Institutions will provide brief summaries of the reporting year's **academic program reviews**. These summaries will focus on the academic quality of programs and should include an evaluation of stated program outcomes. The summary should include a description of the program's assessment of student learning and how the learning assessments inform program improvement. Finally the summary should detail how the information from the program review is being utilized to formulate an action plan for the future. The institution will also provide a follow-up report on the progress and outcomes of the immediate prior year's action plans.
- Institutions with **graduate programs** will provide a summary of institutional efforts to improve the outcomes of students enrolled in these programs along with how the success of these efforts will be assessed. Initiatives may include efforts to improve licensure pass rates, strategies for supporting students in the timely completion of their degrees, initiatives to decrease student loads or other institutional efforts to improve student success.

## **Impact**

### **Definition:**

West Virginia's four-year public colleges and universities serve three core functions: teaching, research, and service, though their focus to the different components varies by institution mission. Their impact on the state is also threefold and includes: 1) providing graduates that are educated citizens, problem solvers and skilled workers, 2) conducting service and inculcating civic and social responsibility, and 3) conducting research and developing innovations that develop new knowledge and encourage further investment in research, development and innovation in West Virginia. Public colleges and universities throughout West Virginia provide the intellectual infrastructure required to create and maintain both an educated citizenry and a skilled workforce. Postsecondary graduates also have a profound civic, social, and economic impact on their local communities and the state at-large. Moreover, the state's four-year institutions of higher education actively and directly contribute to the economic, cultural and social vitality of their respective regions. Although these impacts are naturally occurring products of well-functioning higher education institutions, they can be enhanced through the efforts of faculty, staff, and institutional leadership to cultivate deeper partnerships with the schools, businesses, government agencies, and civic and faith-based organizations in their communities. Developing and strengthening these partnerships can increase and improve the impact of West Virginia's public higher education institutions as well as the economic, social and cultural well-being of the state and its citizens.

### **Postsecondary Impact in West Virginia**

West Virginia's public higher education institutions have a positive impact on the state in a variety of ways. One of the most important roles that all institutions play is producing educated and skilled graduates. Between 2007 and 2011, the number of degrees awarded by Commission institutions increased from 12,093 in 2007-08 to 13,008 in 2011-12, a growth of 7.6 percent. During that time, the number degrees awarded in STEM fields increased, but STEM degrees as a share of all degrees declined slightly from 22.7 percent in 2007 to 21.8 percent in 2011. STEM degrees are in high demand throughout the state. Not only is there demand for STEM degree holders in areas such as engineering, energy production, and general research, but there is also a critical need for STEM graduates in the education sector. In addition to graduates trained in STEM fields, West Virginia also needs more STEM educators to ensure that students in K-12 have access to teachers with deep knowledge of science, technology, engineering and math. West Virginia also has a pressing need for highly skilled graduates in the health sciences field. The state's aging population, high rates of chronic disease, and substance abuse challenges, in addition to changes to federal policy, necessitate sustained attention to this field of occupations.

Producing research that helps expand understanding of the world and leads to new solutions for society's challenges is another important function of higher education institutions, especially the state's research universities, Marshall University and West Virginia University. Between 2007 and 2011, the state's public four-year institutions received over \$930 million in external research funds. The largest single year

was 2009, with over \$243 million in external funds for research. These grants not only help to sustain and create new jobs, but also help to develop the state's research infrastructure through new equipment and facilities. As innovation and knowledge-based industries become more important for West Virginia's economy, transferring the fruits of university research to the market is taking on increasing importance as well. This transfer of technology represents an important revenue stream for higher education institutions and the state. Between 2006 and 2011, 27 patents have been issued to West Virginia's research universities and 72 licensing agreements executed, generating nearly \$600,000 in institutional revenue. Bringing innovations from the lab to the market also means that they can be used to tackle pressing social, medical, or economic problems.

Some of the most important benefits public higher education institutions bring to the state are the hardest to measure. Developing critical thinking skills and instilling values of service and civic responsibility in their students are both incredibly valuable for students and the state as a whole. Another important impact of the state's higher education institutions are the bonds of community they create with other organizations in their region. Creating stronger institutional bonds with the surrounding community benefits all parties involved: the university, students, and local businesses and organizations. These relationships can also bring economic benefits to individual students and the community as a whole. When degree programs and workforce needs align, it becomes easier for students to begin their careers while still enrolled in coursework through internships, research apprenticeships, and other career shadowing opportunities. These relationships can then extend into local job opportunities shortly after graduation. Newly hired graduates then help spur the local economy through additional spending at local merchants, purchasing property, and paying taxes that fund local public utilities, schools, and social services. Beyond workforce and economic outcomes, new graduates fulfill their commitment as educated citizens by increased participation in community volunteerism and public service. For local communities coping with difficult civic and economic realities, postsecondary degree holders represent a net gain in both financial and human capital.

While West Virginia's higher education institutions have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the state and its citizens, there are areas of concern as well. Net cost of attendance has increased from \$6,797 in 2007-08 to \$8,212 in 2011-12, while the average debt load of bachelor's degree graduates has increased from \$26,784 to \$29,183, an increase of 9 percent. While research shows that higher education is a worthwhile investment that pays for itself many times over during the course of a career, giving student financial advice, providing adequate aid, and protecting students from unmanageable debt burdens are also important ways that higher education institutions can make a positive impact on students and the state.

### **Impact Efforts at the Commission**

The Commission works to help colleges and universities increase their positive impact on the state through a strategy of informing, coordinating, and supporting. Commission staff conduct research, provide professional development, and communicate with state and local policy makers about institutional needs and current best practices in higher education policy. One of the ways the Commission does that is by contracting with West Virginia University's Bureau of Business and Economic Research to track West Virginia graduates once they enter the workforce and to assess how future graduate production aligns with state and industry needs.

The Commission is also collaborating with the West Virginia Department of Education, WorkForce West Virginia, and the West Virginia Network (WVNET) to create and maintain a longitudinal pre-K to postsecondary state data system (P-20). The P-20 data system will allow the Commission to perform research and analysis on current West Virginia students from K-12, through college, and into the workforce. This data will allow both K-12 and postsecondary stakeholders to form a better understanding

of educational dynamics and enact targeted interventions that will not only ensure a quality education, but will also result in gainful employment within the state.

In the area of service and civic engagement, the Commission works with campus partners to amplify their impact on the state. The West Virginia Student Leadership Conference, which is planned with the statewide Student Affairs Advisory Committee, brings together Commission staff with campus student leaders from public higher education institutions in the state to build leadership skills. Another initiative supported by the Commission is the West Virginia Campus Compact based out of West Virginia University. Campus Compact is a national organization that promotes civic engagement by assisting and encouraging higher education institutions, faculty, and students to connect with local communities. Through the College Access Challenge Grant, the Commission also provides monetary support to Campus Compact's CFVW Fellows program that allows graduate student fellows to develop outreach programs for adult learners and first generation students. The Commission also partners with the state's academic health centers in a variety of ways to ensure that rural communities have access to skilled healthcare providers.

The Commission also supports higher education through identifying grant opportunities that can benefit both the state and its institutions. This includes working with faculty members at the state's colleges and universities to submit federal research grants, as well as seeking out funding opportunities from major private foundations. In the last three years, the Commission coordinated efforts have helped to attract over \$1.8 million in private funds, improve educational and economic outcomes for the state's citizens. In addition to helping bring in grant money from the outside, the Commission's Division of Science and Research oversees the distribution of state research funds through programs such as the Research Challenge Grant and the West Virginia Research Trust Fund.

Finally, the Commission helps stimulate economic growth through various research initiatives. The development of patents and intellectual properties through scientific research can be licensed and commercialized creating new monetary opportunities for state institutions. The Commission's *Vision 2015: The West Virginia Science and Technology Strategic Plan* lays out sixteen goals centered around stimulating research and development across the state. Additionally, the Commission received the Research Infrastructure Improvement award, "Biotechnology for Enhanced Public Security and Environmental Security" from the National Science Foundation in August of 2010. This five-year grant of \$20 million is the largest NSF grant ever received in West Virginia. This award is to support academic research in several key areas to ensure the long-term viability of West Virginia technology competitiveness and economic development. The development of the West Virginia Regional Technology Park is also a major research effort overseen by the Commission. Acquired in 2010, this property is a critical addition to the state's research infrastructure that is helping to grow the state's knowledge economy. It will serve as a locus for technical training, research and technology transfer, and provide an anchor for innovation-based industry in the greater Kanawha Valley and the state.

### **Impact Moving Forward**

Despite the fact that West Virginia has been successful in increasing the number of graduates, STEM degree holders, and external research funds over the last five years, the state needs further progress to meet the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century innovation and knowledge based economy. Labor economists at Georgetown University predict that West Virginia will need at least 20,000 more certificate, associate's, and bachelor's degree holders by 2018 to maintain the present-day economy. To further diversify and grow the state's economy would require additional degree holders beyond 20,000. One of the critical strategies for increasing the number of degree holders identified by the College Completion Task Force was to involve businesses, families, K-12 leaders, state agencies, and non-profit organizations in addressing the barriers that stand between students completing college and entering into the state's workforce as skilled and knowledgeable contributors to the state. Strategies for engaging with other

stakeholders include, but are not limited to: aligning degree programs with regional workforce needs, working with businesses and other organizations to arrange internships and job placements for students, meeting regularly with industry to see if university research can help develop new products, informing students and families about financial aid, student debt and the value of college, or working with civic groups to directly address community needs. Collaboration, however executed, is an essential part of improving higher education's impact on the state.

In order to increase the positive impact that the West Virginia's public four-year institutions have on the state, the Commission will continue to provide research that helps identify challenges and solutions, coordinate institutional efforts where appropriate, and support higher education through advocacy and the acquisition of external funding. The Commission will also continue to work with campus-based organizations and key stakeholders across the state, including the West Virginia Department of Education, the Legislature and employers so that efforts to improve the state through education, research and the creation of good jobs are coordinated and well planned.

An important issue at the center of improving higher education's impact on the state is fiscal responsibility. This includes ensuring that debt levels after graduation are manageable. Part of the Commission's commitment to ensuring a positive impact on the state is to work with institutions and the legislature to make sure that tuition remains affordable and that state support for higher education in general, and for financial aid in particular, is adequate. While the individual financial decisions of students are beyond the direct control of institutions or the Commission, combining sound financial guidance while protecting affordability helps ensure that students will gain value from their investment in higher education and be able to participate fully in the social and economic life of the state.

The academic impact of the state's colleges and universities begins with the institution's commitment to student success. Increasing the quality of curricular and co-curricular programs not only serves students' best interests, but will also result in the postsecondary degree holders necessary to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce, which is required for West Virginia's continuing economic success.

Postsecondary degree holders also help stimulate stagnate regional economies. Traditionally, during times of economic hardship, institutions of higher education, across all sectors, experience increases in enrollment. These enrollment increases highlight the public's perceived value of higher education as a vehicle for transforming their lives and economic fortunes. For their investment, there is the expectation of tangible, local returns.

In order to best prepare the state citizenry for the challenges of the future and grow West Virginia's economy, the state's four-year institutions must make a concerted effort to prepare students for the transition and rigorous demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Although four-year institutions play a limited role once students graduate, they are able to provide students with both general education competencies as well as quality academic programs and opportunities for professional development, financial literacy, and different avenues of career placement. The following suggestions, grounded in academic research and best practices, would enable institutions to provide students the necessary means to be successful college graduates entering the workforce and the community:

- Create and foster better linkages with local businesses to learn about workforce needs and provide students with opportunities such as internships;
- Inform students about West Virginia businesses and organizations through their academic programs;
- Provide financial literacy guidance and ensure that students understand the implications of student loans;

- Increase career placement efforts for current students and alumni to reduce student loan default rates;
- Integrate community service, service learning, and regional community challenges into curricular and co-curricular activities; and
- Contribute to the state's knowledge economy by conducting basic research, acquiring external research funding and expanding technology transfer.

**Goal: Increase the impact that public colleges and universities have on West Virginia through production of qualified graduates ready to contribute to the workforce and the community, provision of needed services, and research and development that promote knowledge production economic growth.**

Toward the goal of increasing the impact that its member institutions have on the state of West Virginia, the Commission sets the following objectives:

- Increase the number of **degrees awarded annually at the undergraduate and graduate levels** overall and in needed areas:
  - Increase the number of degrees awarded to 15,500;
  - Increase the number of degrees awarded in STEM fields to 3,750;
  - Track the production of degrees awarded in STEM education and increase the number of these degrees over the master plan cycle; and
  - Increase the number of degrees awarded in health to 2,000.
- Institutions will address regional economic needs through developing and **promoting pathways to the West Virginia workforce** for students and recent graduates. To that end, institutions will provide their plan for (1) developing formal partnerships with businesses, non-profit organizations, and other employers; and (2) enhancing institutional career readiness programs (internships, co-operative arrangements, career counseling, job placement programs, etc.). The plan should articulate goals aligned with the institution's mission, the institution's strategies to meet those goals, and how the institution will assess the success of those strategies. Institutions will report annually on progress toward the goals of this plan.
- Institutions will provide their plan for how the institution and its students are engaging with external organizations (government, business, non-profit) to **solve critical regional civic and/or social issues**. The plan should articulate goals aligned with the institution's mission, the institution's strategies to meet those goals, and how the institution will assess the success of those strategies. Institutions will report annually on progress toward the goals of this plan.
- Decrease the system average **federal student loan cohort default rate** to 9.0 percent.
- **Increase research and development activities** which contribute to West Virginia's economic growth:
  - Increase annual external research and development funds to \$200 million;
  - Increase annual licensure income to \$170,000;
  - From 2013 to 2018, a total of 30 patents issued;
  - From 2013 to 2018, a total of 20 start-up companies based on university technology; and
  - Track the number of articles that faculty members publish in peer-reviewed journals and increase the number of these publications over the master planning cycle.

## Conclusion

*Leading the Way: Access. Success. Impact.* is a bold new master plan which directs the system's attention to the three focal areas that most need attention to meet the challenges West Virginia faces in the coming decade. In order for higher education to substantially improve the economy and quality of life in West Virginia, the Commission and its institutions must concentrate on opening the doors of higher education to as many citizens as possible through informing students about the benefits of higher



education, assist them in preparing for college academically and otherwise, and ensuring that a college education is affordable. Furthermore, it is important to reach out to those less historically served by higher education such as low-income, racial/ethnic minority, and adult students both to ensure equity of opportunity and to maximize the potential of the state's human resources. Yet, educational opportunity is not sufficient; further work is necessary to make the promise offered to students through admission to college a reality by assisting them in reaching their educational goals. To that end, the Commission must increase the numbers of students who persist, make steady progress, and earn a degree all the while guarding and enhancing academic program quality and rigor. To deepen the impact that system institutions have on the state, higher education must align its programs with West Virginia's workforce needs and ensure that students are aware of these opportunities. While this career preparation is important, it is vital to preserve a focus on skills and knowledge that prepare students for whatever their future holds such as critical thinking, writing, quantitative literacy. Higher education also has an impact on the state through the service institutions provide to their communities, and increasingly through incorporating service learning and civic engagement into the curriculum itself so that students carry forth these values and skills. And research contributes to the state through advancing knowledge generally and promoting outside investment and creation of innovations, jobs, and businesses.

While access, success, and impact can be conceived of as a linear progression, improvement in each reinforces the others. Higher levels of student success make it more likely that other students will think that investment in higher education is worthwhile. Increased educational attainment in the state as well as a robust research and technology environment are attractive to businesses and citizens looking to locate in West Virginia. These additions to the economy increase the resources available to be invested in education. These are but a few of the connections between the plan's interrelated focal areas.

The three tools of fiscal responsibility, collaboration, and assessment also ensure that the Commission and its campuses maximize resources and contain costs in a time of very tight budgets, leverage the ideas and contributions of relevant stakeholders, and always know whether progress is being made toward the system's stated goals.

*Leading the Way* brings a new level of accountability in articulating not only broad goals, but also more defined objectives for the coming years and targets to be met on specified metrics for each objective. The Commission will communicate progress toward these targets in the annual Higher Education Report Card as well as a new master plan section of the Commission website. Campuses will report on their progress toward achieving the goals of *Leading the Way* through their submission of annual compacts. In addition to data on the plan's metrics, the compacts also give campuses an opportunity to provide narratives about the institution's efforts in the areas of access, success, and impact. The Commission will also post the institution compacts on the *Leading the Way* website.

The vision of *Leading the Way* imagines a large role for public higher education in improving quality of life in West Virginia and contributing to the creation of a more diverse and robust economy that is competitive in a global, knowledge-based marketplace. Fulfilling this role will require extraordinary efforts from and collaboration between the Commission and its constituents. The Commission will continue its efforts to inform, support, and coordinate the campuses in their work on the plan's goals. Together, the Commission and its institutions can lead the way to a better educated, stronger West Virginia.

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