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October 31, 2018

The Honorable Anthony Kern, Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

The Honorable Bob Worsley, Vice Chair
Joint Legislative Audit Committee

Dear Representative Kern and Senator Worsley:

Our Office has recently completed an initial followup of Arizona's Universities—Student Success regarding the implementation status of the 15 audit recommendations (including sub-parts of the recommendations) presented in the performance audit report released in March 2018 (Auditor General Report 18-102). As the attached grid indicates:

- 4 have been implemented, and
- 11 are in the process of being implemented.

Our Office will conduct an 18-month followup on the status of those recommendations that have not yet been fully implemented.

Sincerely,
Dale Chapman, Director
Performance Audit Division

cc: John Arnold, Executive Director
Arizona Board of Regents

Dr. Michael M. Crow, President
Arizona State University

Dr. Rita Hartung Cheng, President
Northern Arizona University

Dr. Robert C. Robbins, President
University of Arizona

Arizona's Universities—Student Success

Auditor General Report 18-102

Initial Follow-Up Report

Recommendation

Status/Additional Explanation

Chapter 2: Universities should establish guidance for more consistently evaluating strategies to achieve student retention and graduation goals

2.1 ASU, NAU, and UA should continue efforts to develop university-wide approaches for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. These approaches should include related policies, procedures, and/or guidance for evaluating their student retention and graduation strategies. Their university-wide evaluation approaches should also include guidance on planning the evaluation of each strategy before it is implemented. In addition, these approaches should include guidance on the following:

- Strategy descriptions that clarify the strategy's activities and desired short-term and long-term results, including an explanation of how the strategy is expected to achieve these results;
- Questions the evaluation will answer, including questions for assessing strategy implementation and short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes related to overcoming common obstacles to staying in school and graduating in a timely manner;
- Methods for answering the evaluation questions, including what information is needed to do so, how the information will be obtained, and how the information will be analyzed and interpreted. Additionally, strategies that involve voluntary participation should include methods for addressing the potential influence of self-selection bias, when applicable; and
- Explanations for how evaluation results will be used.

Implementation in process for ASU

ASU has continued its efforts to develop university-wide approaches for evaluating its student retention and graduation strategies. For example, ASU established a collaborative to support evaluations of its student retention and graduation efforts. The collaborative included a workgroup that has developed draft guidance for evaluating its student retention and graduation strategies, which ASU plans to implement in fall 2018. The draft guidance includes information on planning the evaluation of each strategy before it is implemented or revised, clarifying the strategy's activities and desired short- and long-term outcomes, identifying questions the evaluation will answer and methods for answering the questions including addressing the potential influence of self-selection bias, and identifying how evaluation results will be used.

Implementation in process for NAU

NAU has established a committee and developed a policy and procedures for determining which student retention and graduation strategies will undergo evaluations by NAU's institutional assessment and research staff. For example, the policy and procedures outlines an annual process and timeline for the committee to follow to determine which strategies will be evaluated. However, NAU has not developed policies, procedures, and/or guidance for evaluating its student retention and graduation strategies that are not selected for committee evaluation.

Implementation in process for UA

UA has continued its efforts to develop university-wide approaches for evaluating its student retention and graduation strategies. For example, UA established a team to support university-wide retention efforts, including strategy development and evaluation. Additionally, UA provides an annual year-long evaluation training program for staff to develop their assessment knowledge and skills. Further, UA has provided some guidance for evaluating its student retention and graduation strategies, which includes information on identifying questions the evaluation will answer, methods for answering the questions, and identifying how evaluation results will be used. Finally, although UA continues to use a statistical method to address self-selection bias for some student retention and graduation strategies, UA reported that it still

Recommendation

Status/Additional Explanation

needs to develop university-wide guidance for how to address self-selection bias, plan the evaluation of each strategy before it is implemented, and clarify the strategy's activities and desired short-term and long-term results. UA estimated that it will complete this guidance in Fall 2019.

Chapter 3: Universities should improve strategic plans to help achieve student retention and graduation goals

3.1 ASU should:

a. Develop a SMART objective for its goal related to increasing the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students.

Implemented at 6 months

b. Consider developing multiple SMART objectives for each of its student retention and graduation goals, as appropriate.

Implemented at 6 months

c. Develop performance measures and/or revise existing performance measures to assess the progress of its strategies and tasks for achieving its goals related to its freshman retention rate, 6-year graduation rate, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students. ASU should also consider using a combination of multiple types of performance measures to assess different aspects of its performance related to each of its strategies and tasks, where appropriate.

Implemented at 6 months

d. Revise its action plans for its goals related to its freshman retention rate, 6-year graduation rate, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students to specify deadlines and the party or parties responsible for implementing each strategy and task.

Implemented at 6 months

3.2 NAU should:

a. Develop at least one SMART objective for each of its student retention and graduation goals.

Implementation in process

NAU developed a new strategic plan that focuses on improving the retention rates of five different student populations and improving the 6-year graduation rate for all students. Within its new strategic plan, NAU developed several SMART objectives related to retaining students in the five different student populations, such as first-generation students and transfer students. However, NAU has not developed SMART objectives that are directly tied to its goals for its 6-year graduation rate, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students.

Recommendation

Status/Additional Explanation

- b. Consider developing multiple SMART objectives for each of its student retention and graduation goals, as appropriate.
- c. Develop performance measures and/or revise existing performance measures to assess the progress of its strategies and tasks for achieving its goals related to its 6-year graduation rate, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students. NAU should also consider using a combination of multiple types of performance measures to assess different aspects of its performance related to each of its strategies and tasks, where appropriate.
- d. Continue with its efforts to develop action plans for its goals related to its 6-year graduation rate, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students, and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students, and these action plans should include the strategies and tasks that will be implemented to achieve the goals and specify deadlines and the party or parties responsible for implementing each strategy and task.

Implementation in process

See explanation for Recommendation 3.2a.

Implementation in process

As discussed in the explanation for Recommendation 3.2a, NAU developed a new strategic plan that focuses on improving the retention rates of five different student populations and improving the 6-year graduation rate for all students. Within its new strategic plan, NAU developed performance measures to help assess its progress in implementing strategies to improve the 6-year graduation rate. However, NAU has not developed performance measures that are directly tied to its goals for the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students.

Implementation in process

As discussed in the explanation for Recommendation 3.2a, NAU developed a new strategic plan that focuses on its goals related to retention and the 6-year graduation rate. This new strategic plan identifies strategies to implement for these goals, as well as an overall team to oversee implementation of each group of strategies, but it does not identify deadlines or the party or parties responsible for implementing each individual strategy. Additionally, NAU's new strategic plan does not include an action plan that is directly tied to its goals for the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to all students and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Arizona community college transfer students.

3.3 UA should:

- a. Develop a SMART objective for its goal related to increasing its freshmen retention rate.
- b. Consider developing multiple SMART objectives for each of its student retention and graduation goals, as appropriate.

Implementation in process

According to UA, it is developing a new strategic plan that will include objectives, performance measures, and action plans for its student retention and graduation goals. UA stated that it is presenting the strategic plan to the Arizona Board of Regents for approval at its November 2018 meeting and plans to finalize the strategic plan later in the year.

Implementation in process

See explanation for Recommendation 3.3a.

Recommendation**Status/Additional Explanation**

- c. Develop performance measures and/or revise existing performance measures to assess the progress of its strategies and tasks for achieving each of its student retention and graduation goals. UA should also consider using a combination of multiple types of performance measures to assess different aspects of its performance related to each of its strategies and tasks, where appropriate.
- d. Revise its action plans for each of its student retention and graduation goals to specify the party or parties responsible for implementing each strategy and task.

Implementation in process

See explanation for Recommendation 3.3a.

Implementation in process

See explanation for Recommendation 3.3a.