

DRAFT

# Task Force Report on Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates at NC State

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## I. Executive Summary

Despite the personal, social, and economic value of a college education, “more students leave their college or university prior to degree completion than stay” (Tinto, 1993, p. 1). Additionally, although the overwhelming majority of college students who enroll in post-secondary education do so with the intention of graduating (98.7%), only 27% of the baccalaureate students who attend public 4-year institutions complete their education in 4 years (NCES, 1996), and the average five-year graduation rate for public four-year institutions in 2001 was 41.9%, down from 52.2% in 1983 (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 2002).

NC State’s 4-year graduation rate is consistent with the national average and slightly above the national 5-year rate, but when compared with the fifteen institutions that the University regards as peers, NC State consistently ranks in the bottom half in terms of the retention of students at the beginning of their sophomore year, 4-year graduation rates, and 5- and 6-year graduation rates. Even more significantly, when the University’s actual rates are compared with its predicted rates, NC State scores -3% on retention, -7.9% on 5-year graduation rate, and -3.7% on 6-year graduation rate.

Because NC State is strongly committed to excellence, which includes the satisfaction and success of its undergraduates, objectives that correlate very closely with retention and graduation rates, this University Task Force was appointed and charged in the Fall, 2002 by Provost Stuart L. Cooper with developing recommendations and strategies for improving retention, and in turn, graduation rates within the University. To this end, the Task Force reviewed national literature on the topic, analyzed a variety of data related to retention and graduation rates, and developed a list of 6 recommendations, along with rationales for the recommendations and implementation strategies. It also reviewed Academic Regulations related to retention and graduation and made suggestions for changes that need to be implemented as soon as possible. These regulations include adding and dropping courses, course load, class attendance, graduation requirements, evaluations, and feedback to students. The six recommendations follow; in each case selected items from the Implementation lists are included. These items serve as examples only; neither inclusion in the Executive Summary nor the order in which items appear indicate rankings by the Task Force.

**Recommendation 1:** The administration at NC State will emphasize retention and graduation rates in all planning endeavors.

- The University should add advising to its goals/objectives, with emphasis on quality advising.
- Provost will emphasize retention and graduation rates as part of compact planning process with Deans; Deans will emphasize retention and graduation rates as part of compact planning process with Department Heads; Department Heads will discuss and emphasize the importance of retention and graduation rates with faculty who teach and advise.
- All discussions regarding retention and graduation rates will emphasize accountability and will be used in assessing organizational effectiveness. All colleges and departments will be asked to explain their situation and to design plans for ongoing monitoring and enhancement where feedback indicates it is warranted. These plans may include the need for more resources, but this should not be the sole strategy.

**Recommendation 2:** Faculty and administrators will strongly encourage students who enter State as full-time students to remain in that status.

- Work with advisors, especially those who advise freshmen, to implement the Progress Toward Degree Policy very meticulously. Freshmen should be encouraged to plan their academic careers from the time they arrive on campus, and they should be encouraged frequently to stick with their plan, or if necessary, to revise their plan. They should be strongly discouraged from enrolling for courses without a plan.
- Include in guidelines to be developed for use at Visiting/Recruiting Days and at Orientation, i.e. when parents, as well as students, are present, advice regarding course loads necessary to graduate in 4 years.

**Recommendation 3:** Faculty and administrators will work closely with students in order to achieve academic success.

- Strongly urge faculty to monitor their students' success very closely and to report to students and their advisors when students are doing poorly on assignments and tests and/or failing to attend class
- Encourage advisors to be more aggressive in contacting advisees who are in trouble and giving them advice
- Develop at-risk indicators that advisors can use in advising students
- Require Colleges and Departments to continually monitor and evaluate advising and its effectiveness

**Recommendation 4:** Faculty, with the support of the administration, will develop additional opportunities for students who cannot matriculate into their major of choice, and faculty and administrators will improve communication with students about these opportunities.

- Encourage Colleges to create degrees similar to the BS in Engineering; for example, a BA or BS in Life Sciences, Textiles, Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences

**Recommendation 5:** Retention and graduation rates should be given priority in the development or alteration and evaluation of academic regulations and should be considered in relation to one another.

- Fully implement the Progress Toward Degree Policy and plan for the collection of data and on-going assessment of its effectiveness
- The appropriate body(ies) should begin considering the alteration of the Academic Regulations recommended by the Task Force as soon as possible

**Recommendation 6:** Efforts to implement appropriate strategies for improving retention and graduation rates, to monitor and assess these strategies, and to modify these strategies and develop new ones as necessary should be institutionalized immediately.

- Charge the Provost and his/her designee with overseeing the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force and with taking additional steps as necessary to monitor and improve retention and graduation rates on an on-going basis

## Task Force on Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates

- Make implementing retention and graduation rate intervention strategies a top priority at NC State at every level

NC State has long had a commitment to educating non-traditional students, including adults who need to return to an institution of higher education on a part-time basis. At the same time, this commitment should not blind us to the fact that the vast majority of students enrolling as freshmen at NC State expect to go full-time and to complete their degrees in a timely manner. It is the job of these students, and the faculty, staff, and administration at this institution, to see that their goals are realized. This effort will only be successful if these objectives are institutionalized and regarded very seriously on a continuous basis by everyone within the University community.

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