



**BRIEFING TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT SERVICES
AT COPPIN STATE UNIVERSITY**

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President**

TESTIMONY

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. On behalf of Coppin State University's faculty, staff, students, and alumni, I would like to thank you and members of the subcommittee for your support of higher education and for giving me an opportunity to provide information about current programs and services provided to students to help them become college ready and persist to graduation. I have with me today Dr. Sadie Gregory, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Dr. Reginald Ross, Vice President for Enrollment Management; Mr. Richard Siemer, Vice President for Administration and Finance; and Dr. Monica E. Randall, Associate Vice President for Public Policy and Government Relations.

This afternoon, I will examine the full spectrum of programs and services provided to students. I will begin by providing a brief overview of the programs and services provided to students through our summer bridge programs; discuss current programs to assist underprepared students; and discuss support services provided to all students. Finally, I will discuss our current and future strategies to enhance student persistence to graduation.

PRE-ENROLLMENT SUMMER PROGRAMS

The University has recognized and addressed the fact that many potential freshmen need skill development prior to enrollment. To that end, the University has implemented the Student Services' STEP AHEAD program, the Pre-College Summer Program (PCSP) and the Natural Science Department's Summer Bridge program. The Office of Admissions identifies candidates for these programs based on high school grade point averages, SAT scores, and other indicators. These programs are designed to improve skills in writing, reading, math, test taking and study practices. Table I below provides a summary of CSU's pre-enrollment summer programs.

Table I. Coppin State University Pre-Enrollment Summer Programs

PROGRAM	ELIGIBLE STUDENTS	# OF PARTICIPANTS	PROGRAM PERIOD	ACTIVITIES
STEP AHEAD	Admitted students; low-income; first generation	50	4 weeks	Classes, tutorials, study skills, cultural and career exploration
Natural Science Department's Summer Bridge Program	Admitted students; interested in careers in natural sciences	20	6 weeks	Classes, tutorials, career and science exploration
Pre-College Summer Program (PCSP) ¹	Conditionally admitted students; high risk	100	2 three week programs	Classes, tutorials, study skills, cultural and personal awareness

All three of these pre-enrollment programs have been successful at matriculating and retaining students. Program reports show the second-year retention rates for participants to be 80 percent in STEP AHEAD, 83 percent in the Natural Science Department's Bridge Program, and 75 percent for the PCSP².

CURRENT EFFORTS TO ASSIST UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS

Coppin State University has developed a systematic approach to assist underprepared students. This approach combines mandatory placement testing, developmental courses, academic support services, and the aforementioned summer pre-enrollment programs.

The University has a mandatory placement test for all new students and for any student transferring with less than twenty-five credit hours. In addition, any student who does not transfer a college level math course must take the math portion of the placement test. Students are assigned to developmental math, English or reading courses based on placement results. CSU uses the ACCUPLACER placement test for mathematics, English, and reading. This test is used by more than thirty colleges and universities in the State of Maryland. Additional diagnosis is administered by faculty in the English Composition and Reading 101 classes during the first two weeks of the semester.

Students may not begin University-level work in any subject in which they need developmental courses until they have completed appropriate courses. In addition, the University requires students in need of developmental courses to complete these requirements within a designated time frame. For example, full-time students must complete all developmental courses within three semesters from the first semester of enrollment at the University. In general, the majority of the entering freshmen or transfer students who require a developmental course must take developmental mathematics.

¹ Only 100 students participate in this program each summer. There is a waiting list to participate in this program because the demand to participate exceeds our ability to accommodate more students. Expansion of this program would require additional human capital and financial resources.

² Coppin State University, Self Study Report: Pioneering Academic and Community Innovation Through Technology, Prepared for Middle States Commission on Higher Education, February 2008.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

CSU maintains two major programs designed to provide student support; the Academic Resource Center (ARC) and Student Support Services. The ARC is a program available to all students and includes centers for writing, reading, study skills, test taking, and mathematics. The Student Support Services program is a federally funded program that provides tutoring, counseling, and enrichment activities for 160 students annually who meet federal eligibility guidelines. Annually, the ARC provides more than 18,000 hours of services and the Student Support Services Program provides more than 1,100 hours.

These support services programs are professionally staffed but utilize peer tutors and counselors as well as part-time professionals to provide services. The programs' operating schedules include day, evening, and weekend hours, and each program has instructional libraries, software programs and computer work stations for student use.

Other key support services provided to CSU students includes academic advising, counseling, and financial services. CSU's Office of Academic Advisement provides an Academic Planning and Transition program that provides undergraduate students who have not declared a major with informational workshops to address their advisement needs. The University's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAP) provides support services that enable students to grow in self-understanding and assists students in utilizing their personal and interpersonal resources. The primary purpose of CAP is to create and maintain a healthy, diverse community through relationship building, education, and crisis prevention.

One of the most challenging issues facing students and parents is financing of a college education. This is a particularly daunting task at CSU where the University serves more financially disadvantaged students than any other Maryland four-year institution³. The University's Office of Financial Aid assists approximately 75 percent of CSU students in obtaining financing for their education. Financial aid counselors assist students in understanding both the federal and state financial aid process and in completing documents to obtain financing.

ENHANCING STUDENT PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION: CURRENT AND FUTURE STRATEGIES

Improving the University's graduation rate continues to be my highest priority and I strongly believe that if we admit students, we must do everything we can to ensure their academic success. Providing appropriate attention to persistence through graduation is paramount. Over the last year, I have spent considerable time and effort analyzing existing data and having extensive conversations and dialogue with senior administrators, faculty, students, and staff. In addition, I restructured and reorganized enrollment management which included hiring a highly effective administrator to lead this division. Over the next six months, this new division will complete an extensive strategic enrollment and graduation plan that incorporates research based programs and initiatives to effectively address the myriad of variables associated with increasing student retention and graduation rates over the next several years and beyond. For example, enrollment management will assess the feasibility of a summer residential bridge program and a summer developmental/remedial program; explore the feasibility of the 'Merit Index Score' in the selection process to predict persistence; and identify and manage 'threats' to the fall 2009 enrollment cohort.

In order to help ensure the persistence of our students through graduation, we will continue to redefine enrollment management by developing a more strategically focused, multi-year enrollment management plan. Based on current research and best practices, this strategy includes focusing our attention on the first year of college – a critical time for retention, learning, and skill development.

³ Approximately 59% of first-time, full-time freshmen attending CSU are Pell Grant recipients.

Foundations of Excellence Program®

For the 2008-2009 academic year, CSU was selected to participate in the Foundations of Excellence Program®, as part of the national first-year experience program headed by Dr. John N. Gardner⁴. This comprehensive, guided self-study and improvement process is designed to assist the University in enhancing the learning and retention of first-year students by expanding CSU's ability to realize its goals for student learning, achievement and persistence. Working with the Policy Center on the First Year of College, a non-profit policy and advocacy center, the University will critically evaluate institutional strengths and weaknesses to develop a strategic action plan that will lead to enhanced student learning and persistence. The Foundations of Excellence model is informed by nationally vetted principles known as Foundational Dimensions® which includes developing a philosophy of the first year based on institutional mission; creating comprehensive organizational structures and policies; promoting engaged learning experiences; promoting a culture of faculty responsibility; facilitating appropriate student transitions; serving all first-year students; supporting diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures; promoting student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education; and conducting continuous assessments and institutional improvements. The Foundations of Excellence Program® is supported by the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Participation in this initiative will guide the University in developing an action plan for institutional change and improvement. I am confident that our participation in this nationally recognized program will improve our students' first-year experiences and lead to improved student outcomes.

Center for Student Success

My highest priority is to ensure student success through graduation which includes developing and implementing a Center for Student Success. The primary mission of the Center for Student Success will be to support the overall first-year experience of our students which includes developing clear and measurable student outcome measures for 'student success' and implementing strong support strategies that will include tracking students from the point of entry as freshmen through graduation and beyond. This Center will serve as the main starting point for traditional freshmen and include a freshmen seminar and service learning component. Although we continue to develop the logistical characteristics of this Center, we envision that this Center will provide a single location where students can take care of a range of school-related business such as advising, financial aid, registration, academic services, tutoring, and career development - all under one roof. This Center will also utilize web-based technology to provide 24 hour tutoring and financial literacy training.

CONCLUSION

Coppin State University's participation in the Foundations of Excellence® program and the development of the *Center for Student Success* are actions and activities that are consistent with the recommendations made by Study Panel on Comparability and Competitiveness of Historically Black Institutions. Both of these initiatives focus on the first year of college and utilize national research to inform and develop institutional practices to enhance persistence through graduation. As we continue to develop and implement strategies that will ensure that students persist through graduation, we welcome your support.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of the programs and services provided to our students and allowing me to discuss the current and future strategies we continue to develop to enhance student persistence to graduation. All of these programs and services are designed to nurture the potential and transform the lives of Coppin State University students.

4 For a comprehensive description of the Foundations of Excellence Program®, please visit <http://www.fyfoundations.org/overview.aspx>.