



# **Growing Enrollment in a Challenging Environment: An Imperative for Cleveland State**

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**Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations from the Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force**

**July, 2015**

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### **Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations from the Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force August, 2015**

In August, 2014, President Ronald Berkman chartered a Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force, comprised of administrative and faculty leaders from across the campus, to develop Cleveland State University's first strategic enrollment management plan. The Task Force's work was prompted by demographic trends projecting a continuing decline in the number of high school graduates across the six-county area from which most CSU students are drawn. Indeed, from 2010 through 2014, the Northeast Ohio high school population declined by about 2,000 students. Thanks to many initiatives, CSU recorded impressive enrollment growth of 12% over that period, which outperformed the competitive marketplace. However, an unexpected decline of about 2% in the 2014-2015 academic year highlighted the University's continuing demographic challenges and the need to develop a clear, long-term strategy for enrollment management.

Over a period of about eleven months, the sixteen members of the Task Force gathered and analyzed hundreds of pages of data, convened dozens of meetings with key stakeholders from across the University, studied enrollment management best practices, and participated in national enrollment management symposia. The Task Force concluded that CSU should work aggressively to reverse its one-year enrollment decline and grow both enrollment and student credit hours in line with specific targets through 2020. Doing this will fulfill the University's mission to provide a high quality, accessible education for the largest possible number of Northeast Ohio residents; to be financially viable in the face of likely zero tuition growth and largely inevitable expense increases; to bring the University to scale in key academic programs; and to utilize CSU's capacity to accommodate roughly 19,000 students. This summary provides an outline of the three broad measures proposed by the Task Force to achieve these objectives.

#### ***Establishing University-Wide Enrollment Management Goals***

The Task Force first proposes that CSU establish specific numeric goals related to enrollment management to both provide guidance and to mark achievement. The Task Force recommends a principal enrollment goal supplemented by two sub-goals for the University. Progress toward these goals began in the 2014-15 academic year, even as the Task Force was engaged in its work on the overall enrollment management plan. **The principal goal is to increase enrollment at CSU by roughly 4% to at least 18,000 students by 2020.** This goal embodies **two sub-goals: manage annual graduate student enrollment to 4,900 by 2020** (a 5% decline from 2014); and **increase the undergraduate student body by 175 students per year to a total undergraduate enrollment of 13,100 by 2020 (a 7.5% increase).** The Task Force modeled six different scenarios—"Six Roads to 18,000"—under which the first goal of enrolling 18,000

students can be achieved. An additional three scenarios—“Three Roads to 19,000”—illustrate how the University can achieve a more aggressive goal of enrolling 19,000 students by 2020.

### ***Driving Recruitment and Retention through Six Student Segments***

The second Task Force proposal is to achieve our specific enrollment targets by focusing on six identified segments of the CSU student body: (1) First Time in College Undergraduates (2) Transfer Students (3) Graduate Students (4) Summer Students (5) International Students and (6) Veterans. Establishing goals for different segments of the University’s student body recognizes the range of unique circumstances associated with Cleveland State’s prospective students that affect both our initial efforts to recruit them and our subsequent work to retain them through graduation. These include geographic origin, socioeconomic status, family education history, academic preparation, and diversity.

***1. First Time in College Undergraduates (FTICs)*** -- The Task Force recommends that recruitment efforts be expanded so that an additional 75 freshmen are enrolled each year. This will result in a total freshmen class of 1,935 students by 2020, and will be achieved through a combination of strategies including:

- Expanding recruitment efforts to include more high schools with potential for sending students to CSU
- Increasing recruitment activity in “spotlight” schools with potential for sending students to CSU
- Aggressively recruiting students earlier in the pipeline—i.e., high school sophomores and juniors
- Increasing application flow through retention of outside admissions consultants
- Expanding access to student housing
- Strategically using scholarship dollars in recruitment efforts
- Simplifying application processing and conducting more high-impact campus visits

As important as its recruiting efforts will be the University’s strategies for student retention. Here, CSU has made significant strides already through implementation of recommendations from the Student Success Committee established by the Faculty Senate in consultation with President Berkman in 2010.

These have contributed significantly to gains since 2002, notably a 17% increase in freshmen to sophomore retention and a close to 50% increase in freshmen cohort graduation rates.

The Task Force recommends that these efforts be further fortified by:

- Increasing financial support for initiatives that show success in increasing student retention, including additional funding for the Tutoring and Academic Success Center (TASC) and for the successful, federally funded TRIO program

- Making use of “big data” and predictive analytics that will give CSU a more sophisticated understanding of the results produced by both new and existing student retention initiatives
- Aggressively implementing Degree Mapping to give both students and their advisors the tools to monitor students’ progress towards degree completion and to make corrections when they have gone off course

**2. *Transfer Students*** – A substantial number of CSU students (about 50%) have transferred from another institution. Roughly 60% of these transfer students (27% of the entire CSU student body) come from the Tri-C, Lakeland, and Lorain County community colleges. A key objective will be to achieve total transfer enrollment of 5,600 students per year through 2020. This will be challenging given declining community college enrollments. However, the Task Force believes CSU can obtain a greater market share of transfer students from the three institutions above by creating stronger relationships focused on aligning degree maps so that students at these community colleges do not take excess credit hours and arrive instead at CSU “on track” to complete their program of study in the shortest possible time. Increasing transfer enrollment, particularly from the three community colleges will involve:

- Actively promoting the transferability of credits and progress toward a University degree
- Providing regular advising services to transfer students at all stages of the application process
- Ensuring that scholarships are used strategically for recruitment and that amounts remain competitive
- Providing transfer students with advising at all stages in the admissions process

Retention will also be key for growing transfer student enrollment. Accordingly, the Task Force recommends a number of strategies for transfer retention that mirror those employed to retain FTICs.

**3. *Graduate Students*** – Graduate enrollment at CSU has been in decline since 2010, and that decline will continue through 2020 as graduate students who began their studies several years ago leave in greater numbers than new students enrolling. The Task Force recommends that this decline be moderated to 5% so that graduate enrollment in 2020 will be 4,900 students. This will require aggressive recruiting efforts directed at prospective U.S. students (international graduate student recruitment is addressed below). These efforts must include:

- Implementing a comprehensive team-based process for graduate recruitment that involves program directors, department chairs, deans, the College of Graduate Studies, and Institutional Research
- Increasing marketing support
- Identifying and targeting of graduate students employed by companies that provide tuition assistance
- Evaluating tuition levels for competitiveness with other universities

**4. Summer Students** – A little more than 10% of total University student credit hours are derived from the summer semester. As a result of the 2012 withdrawal of Pell Grants for summer study and other factors, however, summer student credit hours have been steadily declining. The Task Force recommends that this decline be arrested by stabilizing summer credit hours at 41,000 for Summer 2016, and then increasing them to at least 43,000 by 2020. A Summer Semester Working Group convened by the Provost is assessing summer strategies and will finalize recommendations and a Summer 2016 action plan by September 2015.

**5. International Students** – A significant student segment for CSU is international students (both graduate and undergraduate), which has grown by roughly 120 students annually since 2009. This segment is particularly important because international students pay tuition at the higher “out of state” rate. The Task Force recommends that CSU increase international enrollment by 50 students annually so that enrollment grows from 1,594 in Fall 2014 to 1,850 by 2020. Strategies for achieving this increase will include:

- Increasing the number of government-sponsored students to 600 by 2020
- Expanding utilization of agents and uncapping agent commissions
- Building the University’s presence and brand recognition in key countries including China, Brazil, India and the Middle East
- Creating a pipeline from CSU’s English as a Second Language (ESL) program
- Expanding visits of and build stronger relationships with international faculty

As with other student segments, retention is a critical element in managing international student enrollment. Thus, the Task Force believes it is essential to evaluate the sufficiency and effectiveness of acclimation and support programs for international students and to take steps to fill the most significant gaps.

**6. Veterans** – In the first phase of its work, the Task Force identified Veterans as a segment that could possibly be a significant source of new enrollment, cutting across both the undergraduate and graduate student bodies, as does International. Because that potential has not yet been quantified, the Task Force recommends three main actions:

- Exploring possibilities for partnership with Tri-C’s Alfred Lerner Veterans Services Center
- Developing and inventorying available existing online mechanisms for awarding credit for life experience over Summer 2015
- Gathering and analyzing relevant data to assess the potential for growth in the Veteran student segment

### *Enhancing Cleveland State's Value and Affordability*

The third Task Force proposal is to place renewed emphasis on our unique value proposition to both prospective and enrolled students. Cleveland State University's Vision articulates it in this way: **We will be recognized as a student-focused center of academic excellence that provides an accessible and exceptional education to all.** In other words, providing an outstanding academic experience that is within financial reach is at the core of what we do. The balance of this summary outlines the Task Force's recommendations on two major components of this proposition: academic programs and financial aid.

#### *Academic Programs*

Though continually confronted with scarce resources, CSU's leadership has taken a series of steps to enhance the value and impact of the University's academic "product" and students' engagement in the learning process – and hence "engaged learning" as a foundation of CSU's academic work and external brand. The Task Force recommends the following main to further build on that work.

- Completing implementation of the University's comprehensive Program Prioritization Process as rapidly as possible, which will make major strides in reinforcing CSU's areas of excellence across programs in healthcare, the arts, and engineering - while meeting selected student and employer demand in focused disciplines
- Investing the time and money necessary to ensure the success of the major partnerships the University has created with a range of civic institutions such as Playhouse Square, educational organizations including NEOMED, and employers like Parker Hannifin and Progressive
- Bringing CSU's internship and co-op program to the next level of success as an integral part of academic programs to build a growing base of internship opportunities and robust strategic relationships with a larger number of employers
- Building on the faculty's accomplishments and the E Learning Center's strengths to increase the proportion of online programs from 12% of Fall and Spring Semester courses and 25% in the Summer Semester
- Becoming a "fast follower" of pedagogical innovations to obtain the benefits of these approaches with relatively little financial risks

#### *Financial Aid*

Most prospective and current CSU students are financially challenged and some severely so. As a result, the University's financial aid program is highly important for both recruitment and retention, as well as the achievement of our Mission's and Vision's requirement of accessibility for all.

Today, CSU provides substantial levels of financial aid. For example, in the Fall and Spring semesters of 2014, Institutional Grant & Scholarship funds were close to \$20 million and CSU Advancement's endowment and gift awards approached \$3 million. Best estimates are that some 4,000 students received awards. However, in the former category the money is spread across some 12 categories of aid, and fragmented across Administration and the Colleges. There is no central oversight and coordination of all existing scholarship funds and the administrative support to help allocate most effectively and measure the results achieved.

In this context of fragmentation, the Task Force is highly encouraged by the recently announced a \$100 million Campaign for Student Success and Advancement's ongoing aggressive activity to build a culture of philanthropy across CSU.

At the same time, the Task Force believes that three main actions will build on this momentum.

- Developing and gaining agreement on an overall Financial Aid Strategy for CSU that includes a set of objectives for the size and competitiveness of financial aid overall, the balance between merit and need based assistance, while adhering to the complex federal regulatory compliance requirement for our students who receive federal and institutional aid
- Establishing central oversight and coordination of the administration of the University's entire grant and scholarship portfolio – as we develop the recruitment and retention strategy
- Pursuing opportunities to assist students in areas such as financial literacy, budgeting, borrowing, repayment, and managing limited resources as counseled by Campus All-in-One

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In overall summary, the Task Force believes that the above recommendations – when well implemented – will make Cleveland State University a leader in the next era of Strategic Enrollment Management among US universities, and by far most important will produce the level of enrollment required for the University's lasting success.