

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Agenda Item Summary Sheet

Committee: Academic and Student Affairs

Date of Meeting: November 15, 2011

Agenda Item: Students First Update

Proposed
Policy Change

Approvals
Required by
Policy

Other
Approvals

Monitoring

Information

Cite policy requirement, or explain why item is on the Board agenda:

The Trustees have been monitoring progress on the Student First initiative.

Scheduled Presenter(s):

Larry Litecky, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic & Student Affairs

Mike López, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Jonathan Eichten, Students First Director

Outline of Key Points/Policy Issues:

Staff will provide an update to the Students First projects with one of the projects, Graduation Planner, reviewed in depth. Graduation Planner is intended to provide students with an easy-to-use online tool that enables them to plot out their academic program, make changes along the way, or try out “what if?” scenarios. The software piloted this summer does not fully meet this intent. As a result, staff have identified other products and approaches that they and campus users believe will provide students with better tools and outcomes.

Background Information:

Jonathan Eichten provided a comprehensive update on all of the Students First Projects to the Board of Trustees Technology Committee on July 19, 2011. Installation of the final component needed for the Graduation Planner project was completed in July. Pilot campuses assessed the tools.

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INFORMATION ITEM
STUDENTS FIRST UPDATE

1 **BACKGROUND**

2
3 Over the past few years, the system has been engaged in initiatives to improve students’
4 experiences through the Students First initiative. Staff will provide an update to the Students
5 First projects with one of the projects, Graduation Planner, reviewed in depth. Graduation
6 Planner is intended to provide students with an easy-to-use online tool that enables them to plot
7 out their academic program, make changes along the way, or try out “what if?” scenarios. The
8 software piloted this summer does not fully meet this intent. As a result, staff have identified
9 other products and approaches that they and campus users believe will provide students with
10 better tools and outcomes.

11
12 At the March, 2011 Board of Trustees meeting, staff reported that testing had stopped while
13 waiting for a software upgrade with a projected delivery date of June 30, 2011. The assessment
14 of the project at that time was “Due to a large number of unknowns, overall confidence is low.”
15 University and college questions about the impact of the software on campus resources and
16 advising structures prompted a full assessment of the software and a report to universities and
17 colleges in response to the questions.

18
19 The graduation planning tool software upgrade was received in early July and fully installed by
20 the end of July. During the months of August and September the two pilot campuses assessed
21 the upgrade. The assessment revealed that maintaining the tool would require additional staffing
22 at a time when colleges and universities are cutting staff. In addition, the pilots demonstrated
23 that the tool does not deal well with certain aspects of our college and university operations and
24 student academic progression. Throughout the assessment process, the challenges the software
25 will have in meeting the complex and diverse needs of Minnesota State Colleges and
26 Universities became more clear. The system includes different types of institutions students,
27 programs, and pathways – we are a complex customer. From individualized study programs to
28 lockstep technical programs, our curriculum is very diverse and complex. Examples of the
29 impact on our students’ abilities to effectively use the tool include:

- 30
- 31 • Many students enroll in one or more courses in developmental education. The software
32 is able to handle very simplistic curriculum models of developmental education;
33 however, our system has varied and very complex models of developmental education
34 that the software is unable to support.
 - 35 • Many students pursue both a major and a minor or multiple programs. Students would be
36 able to complete a single plan with the software; however, the software is unable to
37 provide a singular audit against the student’s plan. Students would have to track multiple
38 roadmaps – prone to error and contrary to the project goal of providing a clear path to

1 graduation.

- 2 • Many students have one or more exceptions made to their major or program. Examples
3 include courses exempted due to military experience, credit for prior learning and the
4 International Baccalaureate. The software is able to consider the exemptions in the
5 student plan only if the student had the exception approved prior to creating the plan.
6 The result is that a student may register for courses that he/she doesn't need.
- 7 • Students expect technology to be fast. For the pilot at Minnesota State University,
8 Mankato, the system response time was on average three minutes when opening a
9 roadmap. Given the scale of our system, overall performance was a great concern.

10 11 **NEXT STEPS**

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13 In October, the Graduation Planner Assessment Report was placed on the Students First website
14 for review. Several groups, including the Students First Graduation Planner Working Group,
15 Student Leaders, Students First Management Team, and the Leadership Council reviewed and
16 discussed the report. The response has been consistent: in considering the capability of the
17 software, along with the additional resources necessary to serve students, it is believed our
18 students and system will not receive adequate return on our collective investment in this
19 approach. Therefore, we have elected not to pursue further development of the Graduation
20 Planner tool for use within Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. **However, we are still**
21 **fully committed to the original goal of developing an academic planning tool for students**
22 **that can respond to the diversity of needs in a dynamic environment.**

23
24 Based upon this goal, the following possible solutions have been identified and will be further
25 developed and explored with the Leadership Council and other stakeholders:

- 26
27 • Enhance the Degree Audit & Reporting System (DARS/u.achieve) with planning tools to
28 enable students to:
 - 29 o Explore “what if scenarios” with majors/programs
 - 30 o Enter planned courses into (DARS/u.achieve) so that students can create a
31 customized academic plan
 - 32 o Run a report that reflects their customized academic plan and includes transfer
33 courses, completed courses, and planned courses, by term
 - 34 o Explore how transfer options could lead to a university degree
- 35
36 • Explore connections to GPS Lifeplan to support student advising.
- 37
38 • Create an academic report that reflects students' future planned courses that can be used
39 by faculty and administrators to improve curricular planning.
- 40
41 • Build on the GradUate Initiative that encourages degree completion with an application
42 that identifies former students who have not completed a degree, diploma or certificate
43 and encourages their completion.