



Student Success Measures and Strategies

*President Sue K. Hammersmith's Presentation to the MnSCU Board of Trustees,
Academic and Student Affairs Committee, June 17, 2014*

Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today about practices that promote success for a diverse student body. I've been working in this area for 25 years, so my comments today are based on what we do at Metropolitan State but also what I've learned over my career. We know a great deal nationally about what works and what doesn't work to promote success for students of color, and generally, what promote success for diverse students promotes success for all students.

Working from MnSCU's "Accountability Dashboard: Strategic Framework Performance Measures" for Metropolitan State University and all MnSCU Universities:

- Metropolitan State University has a higher graduation rate for both students of color and for all students,
- Metropolitan State University enrolls one third of all the university students of color in the MnSCU system, and
- Metropolitan State University graduates 44% of the university graduates of color in the MnSCU system. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Enrollment and Graduation of Students of Color FY13

Dashboard Measure	All MnSCU Universities	Metropolitan State U.	MetroSU Share
6-Year Graduation Rate – All Students*	53.4%	69.3%	
6-Year Graduation Rate – Students of Color*	43.5%	56.7%	
Estimated Number of Graduates – Students of Color**	4982	2178	43.7%
Enrolled Students of Color – Number (FY13)	11,452	3,841	33.5%
Enrolled Students of Color – Percent (FY13)	14%	33%	

*Based on graduation of students entering fall semester, full-time FY2007.

**Based on graduation rates and total number enrolled, FY13.

Our students are what's often called "post-traditional" students. Even our young students are not your traditional student. They are culturally diverse. They range in age from 16 to mid-70s (the average age is 32). They are typically juggling family, work, and community responsibilities. They are often in transition. They bring a wealth of life experience and cultural backgrounds into the classroom. They have many different learning styles. For many, English is not their first language. Finally, 97% of our students are transfer students; they bring in an average of 72 credit hours and 5 transcripts.

Over the past six years:

- Our enrollment has increased by 25% to over 11,000 students per year.
- Our degree conferral has increased by 38% to over 2000 graduates per year.
- Our enrollment of students of color has increased by 35%; they constitute over 33% of our student body.
- This year alone, our students of color grew by 7%. That included:
 - An 18% increase in American Indian students.
 - A 10% increase for Asians.
 - A 6% increase for Africans and African Americans.
- Our veterans and military students grew by 38% over the past six years. We have more than 800 veterans enrolled, more than any other MnSCU institution. Many of these students are persons of color.

I was asked to share with you today 3-5 examples of institutional practices that promote student success and graduation, especially for students of color. I have chosen four areas which I believe would benefit any institution, urban or rural, large or small, to promote success among all students.

Institutional Commitment

Antiracism, diversity and inclusion are explicitly included as central features of our mission, vision, and core values. This institutional commitment is manifested in many ways. For example:

- All proposed policies and procedures include a consideration of disparate impact.
- We require diversity on our search committees.
- We require diversity questions to be included at each round of the interview process for new administrators, faculty, and professional staff personnel. Demonstrated ability to work with diverse populations is routinely considered in our hiring decisions for faculty, staff, and administrators.

Cultural competency is something we expect of all employees, and it is something we work on all the time. We start at the top. All 22 of my Cabinet members have gone through numerous diversity workshops, 1B.1 training, and IDI assessment (Intercultural Development Inventory).

Over 400 employees have gone through at least one form of diversity training in the last two years. Many more have engaged in other discussions of antiracism, diversity and inclusion.

Every year we send delegations of employees and students to the YWCA's "It's Time to Talk" events, to the Overcoming Racism Conference, and to the White Privilege Conference. Those delegations include students, faculty, staff, and administrators. We emphasize that antiracism, diversity and inclusion is everybody's business, whether you are working in academic affairs, student affairs, financial management, advancement, or facilities. It is everyone's responsibility.

We have a University Diversity Plan that was developed with participation of over 300 individuals. We have a Diversity Council, an Antiracism Education group, a Diversity Learning group, and Antiracism Leadership Team, and many other caucuses and interest groups. We have cultural coordinator/retention specialists for most of the diverse populations we serve: African/African-American, American Indian, Asian, GLBT, Latino, and veterans.

Finally—and this is very important—25% of our full-time employees are persons of color. Our workforce mirrors our student body, and students can see faculty and staff who look like them and appreciate their culture. Our workforce diversity is also a tremendous resource to inform the operation and decision-making processes within the institution.

I mention this level of institutional commitment because students tell us it makes a difference, that they are aware of our mission, vision, and core values and that it makes a difference for their educational experience.

Intrusive Advising, Cultural Outreach, and Early Intervention

Research shows that one major difference between students who graduate and those who don't is simply the ability to have someone at the university that they can connect with. We have two features that are designed to promote that personal connection beyond what takes place between the faculty and student in the classroom.

One is the model of intrusive advising, in which Metropolitan State University was a national pioneer. With this model, full-time professional academic advisors are responsible for keeping their assigned students enrolled, in touch with the services they need, encouraged, and on track. We have invested heavily in building a substantial staff of academic advisors who know their students and have the time to interact with them personally, on an ongoing basis, as the students move through their program. At an earlier point in my career I had the opportunity to actually measure the direct impact of intrusive advising. We extended intrusive advising to freshmen students and cut their first-to-second-year drop-out rate in half in the first year of using an intrusive advising model. I cannot tell you how often here at Metropolitan State, when I talk with our alumni, they mention their academic advisor as the person who got them through school. Decades later they can often still tell you their advisor's name.

In addition to the academic advisors, we also have special professional staff for each of the major diverse populations we serve: African/African Americans, American Indians, Asians, GLBTs, Latinos, and Veterans. They do outreach and have personal relationships with students as well. They help trouble-shoot, make referrals, plan special events, and work with their group's respective student organization. I have heard many students and alumni say how important those relationships were in helping them get through school.

The cultural coordinators also serve as an invaluable resource to me and to the institution as a whole. This year, for example, we developed a smudging policy and procedure for the university's American Indian students and employees. That is part of the inclusion work that would not have happened without our American Indian liaison. And the cultural coordinators all affirm and promote the University's relationship with their respective communities, whether that means Metropolitan State University's participation out in the communities we serve, or Metropolitan State University's hosting conferences or special events for the communities we serve.

We also have developed some "early intervention" protocols for preventing attrition before it happens. Our research tells us that if a student enrolls every semester with no "stop-outs," the odds are 98% that the student will graduate within the 6-year time frame. Whether they enroll part-time or full-time does not matter; the odds are still 98%. But if the student stops out one semester, the probability of graduating within six years drops to 60%. If the student stops out twice, the probability of graduating drops to 33%. So we have some new intervention strategies to keep them enrolled without interruption.

- The Registrar identifies students who are in good academic standing but who have not preregistered for the next semester's classes. Our student affairs staff personally contact these students to see why they haven't registered and if we can help get them registered. Often we can. That's one intervention.
- Then our Financial Management Office identifies the students who risk having their classes cancelled for nonpayment. Student affairs staff personally contact these students to make sure they know their schedule is about to be cancelled and see if we can help. Often we can. That practice has reduced our drops for nonpayment to 1/3 of the prior number.

It will be a few years before we can truly assess the effectiveness of these interventions, but so far we believe they are having some effect and that they will contribute to positive outcomes for all our student populations.

The Educational Experience

Let's talk about what happens in the classroom. Our faculty themselves are serious students of teaching and learning; of adult learning; and of antiracism, diversity and inclusion. They work hard to adopt teaching styles that accommodate many different experience bases and many different learning styles, without lowering expectations or compromising learning outcomes. They also use high-impact educational practices that we know enhance student engagement, learning, and success.

For this area, I am relying on what our students and alumni tell us has made a difference to them. Remember, virtually all of our students are transfer students, and they have a comparative basis for telling us what we do that's a little different. This is what our students tell me is different about the Metropolitan State educational experience:

- Classes are small—usually in the low 20s, never above 35.
- Classes are highly interactive, with lots of in-class collaborative and small group work.

- Our classes and academic programs include a lot of field experience, so students can see how learning is applied and why it matters.
- Instruction is individualized. Rather than having cookie-cutter “lesson plans,” the students tell me the faculty push them along their individual paths to get to the outcomes we want for them.
- Our schedules, locations, and methods of instructional delivery (that includes online and hybrid courses) give them the flexibility they need to be able to go to school and work full-time.
- The faculty who teach at Metro have real-life examples and applicable experience that they bring into the classroom. Our students love that.
- On the NSSE survey, our students are 18% more likely than students in comparison institutions to have a senior capstone experience.
- Our faculty use diversity as a resource to enrich the educational experience of all our students and really work with the difference life experiences and perspectives the students bring into the classroom. According to the NSSE survey results, the Metropolitan State students are significantly more likely than students at other institutions to say their educational experience has included:
 - Discussions with people of a different race, ethnicity, or religious background.
 - Diverse perspectives in course discussions or assignments.
 - An emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds.

Students tell us that this immeasurably increases the richness and value of their educational experience, that it makes them feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, reaching across cultural lines, and learning from others who are different from themselves.

- Part of the magic that happens between our faculty and students, I think, is because the faculty have faith in our students. They know what a lot of our students have gone through to get here, and they are determined to help them succeed. But **they do not lower expectations**. That is one of the lessons we have to learn from the HBCUs, which is never lower your expectations. Again, the NSSE survey results say that our students are more likely than other students in Minnesota to say:
 - The institution emphasizes spending significant time studying and on academic work.
 - Their courses are highly challenging.
 - The write more pages of assigned writing.

Again, these are practices and features that benefits all students, traditional or post-traditional.

Social Work Program Success

Finally, let me share with you a particular academic program design that produces extraordinarily high graduation rates. It is our social work program. The lowest graduation rate I’ve seen from this program is 91%. Often it is 100%. Half of our social work graduates and alumni are persons of color.

What is distinctive about the social work program model?

- It is a cohort model. The students move through the program together, and they are taught to support each other when the going gets tough. They are a learning community, and they learn from each other. I have heard their testimonies at their graduation banquet. They are part of a close-knit community, and they motivate and support each other.
- The students also get personal coaching by the faculty. They meet weekly or biweekly outside the classroom, and the faculty are very nurturing.
- The program has a heavy emphasis on field placement and applied learning. For the students, this brings to life everything they are learning in the classroom. They can see immediately how what they're learning in the classroom applies in the field, and how important skills like writing are for the professional practice.
- Students are not admitted to the program until their junior year. They've had time to explore and they know this is really what they want to do.

The last time they had their reaccreditation by the Council of Social Work Education, the reviewer told me he was so impressed, that this is how every urban social work program should be designed. It works, and it is replicable. The cohort model, faculty coaching, and field placements are all important and all replicable, where appropriate in other institutions.

In summary, I offer these factors for your consideration:

1. Strong institutional commitment to antiracism, diversity and inclusion.
2. Contact with students outside the classroom, through intrusive advising, cultural outreach, and early intervention.
3. High-impact educational practices and high expectations.
4. The cohort model for academic programs where appropriate.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share with you. We are happy to entertain any questions you may have.