

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

Agenda Item Summary Sheet

Committee: Academic and Student Affairs **Date of Meeting:** May 17, 2011

Agenda Item: Board Committee Goals: Three-Year Baccalaureate and 12-Month Calendar

Proposed Policy Change Approvals Required by Policy Other Approvals Monitoring

Information

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

The FY2011 work plan of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee includes a goal to study the pros and cons of three-year baccalaureate degree programs and a 12-month calendar and to make a decision on implementation in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

Scheduled Presenter(s):

Scott R. Olson, Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Sue Hammersmith, President, Metro State University
Manuel M. Lopez, Associate Vice Chancellor, Learning, Technology and Programmatic Innovations
Leslie K. Mercer, Associate Vice Chancellor, Associate Vice Chancellor for Research, Planning and Effectiveness

Outline of Key Points/Policy Issues:

- All system colleges and universities operate year round by offering one or more summer terms. Summer term course offerings and enrollments vary, but on every campus, summer terms are shorter and enroll fewer students than fall and spring semesters.
- North Hennepin Community College is exploring an alternate 12-month calendar which would consist of three equal-length terms over a year. If implementation issues can be resolved, the pilot would be evaluated after three years.
- Although the state universities do not now have formal three-year baccalaureate degree programs, about 140 university students a year earn a bachelor's degree within three years. Most common acceleration strategies are to transfer in credits earned while in high school and to take heavier than normal course loads.
- Two state universities are planning formal three-year degree programs in selected majors.

Background Information:

Both 12-month calendars and three-year baccalaureate degree programs can enable students to accelerate completion of their degrees.

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

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| INFORMATION ITEM |
| BOARD COMMITTEE GOALS: THREE-YEAR BACCALAUREATE AND 12-MONTH CALENDAR |

BACKGROUND

In September, 2010, the Board of Trustees approved the following goal in the FY2011 work plan of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee:

- Study the pros and cons of implementing a 12-month calendar and a three-year baccalaureate program and make a decision on implementation by June 21, 2011.

This report presents information on both 12-month calendars and three-year baccalaureate degree programs, including the pros and cons of expanding each initiative in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

A 12-month calendar and three-year baccalaureate degree programs are related, but separate issues. Both options can potentially assist students in earning their baccalaureate degrees in a timely and efficient manner.

Consultation

Implications of 12-month calendar and three-year baccalaureate degree models were identified in discussions in meetings of the presidents, chief academic officers and faculty representatives. In addition, the Office of the Chancellor convened a committee of student representatives, academic and student affairs leaders, and faculty organizations that contributed to the findings in this report. Members are listed in the attachment.

12-MONTH CALENDARS

The traditional academic year is nine months long. The board has asked for an analysis of the opportunity and impacts of implementing a year round calendar that could accelerate student progress and improve efficiency in using facilities.

12-Month Calendar Models

There are a variety of calendar models that could be employed to operate colleges and universities on a year round basis.

Traditional Semesters and a Shorter, Optional Summer Term

Programs are designed to fit into an academic year of two 14-17 week semesters and a summer term with limited course offerings. This model is the dominant practice in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and higher education in general. Some faculty and students find that a full semester is too long—fatigue sets in or they prefer a condensed schedule to fit their work and personal obligations. On the other hand, summer sessions can be too short for high quality learning; faculty have found that it is not possible to deliver some semester-long courses during a short summer session.

Trimesters

The college or university operates three terms of equal length over a 12-month period and students attend one, two or three terms a year at their option. Student demand dictates whether enrollment levels become relatively equal over the three terms or whether the third (summer) term includes fewer courses and smaller enrollment. For faculty, this model allows the same course designs to be employed whenever the course is offered.

Year Round Attendance

Regardless of term format, students are required to enroll year round, including summers. Minnesota State Colleges and Universities offer a limited number of programs that require summer enrollment. Examples include clinical programs with summer internships and certain disciplines, such as horticulture which requires field experience during the growing season.

No Fixed Calendar

Programs can be designed to start and stop at any date depending on curriculum and student needs. Some online courses in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities have open start and end dates. While flexible for students, as a uniform practice, this model is difficult to manage to achieve minimum course enrollments that colleges and universities require for financial sustainability.

Current Practice in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities currently operate year round in the sense that all institutions offer one or more summer terms in addition to fall and spring semesters. Summer term dates and the extent of courses offered during the summer differ across the colleges and universities.

Colleges and universities with more resources and larger student populations are able to offer more summer term courses. Summer enrollments range from 12 to 54 percent of fall headcount enrollments, and summer FYE ranges from 2 to 16 percent of annual FYE. Summer term enrollments and course offerings, however, are never as large or extensive as in fall and summer terms.

In comparison to fall and spring semesters, summer terms serve a slightly older student population on average and offer more upper division and graduate courses.

| Summer Term Headcount and Full-Year Equivalent (FYE) Enrollments | | | |
|---|---------------|---|--|
| | System | Largest College/University Summer Term | Smallest College/University Summer Term |
| Summer term headcount | 66,044 | 5,851 | 73 |
| Ratio summer headcount/ fall headcount | 33% | 54% | 12% |
| Summer term FYE | 12,069 | 1,266 | 13 |
| Percent of FYE enrolled in summer | 8% | 16% | 2% |

Potential Benefits of 12-Month Calendars

As discussed above, all Minnesota State Colleges and Universities operate during the summer as well as during fall and spring semesters. The availability of summer courses benefits the system's students:

- All students have added flexibility to enroll and complete their programs by enrolling in terms that are convenient for them.
- Highly motivated students can accelerate their progress, graduate and qualify for jobs earlier than attending only during the academic year.
- Part-time students can still graduate on schedule by enrolling year round.
- Students who take advantage of summer terms to accelerate their progress will avoid paying future tuition and fee increases.
- Students who qualify for employer reimbursement of their tuition charges may be able to increase the amount reimbursed if their employer applies a maximum reimbursement available each term.

Colleges and universities offer summer terms to achieve the following objectives:

- Their mission to be accessible to Minnesotans is supported by offering courses on a flexible schedule for students.
- Added flexibility and access to an accelerated schedule may increase both the numbers of students who graduate and their on-time graduation rates.
- Facilities and equipment can accommodate more students, improving facility utilization and delaying investments that must be made to accommodate growing enrollments.

- Colleges that compete with system institutions offer opportunities for accelerated, year round study, and this option helps in recruiting and retaining enrollments.

Potential Disadvantages of 12-Month Calendars

Unless they are required to attend all year, students are not potentially harmed by 12-month calendars. Reasons why students do not choose to enroll 12 months out of the year—and colleges and universities do not press them to do so—include both educational and financial challenges:

- Learning in many disciplines requires time to absorb and reflect. Faculty know from their experiences that a faster pace does not always allow for the deeper understanding of concepts that they seek for their students.
- Students enrolling year round have less time for personal development, travel and other activities which contribute to their personal growth than students who follow a traditional schedule.
- Many students, including many underrepresented and adult students, cannot attend year round because of family and other obligations.
- Most traditional students count on summer jobs for financing their educations. Students would likely increase their reliance on student loans if summer earnings are reduced or not available. For residential campuses, in particular, students' summer jobs are often in their home towns, not where their college or university is located. Online courses are one way in which colleges and universities can enable students to enroll during the summer while still holding their summer jobs.
- Financial aid policies can suppress the potential for year round attendance. Until 2010, students could not receive federal Pell Grants for summer term enrollment if they were also enrolled during the fall and spring. While this policy changed a year ago, it is expected to revert to the previous policy as part of federal budget reductions. Students can receive Minnesota State Grants for fall, spring, and summer terms, but summer term State Grants do not make up for lack of Pell Grant eligibility during the summer.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities are following tradition by offering a smaller number of courses in the summer than in fall and spring semesters. Making a change to a calendar that would have more uniformity in course offerings across the 12 months of the year, would have the following challenges:

- Student demand is a major factor in determining the number and variety of summer course offerings. Enrollments may not support an extensive summer program in all majors. If the intent is to deliver a year round program in all fields, colleges and universities could be required to offer courses with low enrollments during the summer.

- To manage their budgets, some colleges and universities expect each summer course to be financed entirely by student tuition and fees. While all courses required for graduation will be offered during the academic year, lower enrollment courses will not be offered during the summer session when this practice is followed. This constraint especially affects state university upper division courses.
- Faculty association contracts are designed around a traditional two semester academic year with options to teach during summer session. Faculty use their summers to update their skills and have many other reasons to prefer teaching during the academic year. To deliver full programs over a 12-month calendar, colleges and universities might have to turn to greater use of adjunct instructors. Under the MSCF contract, summer terms are limited to 39 days or less, shorter than a traditional semester.
- Colleges and universities now schedule heavy maintenance and capital projects during the summer when few students are around.
- Colleges and universities also schedule many enrichment programs and community partnership programs during the summer months, and a full academic schedule could hinder these programs/partnerships.
- Not all facilities are air conditioned or built for use in very warm weather.
- Depending on their design, alternate calendars can require an exception to Board Policy 3.34 that requires fall and spring semesters to adhere to systemwide common start dates. Exceptions to the policy may be granted by the Chancellor after reviewing a recommendation by the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs.
- Compliance with other system policies and procedures can be affected by deviations from the traditional calendar. Some changes, such as changes to technology, can require additional investment to accommodate non-standard practices.

Proposed Pilot for an Alternative 12-Month Calendar

North Hennepin Community College is exploring an alternate 12-month calendar which it would pilot for three years. In place of the two semester calendar used throughout the system, NHCC would implement a three semester, or trimester, model, starting in Fall 2012. Each term would be 15 weeks long with equal breaks between the terms. As a normal load, faculty would teach two out of the three terms a year. Students could enroll in one, two or three terms; students who enter in the spring or attend three terms a year would be able to complete their degrees sooner than usually possible under the current course schedule.

NHCC's reasons for suggesting this pilot mirror the advantages of 12-month calendars for students and colleges listed above. The calendar could provide added flexibility for both students and faculty. But it is a change from traditional practice, and there are questions about whether the

benefits will outweigh the challenges. The college plans to evaluate the pilot, including its impacts on enrollments, student learning, program completion and staffing.

The pilot would be designed to maintain the existing faculty workload. However, contractual issues with the Minnesota State College Faculty association raised in changing the calendar will need to be negotiated at the state level. They include:

- Faculty assignments to teach fall, spring and summer terms,
- Insurance and other employee benefits,
- Shared governance structures, and
- A provision in the contract that limits summer sessions and courses to a maximum of 39 days.

| North Hennepin Community College: Proposed Trimester Pilot | |
|---|---|
| Rationale/Potential Benefits | Barriers/Potential Disadvantages |
| Minnesota State Colleges and Universities is committed to innovating new ways to meet educational needs | Could reduce enrollments if alternative calendar is less attractive to students than current calendar |
| Three-year pilot will allow experimentation and learning that could inform other colleges and universities in the system | Availability of faculty and staff to work in summer may not match student enrollments |
| Shorter fall and spring semesters will reduce end-of-term fatigue by students and faculty | Will require exemption from Board Policy 3.34 on academic semester start dates |
| Longer summer term will permit greater depth of learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent with Students First goal to improve student services through a single systemwide registration and billing date |
| Enrollments may increase if students prefer trimester calendar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students attending other institutions and part-time/adjunct faculty teaching at other institutions will be on different calendars |
| Three rather than two major start dates each year—greater ability for students to begin their studies in the spring or summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases complexity of technical support |
| Improved ability for students to accelerate progress by attending year round | Will require separate agreement with the Minnesota State College Faculty affecting multiple provisions in the Master Agreement |
| Same course designs can be taught each term because terms will be of equal length | State payroll requirements complicate paying faculty over 12 months for a non-consecutive two-semester teaching load |
| Faculty and staff can choose to work summer term in place of fall or spring terms | Potential implications for employee insurance coverage and other benefits during the summer |
| Fall term start date can be aligned with local schools | |
| More intensive use of facilities during the summer | Could reduce participation in shared governance when faculty are not all on same two semester teaching schedule |

In addition, if the pilot is to proceed, the Chancellor will need to grant an exception to the system's common start dates for fall and spring semesters that are required under Board Policy 3.34.

State payroll procedures are another issue that will require attention by the college.

Conclusions

All Minnesota State Colleges and Universities operate year round, but the demand for summer courses varies by location and program. A limited number of students appear able and willing to attend higher education on a year round schedule.

Each college and university needs to balance resources it devotes to fall, spring and summer sessions. At a time of diminished state support, it becomes more difficult to maintain course offerings each term throughout the year.

If implemented, the proposed pilot project at North Hennepin Community College will provide useful information to all institutions on an alternative to the traditional calendar in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. It is important to note that the college is located in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and faces robust population growth and high enrollments that could possibly sustain offering more courses during the summer.

Alternative calendars must resolve administrative and contractual issues that will require modifications to existing practices. Furthermore, they challenge the system's balance between a system of coordinated institutions following standard processes and individual institutions seeking their own distinctiveness and service to their communities.

THREE-YEAR BACCALAUREATE DEGREES

While many students take a longer time to finish, a bachelor's degree is sometimes referred to as a "four year degree." With growing financial pressures on students, ways to accelerate student progress toward a degree are receiving more attention across the U. S. Three-year baccalaureate degrees are not new in higher education, but more colleges and universities have been implementing programs in recent years.

Three-Year Baccalaureate Degree Models in the U.S.

Three-year bachelor's degree programs in the United States are designed to enable students to complete the same requirements as students in a conventional baccalaureate degree program but to do so within 36 months rather than 45 months. With rare exceptions, programs require the same number of credits and most programs require the same courses to be completed. Some three-year baccalaureate degree programs rely on students to earn credits over one or more summers, but many do not.

Although students can now complete a degree in three years on their own at most institutions, three-year degree plans are structured and require students to apply and be admitted to a three-year cohort. Because course registration must be carefully planned to enable completion in three years, not all majors may be eligible. Three-year degree plans may provide students with extra assistance, including special advising and access to priority registration.

Several strategies are typically used, alone or in combination, to accelerate student progress:

IB/AP/PSEO/Concurrent Enrollment

Students earn college credits in high school through Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), concurrent enrollment, Advanced Placement® or International Baccalaureate® courses. These options allow students to get a head start on college and possible graduate ahead of schedule. They encourage colleges and universities to coordinate with K-12 schools and are leading to new K-14 models.

Assessment of Prior Learning

Faculty assessments of work and other learning experiences result in credits that are applied to shorten the time to earn a baccalaureate degree. This strategy is most often used to assist adults who are returning to higher education with learning acquired on the job or in other settings. Most assessment is faculty-intensive work. The College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) is another way in which prior learning is evaluated for credit.

Accelerated Course Loads

Three-year degree plans usually require students take heavier than normal course loads during the academic year.

Required Summer Sessions

Three-year degree plans may also require students to earn credits in one or more summer sessions.

Features of 20 U. S. Three-Year Baccalaureate Degree Programs

| | |
|--|----|
| Available in selected majors only | 15 |
| Requires attendance during one or more summers | 11 |
| Provides special advising for students in the three-year program | 10 |
| Limited to students who meet academic achievement requirements | 7 |
| Provides priority registration | 5 |
| Requires/expects AP/IB/other college credits earned in high school | 4 |

Combined Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree Programs (3 + 1 or 3 + 2)

In these programs, students earn both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in a four or five year combined program. Programs require a curriculum design so that the student begins to take graduate level courses that will apply to both degrees by the fourth year. These programs are not

true three-year baccalaureate programs because the student is usually not awarded the baccalaureate degree after three years, partly to retain eligibility for undergraduate financial aid in the fourth year.

Proposals for Other Three-Year Degree Models

At least two other three-year degree models have been proposed, but never implemented in the U.S.

Reduced Degree Credit Requirements

Under one concept, championed by Dr. Robert Zemsky and others, institutions would critically examine the course requirements for a bachelor's degree and streamline required courses so that students could complete their degrees in 90 credits (or other shortened length). The complexity of this change is seen by its advocates as a benefit since it would require a massive curriculum redesign that would stimulate conversations about all bachelor's degree requirements.

The argument for this approach rests on a premise that institutions now require redundant or unnecessary requirements for a bachelor's degree. So far, this assumption has not been proven to the point where any institution has chosen to take on the challenge of trying to develop a design that could be implemented. The value of such a degree is unknown. Would potential students, employers and the public view it as truly equivalent in learning outcomes to other baccalaureate degrees?

Furthermore, accreditation issues have not been addressed and would be a significant barrier to pioneering a shortened degree. Under pressure from accreditation critics, the Higher Learning Commission recently strengthened its statements about credits needed for a bachelor's degree. Institutions are required to conform to "commonly accepted minimum program lengths," including 120 semester credits for bachelor's degrees unless a deviation can be justified.

Three-Year Polytechnic Degrees

As envisioned, a three-year polytechnic degree is not a bachelor's degree, but a new 90 credit degree that would be built on an additional 30 hours earned beyond a two-year A.S. or A.A.S. degree. These degrees could provide advanced credentialing in technical education fields. While not offered in the U. S., the higher education systems in numerous other countries include this type of degree.

Current Practice in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities do not now offer defined paths to a bachelor's degree in three years, although two universities are exploring potential initiatives (see below).

A small number of students who enroll in the state universities now complete their degrees within three years. A total of 146 state university students who enrolled in higher education for the first time in Fall 2005 completed a bachelor's degree at the university where they started by the end of the summer term three years after entry; 135 students in the Fall 2006 entering cohort

graduated in three years. Three-year graduates attended all seven of the state universities and represent 1.7 percent of the first time degree-seeking students who enrolled those years. There probably are a few additional university and college students who graduated in three years after transferring to a state university that awarded the degree.

Compared to other state university students, students who had completed a bachelor's degree in three years were much more likely to have transferred in credits. On average, they also took heavier course loads and were somewhat older. Three-year graduates, however, did not enroll in summer terms more frequently than other students.

| Characteristics of Three-Year Graduates and Other State University Students | | |
|---|--|--|
| | Did Not Earn Bachelor's Degree in Three Years | Earned a Bachelor's Degree by End of Third Summer |
| Number of first-time students who entered state universities in Fall 2005 and Fall 2006 | 16,474 | 281 146 Fall 2005 cohort 135 Fall 2006 cohort |
| Number of credits earned before enrollment | | |
| None | 68% | 25% |
| 1-15 | 23% | 18% |
| 16-30 | 6% | 22% |
| 31-45 | 2% | 12% |
| 45 or more | 1% | 23% |
| At end of third summer term: | | |
| Average number of terms enrolled | 7.2 | 7.2 |
| Average number of credits earned | 93 | 108 |
| Average credits/term | 12.8 | 14.9 |
| Age | | |
| < 20 years | 94% | 87% |
| 20 – 24 years | 4% | 9% |
| 25 and over | 2% | 5% |

Credits earned before entering higher education as a first-time student were a key strategy for early graduation.

- Thirty-five percent of the three-year graduates transferred in a year or more of credits when they enrolled.
- Only 71 three-year graduates from the Fall 2005 and Fall 2006 entering cohorts did not transfer in credits upon enrollment.

Since these students entered as first-time higher education students, most of the credits were probably earned in PSEO, concurrent enrollment, AP[®] or International Baccalaureate[®] courses taken in high school. Other credits that could have been earned include CLEP and credits for military training.

Several existing Board policies and related procedures support students who want to accelerate their progress:

- **3.5 Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Program**-commits the system to provide opportunities for high school students to participate in the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options and concurrent enrollment programs; defines admission, faculty qualifications and other standards.
- **3.15 Advanced Placement Credit**-stipulates that credits will be granted for qualifying scores on Advanced Placement exams; specifies how credits will be determined.
- **3.16 International Baccalaureate Credit**-stipulates that credits will be granted for qualifying scores on International Baccalaureate exams and completion of an IB diploma; establishes consistent policy for determining credits.
- **3.33 College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) Credit**-stipulates that credits will be granted for qualifying scores on CLEP exams; specifies how credits will be determined.
- **3.35 Credit for Prior Learning**-requires opportunities for students to demonstrate learning gained in non-credit or experiential settings; establishes consistent practices for evaluating and granting undergraduate credits.

Potential Benefits of Three-Year Baccalaureate Degree Programs

The description which follows applies to three-year baccalaureate degrees that retain the same learning outcomes and number of credits required for normal completion of the degree.

Pros and cons refer to formal three-year degree programs developed and promoted by institutions, not individual decisions to accelerate degree completion. Most three-year baccalaureate degree programs utilize the same courses and calendar as the institution as a whole, but alternative course designs and calendars are also found in a few institutions across the U.S.

For students, many advantages of accelerating progress toward a degree are similar to the advantages listed for acceleration by attending summer terms:

- Motivated students can qualify for jobs or graduate school a year or more earlier than other students. Early graduates save on college living costs and can start earning a career salary a year earlier.

- Students may not pay as much in tuition and fees as a four to six year graduation plan requires. Future increases in tuition and fees are avoided. In universities with banded tuition, students can enroll in the higher course loads needed for early graduation without paying more than students carrying a normal full-time load.

In addition, certain features of a formal three-year degree program can benefit students educationally:

- When programs reach into the high schools to get students started on a three-year path, students will be well-prepared for academic work in higher education.
- Three-year degree cohorts can provide peer support for students once they are in a three-year program.
- Students frequently have access to extra advising services when they are enrolled in three-year degree programs.

Colleges and universities can benefit from offering three-year degree plans in the following ways:

- An option to earn a bachelor's degree in three years serves the university's mission to enable students to succeed and reach their goals.
- Three-year degree programs are attractive to highly motivated students. They can elevate the university's reputation for quality, affordable education and increase recruitment of talented undergraduates.
- Three-year degree graduates improve the university's on-time graduation rates (which allow for a four to six year window).
- Implementing a three-year degree program can stimulate the institution to strengthen honors programming and advising services.
- When summer term enrollment is required as part of a three-year degree plan, campus facilities are used to a greater extent over the summer.

Potential Disadvantages of Three-Year Baccalaureate Degree Programs

Even when formal three-year options are available, they have not been suitable or attractive to most students. While there are financial benefits to early graduation, there are also financial barriers to participation:

- A primary disadvantage is that many students, including many older students, cannot handle an accelerated schedule because of family and other obligations.

- Programs are usually not accessible to students who need to work to cover a significant portion of their educational expenses and or to support family members. By reducing the time students can work, three-year degree programs can result in additional student borrowing.

Besides financial considerations, three-year degree programs raise additional issues concerning students' education and personal growth:

- Faculty observe that accelerated programs do not recognize the reality that deep learning requires time for reflection. While factual knowledge and technical skills may often be taught at an accelerated pace, unless they have exceptional abilities, students will not have enough time to acquire the critical thinking skills, ability to apply concepts to new situations and advanced understanding that employers and graduate programs expect of bachelor's degree graduates.
- Most three-year baccalaureate degree programs require students to identify their major at an early stage. They eliminate exploration of different fields of study that is a valued part of the college experience for many students.
- Students who graduate in three years will have less time for personal development, travel and other activities which contribute to their personal growth.
- When summer term attendance is required, students forego opportunities for summer internships and work that contribute to their employability after graduation.
- Students forego another year or two to mature before entering the job market.
- Some students find that they face added stress and emotional issues by trying to finish their degrees in three years.
- Students must carefully consider their ability to handle heavier course loads. While early graduation can speed entry into graduate and professional education, this benefit must be weighed against the desire to demonstrate academic excellence needed for admission to competitive graduate and professional programs.

Three-year degree programs have the potential to impact the majority of students who follow a traditional path to a degree in negative ways. To the extent that institutions shift advising, curriculum development or other resources to the three-year program, resources to support students in general are reduced. Priority registration, which is offered by some three-year degree programs, can limit access to courses for other students not in the program.

For colleges and universities, three-year degrees present the following cautions:

- The effects on student learning listed above are of deep concern to institutions considering development of an accelerated path to a baccalaureate degree.

- When institutions promote accelerated completion of degrees, they can appear to diminish important educational goals, reducing it to a quick credential for employment.
- Delivering a three-year degree program requires the faculty and institution to commit in advance to a class schedule that supports a three-year plan. Arrangements can add complexity and cost to scheduling courses.
- Reallocating resources to benefit the few students who will take advantage of a three-year option is difficult to justify when institutions need to invest in timely completion, eliminating achievement gaps and other goals that affect the majority of students.
- While a three-year degree program would be designed to result in the same learning outcomes, it may be seen by the public and employers as less rigorous than a traditional degree.

Planned Three-Year Degree Programs

Although a few students complete a bachelor's degree within three years on their own, Minnesota state universities do not now offer formal three-year degree programs. Two universities are, however, discussing initiatives to offer an accelerated path to a bachelor's degree. Both universities have banded tuition rates that benefit students who take accelerated course loads.

Bemidji State University is exploring the offering of three-year degree programs in a few selected majors on a campus-based model or a partial on-line model. One model would focus on allowing students to take advantage of the university's tuition band, if they so desire, by taking a very heavy course load during the fall and spring semesters. The second model would allow students to take normal academic loads in the fall and spring semesters and attend campus-based summer school or take on-line summer school classes.

Students admitted into the programs would have to obtain higher scores on the ACT than regular students. Students would be admitted and advised by cohort; in addition, students would receive preferential treatment in registration to insure timely graduation.

It is estimated that academic programs would require additional resources to implement the three-year degree program. Although not currently under consideration, programs at the university may be open to collaborative transfer programs with community colleges.

Minnesota State University, Mankato is exploring development of formal three-year degree paths in a few selected majors. To build pipelines to three-year degrees, the university has been consulting with high schools on ways to encourage high ability students to take advantage of PSEO, Advanced Placement and other high school options that would connect with the newly designed accelerated degrees. The university is also working with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to determine ways in which returning adults could receive credit

for prior learning. Summer enrollment may be included in the course of study needed to graduate in three years.

Conclusions

Across the U.S., institutions that have offered formal three-year degree programs find that they attract very few students, and a number of programs have been discontinued over the years. With increased attention to the escalating costs of higher education, however, these programs are receiving renewed interest.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities is committed to maintaining an “affordable and competitive cost of attendance.” Along with restraining tuition and fee charges, the ability to earn a bachelor’s degree in three years can be part of the system’s answer to students who are looking for ways to reduce their cost of education.

Students can now complete many bachelor’s degrees in three years if they plan carefully. College, university, and system communications should do more to let students know that they can consider an accelerated path to a degree even if a formal program is not created. For most students, the path to early graduation will begin in high school by earning credits through PSEO, concurrent enrollment, AP, IB or CLEP. In addition, enrolled students can be encouraged to think about taking heavier course loads and enrolling during the summer in order to finish their degrees in less than four years.

Implementation of formal three-year options in several state universities will help clarify issues within the system. Nationally, all but a few three-year degree programs operate within a single baccalaureate degree-granting institution. Partnerships between state universities and colleges could lead to new models of three-year baccalaureate degrees.

A three-year degree path is most suitable for highly motivated, well-prepared students without heavy work or family obligations. Most Minnesota State Colleges and Universities students do not fit this description. Only 49 percent of the system’s entering full-time state university students now earn an bachelor’s degree within six years. Several system initiatives are designed to increase the number of students who complete degrees, even if it takes longer for them to do so.

Each university should determine whether it will devote resources to developing formal three-year degree paths that will benefit relatively few of its students when other challenges, including strengthening educational quality and reducing achievement gaps, must be addressed with diminishing state appropriations. While universities can promote early graduation through three-year degree programs, reduced funding will have the opposite effect of limiting course availability and delaying graduation for some students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the pros and cons identified above, the following practices are recommended to guide implementation of 12-month calendars and three-year baccalaureate programs in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities:

With respect to 12-month calendars:

1. Colleges and universities should continue to have authority over their practices in selecting and scheduling summer term courses.
2. Colleges and universities that offer programs on a 12-month calendar should inform students whenever summer enrollment is required.
3. Colleges and universities should promote opportunities for students to accelerate their progress toward graduation by taking summer term online and/or classroom courses.
4. Before approving an exception from Board Policy 3.34 on academic semester start dates or other calendar alternatives proposed by a college or university, the Office of the Chancellor should evaluate implications on operations elsewhere in the system.
5. If a college or university proposes to implement an alternate 12-month calendar, it must submit a plan for a pilot period to the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs for review and approval. The plan should be endorsed by the president and identify any exemptions or changes needed to Board policies and system procedures, labor agreements, technology or system business practices. Necessary changes to a labor agreement must be negotiated with the bargaining unit representative prior to submitting the plan. The Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs should consult with other divisions in the Office of the Chancellor, including Finance, Information Technology, and Human Resources, before approving the pilot.
6. An approved pilot for an alternate 12-month calendar must evaluate its effectiveness in achieving goals and addressing implementation issues. The Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs should brief the Board of Trustees on 12-month calendar approved pilot plans and evaluation findings at the conclusion of the pilot period.

With respect to three-year baccalaureate degree programs:

1. Universities should continue to have the option to develop structured opportunities for students to complete a baccalaureate degree in three years.
2. Three-year baccalaureate degree programs must meet system procedure 3.36.1 Academic Programs, which establishes degree credit lengths, and be designed to achieve learning outcomes equivalent to the same program offered on a traditional graduation plan.

3. College and universities should reach out to high school students to inform them about early graduation opportunities made possible by earning college credits while attending high school.
4. College, university, and system communications should promote early and timely graduation as a way to cut higher education costs for students.

RECOMMENDED COMMITTEE MOTION

The Academic and Student Affairs Committee recommends that the Board of Trustees accept the report on the pros, cons and recommendations for implementing 12-month calendars and three-year baccalaureate degree programs in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

RECOMMENDED BOARD MOTION

The Board of Trustees accepts the report on the pros, cons and recommendations for implementing 12-month calendars and three-year baccalaureate degree programs in Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

**Ad Hoc Advisory Committee
Studies on Three-Year Baccalaureate Program and 12-Month Calendar**

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| Tom Fauchald Bemidji State University | Inter Faculty Organization |
| Catarina Fritz Minnesota State University, Mankato | Inter Faculty Organization |
| Nancy Genelin South Central College | Administrator, Academic Affairs |
| Travis Johnson/ Jessica Medearis | Minnesota State College Student Association |
| Kevin Lindstrom | Minnesota State College Faculty |
| Greg Mulcahy | Minnesota State College Faculty |
| Shannah Moore Mulvihill | Minnesota State University Student Association |
| Shirley Murray Minnesota State University, Mankato | Minnesota State University Association of Administrative & Service Faculty |
| Wanda Overland St. Cloud State University | Administrator, Student Affairs |
| Jane Reinke North Hennepin Community College | Administrator, Academic and Student Affairs |
| Warren Sandmann Minnesota State University, Mankato | Administrator, Academic Affairs |
| Betty J. Strehlow Ridgewater College | Administrator, Academic and Student Affairs |
| Gary Seiler Metropolitan State University | Administrator, Academic Affairs |
