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Higher Education Accountability System Update



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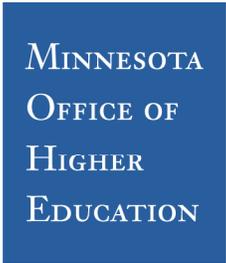
About the Minnesota Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to post-secondary education. The agency serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on post-secondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program, which is administered by the agency, is a need-based tuition assistance program for Minnesota students. The agency oversees tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Program, licensing and an early awareness outreach initiative for youth. Through collaboration with systems and institutions, the agency assists in the development of the state's education technology infrastructure and shared library resources.

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Introduction

In his budget recommendations to the 2005 Legislature Governor Tim Pawlenty included a project to establish an accountability system for higher education in the state. After consideration, the Legislature appropriated \$100,000 in fiscal year 2006 and \$300,000 in fiscal year 2007 to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education for the project. The funding in the second year is ongoing. The rider language in the final conference committee report required the agency to:

“...make a report to the legislature regarding the implementation of the process. The report must be made by January 15, 2006 to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education policy and finance.”

The purpose of this report is to fulfill the statutory requirement. Since the work on this project is still in progress, this report should be viewed as an update and not as a final report. The final report will be submitted once the contractor completes the work later this winter. This report describes the activities that have taken place to date and plans for future work.

In addition to the funding provided by the Legislature, the Office of Higher Education was the co-recipient of a grant from the National Governors Association. The lead agency for this grant is the Minnesota Department of Education with the grant totaling \$2.5 million. The share of the grant for Office of Higher Education is \$150,000 and is specifically allocated to be used for activities related to the accountability project. Information about the project including presentations from all public meetings is available on our website: www.ohe.state.mn.us. Click on “agency initiatives.”

Progress

- On August 9, the Office of Higher Education held a first meeting with more than 60 stakeholders on the topic of higher education accountability, providing a national and international perspective. Representatives from public and private higher education systems, business, the legislature, K-12 and other interested parties attended. Nationally known presenters came to Minnesota to inform an invited audience of the activities in different states regarding accountability in higher education: (Pat Callan, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, helped coordinate the event. The four presenters were Nancy Shulock, Institute for Higher Education Leadership Policy; Jim Applegate, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education; Paul Lingenfelter, State Higher Education Executive Officers; and Dennis Jones, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems).
- The Office of Higher Education conducted a search for a consultant to aid in the actual development of an accountability program. Working through a competitive RFP process, the agency chose the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) as the consultant.
- A second meeting was held on November 4th with a similar set of statewide leaders and stakeholders. At this meeting, NCHEMS presented data on demographics, workforce and educational attainment for the state and at the regional level. The group was asked to identify emerging issues suggested by this data with specific respect to higher education. The consultants had their own set of suggestions. From this effort the consultant developed a preliminary set of emerging issues and indicators.

- The Office of Higher Education convened 20 meetings across the state during the week of January 9, 2006. Meetings were held in Moorhead, Bemidji, Hibbing, Duluth, Rochester, Mankato, Marshall and the Twin Cities. The agency invited more than 400 participants to these small-group meetings. They were held at a variety of venues including public and private institutions. Separate meetings were held at each location. Providers of higher education attending one meeting, and employers and other consumers of higher education attending another meeting. Participants reviewed available data and provided feedback on a regional basis on the kinds of broad goals, benchmarks and indicators they felt would be most appropriate for a statewide accountability system.

Next steps

From these meetings the Office of Higher Education, in consultation with NCHEMS, will produce a draft report of the findings and hold a third meeting with stakeholders. A final report is due from the consultant by the end of February 2006 that includes a recommended set of state goals and indicators to measure performance across the state. This report will be made available to the Legislature upon receipt. The consultants will also undertake a policy audit to determine how current state policies may be affecting the identified emerging issues.

The agency will use the accountability report to begin the next steps of the process implementing the system. A first step will be to combine the emerging issues in the report with the current higher education goals in statute, including both those in Minnesota Statutes 135 and 136A. While a specific implementation plan has not been determined, it will no doubt include data collection and analysis. It is also likely that additional staff will be hired to deal with the accountability system issues on a day-to-day basis.