

Four Year Graduation Challenge Task Force



NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

December 10, 2013



Task Force Members:

Ansel Brown, Tonya Gerald Goins, Claudia Hager,
Janice Harper (Chair), Orkhan Hasanaliyev, Karen
Keaton Jackson, John Smith, Carla Stoddard,
George Wilson, Robert Wortham

4-Year Graduation Challenge Task Force

Executive Summary

The 4-Year Graduation Challenge Task Force's primary purpose was to focus on the traditional first-time freshman and consider how to help the student matriculate successfully in a four-year time period. The Office of Research Evaluation and Planning indicated the 4-year Graduation Rate for the 2008 cohort was 21.8% and the Retention Rate for 2011 was 71.5%.

Qualitative and quantitative data from various sources were collected and reviewed prior to making recommendations. The Task Force reviewed reports from Research, Evaluation and Planning, Summer School Office, Registrars' Office and BlackBoard Analytics. In addition, there were focus group sessions conducted with students, faculty and staff. Selected administrators and staff members in key units were invited to the meetings to discuss critical issues related improving the 4-year graduation rate. A survey was developed and completed by department chairs and a survey was also developed and completed by students, faculty and staff. These data sources revealed several common themes:

- Issues and concerns related to Advising Process
- The lack of Course Availability and Course Offerings
- Student Financial Need and the Need for Financial Literacy Programs
- The need for Comprehensive Mentoring Program for Freshmen
- The importance of Teaching and Learning Process in improving Retention and Graduation Rates

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on data and campus wide- surveys, the following recommendations were developed:

I. ACADEMIC ADVISING

Recommendation 1:

Students should be informed in writing that they must on average enroll in and earn at least 16-17 credit hours each semester to ensure graduation in four years.

Recommendation 2:

Develop university-wide basic guidelines and expectations for departmental academic advising and provide workshops and training for all faculty advisors. Establish a university wide policy regarding students' access to registration PIN numbers. Include an evaluation of all academic advisers and provide rewards for good advising.

Recommendation 3:

Modify current Advising Practices to include the following:

- Implement a Developmental Advising Strategy at North Carolina Central University
- Decrease the student/advisor ratio in the University College
- Integrate career advising with academic advising
- Require one mandatory meeting for students advised in University College (who have declared a major) in the academic department each semester

II. COURSE AVAILABILITY AND SCHEDULING

Recommendation 1:

Implement an Electronic Wait list for GEC and other high demand courses. Develop a wait list for registration of classes that are closed and prompt action for the addition of class sections as needed. Require Department chairs to plan course offerings based on projected demand. This would include planning for course offerings across disciplines.

III. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recommendation 1:

Any GEC course where 30% or more of students enrolled in a semester receive a grade of D, F, I, or W must be reviewed by the department. A strategy for addressing appropriate changes and/or course redesign must be developed, tested and reported to the Dean and the Provost within one year of being notified of the DFIW 30% rate.

Recommendation 2:

Infuse High-Impact Educational Practices across the Curriculum in all Academic Departments.

IV. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Recommendation 1:

Create a comprehensive university-wide peer mentoring program for freshmen. This mentoring program would include providing basis study tips, individualized tutoring, and enthusiastic leadership from exemplary upper-class NCCU students.

Recommendation 2:

Develop a Summer Bridge Program for students who score below a certain level on the placement test in Math, English and Foreign Language.

Recommendation 3:

Creation of E-Squared Mobile App and Online Dashboard that delivers content that promotes 4-year graduation.

Recommendation 4:

Academic Support – Provide the Writing Studio its own line item within the University College's budget that includes funding for additional staffing (three full-time professional writing consultants) and resources so it can be a more stable and effective unit on NCCU's campus.

V. STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Recommendation 1:

Create More Scholarships to recruit and retain highly motivated students. Provide incentives for students who maintain high academic standards and on track for graduation (i.e. work study /work aid, discounted parking decal, discounted meal plan, etc.)

Recommendation 2:

Provide Additional Funding for Students' Attendance during Summer School

Recommendation 3:

Require students to participate in Financial Literacy Workshops and provide financial literacy information to Parents.

VI. 4 -YEAR GRADUATION MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Recommendation 1:

Develop a media/communications plan titled "Finish in Four". This plan will outline major steps that must be completed to graduate in four years. A media blitz will be developed and strategically located on the website, on the plasma screens around campus and other strategic locations.

In summary the 4-Year Graduation Challenge Task Force's recommendations are based mainly on the institutional characteristics with the goal of further analyzing the factors related to student circumstances. We recommend that ongoing data analysis be conducted as the university's circumstances and needs continually change. This will allow the university to make informed, data-based decisions on this important topic. Correlative and multivariate analysis is needed to specify key factors that impact degree completion. This data collection, ongoing research and assessment will lead to identifying the most effective strategies to assist our students with reaching the goal of graduating in four years.

Introduction

On September 6, 2013, Chancellor Debra Saunders-White charged the Four-Year Challenge Task Force to be “courageous and fearless.” The Task Force was encouraged us to “interrogate the fabric of the institution,” look at every system on campus, starting with academics, and determine where opportunities exist for investments in programs, improvement within programs, and where some programs need to be eliminated. The goal is to create the optimal environment for all NCCU students to graduate within four years. Specifically, this task force was charged to focus on the traditional first-time freshman and consider how we can help that student matriculate successfully in a four-year time period. The Task Force was reminded us not to focus on popularity in thought when creating our recommendations to the campus, but rather at what needs to be in place at NCCU relative to this goal. This document is to be “singularly focused on our students” and a “blueprint” for our institution’s direction to be completed by December 13, 2013.

The Office of Research, Evaluation and Planning indicated the 4-Year Graduation Rate for the 2008 cohort was 21.8% and the Retention Rate for 2011 was 71.5%. The NCCU 2020 Strategic Plan stated that by August 2015 the university would have achieved a Retention rate of 82% and a four-year graduation rate of 24%.

The most efficient method of improving graduation rates is to understand the factors that hinder students from completing their degrees in 4 years. Our approach before suggesting any changes to campus programs and activities is to find out for certain what “is” in place at NCCU so our statements are accurate and our recommendations are relevant to the goal of increasing retention and graduation rates. To begin this process, we brainstormed the collective thought of academic units on campus that most directly impact student success and graduation. We devised a plan to bring in various administrators each week from these units to share with us their tasks and their concerns as related to helping students graduate on time. Simultaneously, we began drafting questions for students, staff and faculty surveys and focus groups, analyzing data and trends relative to NCCU student retention and graduation rates, and researching “best practices” of peer institutions with more successful graduation and retention rates. The most efficient method of improving graduation rates is to understand the factors that hinder students from completing their degrees in 4 years. As we conducted our qualitative and quantitative research, several common themes emerged:

- Issues and concerns with Advising Process
- The need for a Comprehensive Mentoring Programs for Freshmen Students
- The need for Financial Support/Financial Literacy for Students and Parents
- A careful review of Student Academic Performance in GEC courses
- Availability of GEC courses for students and offerings of courses required in the major

While it is difficult to point to one or two issues in isolation, we believe there may be multiple reasons why students do not graduate in four years. This report focuses on recommendations that address the major issues identified by students, faculty and staff.

I. ACADEMIC ADVISING

Recommendation 1: Students are informed in writing that they must on average enroll in and earn at least 16-17 credit hours each semester.

All Advisors in University College and in the major departments must stress each semester they advise a student that four-year graduation requires a student on average earn at least 16-17 credit hours and a minimum 2.0 GPA.

Rationale:

Blackboard Analytics enrollment data for undergraduates in the CAS, CBSS, University College, School of Business, and School of Education for each semester since Fall 2008 to Spring 2013 indicate that students are enrolling in 12.77 - 13.35 hours per semester and earning 9.79 – 11.18 hours per semester. This pattern indicates that students are not earning enough credits to graduate in eight semesters.

Students must be informed and understand that for six of the eight fall-spring semesters, they must earn 16 credit hours each semester and 17-18 credit hours for two of the eight semesters in order to graduate in four years. If a student fails to do this, he or she will need to attend summer school for one or more sessions. However, there are two financial issues that students should be informed about:

(1). Since federal funding for summer school changed dramatically in 2012, students will have to pay tuition out-of-pocket or work out a payment plan in order to attend. It is important to make certain that students are informed and aware of the financial implications of attending summer school. Given the loss of federal funding, there is a need for NCCU to provide scholarships specifically targeted for summer school.

(2). There is also a big difference in the tuition rates for distance education (online) and on campus courses as well as for the rates charged to in-state and out-of state-students. The summer 2013 tuition rate for six hours of distance education courses was \$590.95 for in-state students and \$2,693.77 for out-of-state students. The tuition rate for six hours of on campus courses was \$1,163.81 for in-state students and \$3,197.81 for out-of-state students. If room and board is entered into the equation, the tuition rate for six hours of on campus courses increases to \$2,606.69 for in-state students and \$4,640.69 for out-of-state students. From summer 2010-2012 the average number of distance education course hours taken by students declined slightly from 2.98 hours to 2.82 hours. Essentially students are taking one distance education course over the

summer. Combined on-campus and distance education undergraduate summer school enrollment increased from 2,533 students in 2008 to 3,521 students in 2011; however, the trend reversed in 2012. The financial aid options for the summer changed. There is limited financial aid available during the summer due to the fact that year round Pell has been eliminated. State grants such as the NC Education Lottery and the UNC need based funding are not available for the summer. Combined on-campus and distance education undergraduate enrollment fell to 2,863 students in summer 2012; and 2,800 students in summer 2013.

Recommendation 2: Develop university-wide basic guidelines and expectations for departmental academic advising and provide workshops and training for all faculty advisors. Establish a university wide policy regarding students' access to registration PIN numbers. Include an evaluation of all academic advisers and provide rewards for good advising.

Rationale:

During the focus groups with students and staff, academic advising was the most common topic mentioned in regards to why students do not graduate in 4 years. There are different advising practices implemented across the colleges, schools and departments. Moreover, some faculty are asked to advise when they are not very familiar with the 4-year plan and may not be aware of alternative courses that will keep students on track when major courses are not available. There are many supportive services available on campus and all advisors should be aware of what is available and provide this information to students. Advising records should be kept with all of basic requirements, such as updated 4-year curriculum plans and evidence of the utilization of the Curriculum Advising and Program Planning (CAPP) electronic advising system. Advising records should be consistent across campus.

Recommendation 3: Modify current Advising Practices:

- **Implement a Developmental Advising Strategy at North Carolina Central University**
- **Decrease the student/advisor ratio in the University College**
- **Integrate career advising with academic advising**
- **Require one mandatory meeting for students advised in University College (who have declared a major) in the academic department each semester**

The developmental advising model is recommended because “Developmental academic advising is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills” (King et al., 2005).

Rationale:

NCCU Retention data from 2009-2011 suggests that we are losing many of our students, particularly our first generation students (in 2009, 33% after their first year). Moreover, Sophomore and Senior survey results (1998- 2008) , focus group results with 133 students and Staff Senate Focus Group meeting (10/15/2013) suggest advising is a major concern for NCCU students, staff and faculty. For NCCU, "Developmental Advising" may help increase the four year graduation rate. Winston et al., (1982), defined developmental advising as a “systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the use of the full range of institutional and community resources.” While a more recent reference by King et al, (2005), condensed definition is as follows, “Developmental academic advising is both a process and an orientation. It reflects the idea of movement and progression”. The University College indicated they have 15 academic advisors who are serving 3085 students. This student to advisor ratio is extremely large and should be decreased. It is difficult to spend the quality time needed for advising when the advising load is 238 or 240 students. There are a total of 17 advisors. However, two advisors are out on maternity leave.

Retention literature stresses the importance of first-year advising and “front-loading” advising help. An advisor’s greatest contribution to student retention and success may be in 1.) reducing initial student confusion, 2.) strengthening affiliation with the institution, and 3.) enhancing clarification on matters pertaining to the higher education experience (Tinto, 1987). First year students should meet each semester with their departments to help assess these interests and progress towards four-year graduation.

Further, a more integrated relationship should be established between University College, Career Services, and Dimensions of Learning for developmental advising that helps students select more appropriate and realistic majors and aim for careers goals that are consistent with their personality preferences and life goals. Many students have not yet matched their skill sets (both hard and soft) with their intended majors and career choices. A more collaborative relationship between Career Services and academic units will also help students select more appropriate and realistic majors and aim for careers that are consistent with their personality preferences and life goals.

Data from the Registrar’s Office indicate there are a large number of students who change their majors. Some students are changing their majors two and three times. This type of behavior leads

to students remaining at the University for five and six years. Limiting the number of times a student changes his or her major was the fourth recommendation in the student survey in response to “What do you recommend NCCU should do to improve the 4 year undergraduate graduation rate for students?” Students should be advised according to a 4-year academic plan and also according to their career goals (such as strategic electives and specific internships needed). One mandatory meeting each semester (during Freshmen and Sophomore year) with the academic department will help students determine if they are 1.) on track to graduate in four years, and 2.) aware and understanding career-building opportunities, such as available internships in their future career goals.

Term	Total Number of Enrolled First Time Students Census Data	Number of First Time Students Changed Major 1 Time & %	Number of First Time Students Changed Major 2 Times & %	Number of First Time Students Changed Major 3 Times & %	Number of First Time Students Changed Major 4 Times & %	Total # of First Time Students Changed Majors & %
Fall 2010	1235	497 40%	140 11%	20 1.6%	2 .16%	659 53%
Fall 2011	1258	571 45%	132 10%	20 1.6%	1 .07%	724 58%
Fall 2012	1407	639 45%	101 7%	4 0.3%	0 0	744 53%

II. COURSE AVAILABILITY AND SCHEDULING

Recommendation 1: Implement an Electronic Wait list for GEC and other high demand courses. Develop a wait list for registration of classes that are closed and prompt action for the addition of class sections as needed. Require Department chairs to plan course offerings based on projected demand. This would include planning for course offerings across disciplines.

Utilizing the wait list will allow more students to enroll in the courses they need as they prepare their class schedule. This wait list should include required courses that are offered in other departments also. Departments should work together prior to changing class schedules to ensure adequate offerings for non-majors.

Rationale:

For NCCU, "Developmental Advising" may help increase the four year graduation rate. Winston et al., (1982), defined developmental advising as a "systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the use of the full range of institutional and community resources." The University College indicated they have 15 academic advisors who are serving 3085 students. This student to advisor ratio is extremely large and should be decreased. It is difficult to spend the quality time needed for advising when the advising load is 238 or 240 students. There are a total of 17 advisors; however, two advisors are out on maternity leave.

Students in some majors have difficulty completing the program in 4 years because they are not placed in the appropriate courses early in the program. This could be for several reasons, one of which is that the class the student needed was closed. Some majors have requirements in the first two or three semesters, for example, in the STEM programs, Nursing and Athletic Training.

In the BSN program, students must have BIOL 1300 in the first semester; if they are not placed in this class in the first semester they will be one year behind and will not graduate in 4 years.

Students in the Athletic Training major must take 4 pre-requisite classes in the first semester of their sophomore year. Last fall, two of the pre-requisite classes were filled on the second day of registration. Additional sections were opened, but not all students were able to be accommodated. These are just two examples of problems with scheduling, there are additional examples. During our focus group session with University College Advisors, they identified specific class that closed early, which delayed students' graduation date. Some of the courses mentioned were BIOL 1300, 1610, 1620, CHEM1100, Math 1100 and ENG 1250.

For example, in an effort to further support this recommendation advisors in the University College reviewed all introductory course offerings within the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences during both Fall and Spring semesters. They created the spreadsheet below which represents courses University College students most frequently require but are unable to enroll in due to limited offerings.

**COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES MOST COMMONLY
REQUIRED COURSES**

DEPARTMENT	SBJ CODE	CRSE CODE	REQUEST
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	CRJU	2350 2450	
HUMAN SCIENCES	FCSC	2650 1000 2900	Multiple sections that do not conflict with other introductory courses
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	PEDU	2010	Increase offering during Fall and Spring
RECREATION	RECR	2120	Additional Section per semester
POLITICAL SCIENCE		2190 NONE	Additional Section per semester
PSYCHOLOGY	PSY	2120	Additional on campus section
PUBLIC HEALTH	HEDU	2000 2100 2200 2400	At least one additional section for all per semester due to the increase change of major from Nursing program
SOCIAL WORK	SOWK	3410	additional section Fall

III. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recommendation 1: Any GEC course where 30% or more of students enrolled in a semester receive a grade of D, F, I, or W must be reviewed by the department. A strategy for addressing appropriate changes, participation in faculty professional development sessions and/or course redesign must be developed, tested and reported to the Dean and the Provost within one year of being notified of the DFIW percentage rate.

Students are dismissed from the university if their GPA falls below 2.0. Poor grades in GEC courses impact academic progress. Furthermore, the repeating of too many grades below “C” can prevent students from being able to graduate in four years.

Rationale:

Blackboard Analytics data for GEC courses for Spring 2013 indicate that for all undergraduates enrolled in five of the GEC courses (MATH 1200, MATH 1210, BIOL 1300, CHEM 1000, POLS 2100), 30% or more of these students received a grade of D, F, I, or W. More courses will be included if a 25% benchmark is employed. In three of the GEC courses (BIOL 1300, CHEM 1000, POLS 2100), 30% or more of freshmen enrolled received a grade of D, F, I, or W, and in four of the GEC courses (MATH 1200, MATH 1210, BIOL 1300, CHEM 1000), 30% or more of sophomores enrolled received a grade of D, F, I, or W.

A review of Blackboard Analytics data for GEC courses for Fall 2012 indicate that for all undergraduates enrolled in three of the GEC courses (MATH 1200, BIOL 1300, CHEM 1000), 30% or more of these students received a grade of D, F, I, or W. In two of the GEC courses (BIOL 1300, CHEM 1000), 30% or more of freshmen enroll received a grade of D, F, I, or W, and in two of the GEC courses (MATH 1210, BIOL 1300), 30% or more of sophomores enrolled received a grade of D, F, I, or W.

Recommendation 2: Infuse High-Impact Educational Practices Across the Curriculum in all Academic Departments.

Rationale:

North Carolina Central University is currently implementing high impact educational practices in the teaching and learning process. However, this recommendation is focused on ensuring that

high impact practices are infused into the curriculum of every academic major. The first year experience and the learning communities are appropriate for freshmen students. The other high impact practices such as global learning, service learning, undergraduate research, collaborative assignments and projects, writing intensive courses, internships and capstone courses and projects should be addressed in every academic department. Educational research suggests that these high impact practices increase the rates of student retention and student engagement. (Kuh, G.D. 2008 High impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them and why they matter” AAC&U, Washington, D.C).

IV. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Recommendation 1: Create a comprehensive university-wide peer mentoring program for freshmen. The peer mentoring program would include providing basic study tips, individualized tutoring, and enthusiastic leadership from exemplary, upper-class NCCU students.

NCCU should match mentors who are sophomores, juniors, or seniors with freshman students of like interests who have received a high school GPA of 2.7 or below and/or have earned a combined math and verbal score of 900 or less on the SAT. Mentors will engage with their mentees in a service project and receive up to 15 community service hours per semester for their service as engaged peer mentors. These hours would be recognized by the Academic Community Service Learning Program as community service hours towards graduation. Peer Mentors will 1) Attend a training session and coordinate follow-up activity with a designated mentoring program coordinator; 2) Engage in at least 15 hours per semester in the program during the fall and spring semesters (not including additional time spent with peer mentees, which is at the peer mentor’s discretion); and 3) Share study skills, experiences, insight, and knowledge with students for academic, personal, and professional development. Students will log their meetings in an electronic reporting system.

Rationale:

This experience will foster a smoother transition to college life, the NCCU community, and the greater community. The program will focus on a cohesive academic identity and culture at the university with a focus on transition, retention, and four-year graduation. Retention literature notes that students often do not stay at an institution if they do not feel they fit in; therefore, students who feel they belong at an institution are more likely to commit to graduating from that institution (Hall, R. & Jaugietis, Z. 2011. Developing Peer Mentoring through Evaluation, *Innovations in Higher Education* 36:41-52. Smailes, J. & Gannon-Leary, P. 2011. Peer Mentoring –is a virtual form of support a viable alternative. *Research in Learning Technology*

19, No.2, 129-142.) Information from the student focus groups indicate students feel the need to have more support from peers. Nearly 1 in 4 students surveyed at NCCU indicated that feeling they belong at the university is among the top factors contributing to their graduating in four years. According to research reported in the Academy of Management Journal of Learning and Education, peer-mentoring programs are directly linked to student satisfaction with their university. ("Peer-Mentoring Freshmen: Implications for Satisfaction, Commitment, and Retention to Graduation" S. Rudolph, T. Bauer, & M. Paronto (2006).

Recommendation 2: Develop a Summer Bridge Program for students who score below a certain level on the placement test in Math, English and Foreign Language.

Rationale:

Focus group sessions with University College Advisors revealed that many students' placement scores require they take courses at a lower level than what is outlined in their 4-year plans. They also indicated that in some instances as a result of scores on the placement tests, students may need to enroll in a full semester of courses that are not outlined on their 4-year plan. This is the major reason students start out during the freshman year behind and off track from the schedule of courses on their 4-year plan. If students are required to take the placement test early in the summer, it would allow time to review the results and require students to attend Summer School to take these courses. If they pass the summer courses they will be prepared to enroll in the next level courses outlined in the four-year curriculum plans during the Fall semester. The University College provided the overview below of the percentage of students from the past two years that require courses which are not on their 4-Year plan as a result of placement test scores.

Placement Test Score Results

21% require English 1050 (3 credits) over the past two years.

92.5% of students require lower-level foreign language courses over the past two years (only FL level III is listed on many curricula).

- 71% of students require the first and second-level foreign language (6 credit hours).
- 21.5% require the second level foreign language (3 credit hours).

49.4% of students this year require Math 1000 (3 credit hours). Last year was 80%. The reduction was due to the new Math 1080 option for certain majors.

18.5% of students this year require EDU 1000 (1 credit hour). Last year was 39.3%. The reduction was due to our change that students testing into ENG 1110 shouldn't have to take EDU 1000.

Recommendation 3: Creation of E-Squared Mobile App and Online Dashboard that delivers content that promotes 4-year graduation.

In preliminary classroom sample surveys conducted this fall semester, NCCU students identified challenges in advising, unclear or elusive graduation plans, and the desire for more professional advising as important in four-year graduation attainment (See NCCU Four-Year Challenge Task Force). NCCU can address these important needs by innovatively meeting students where they are readily accessible and provide up-to-date information helpful towards their 4-year graduation. It is recommended that NCCU create an “E-Squared” mobile application that is linked to a parallel and mobile-compatible internet dashboard complimenting MyEOL. This mobile application will allow students to have real-time access to helpful information they have indicated as important towards their four-year graduation. The mobile App will perform the following functionality:

- Tab Function 1: Four-Year Graduation Plan, Progress, and Projection Alert
- Tab Function 2: Class Schedule and Assignment Alerts with Downloadable Podcasting
- Tab Function 3: E-Squared Alerts from Advisor, Registrar’s Office and Career Services



Rationale:

North Carolina Central University is positioning itself as a global leader in higher education, where “techno-scholars” will graduate in four-years and impact society as trendsetters and

leaders who understand the intersection of technology and the professional world. This is consistent with recent studies, including a recent survey by Pearson Education that indicated 43% of college students would like to use mobile devices more in the classroom (See <http://www.pearsoned.com/wp-content/uploads/Pearson-Student-Mobile-Device-Survey-2013-National-Report-on-College-Students-public-release.pdf>)

NCCU can tap into this need and serve its students more competitively. A study by CDW Government LLC revealed that 63 percent of college students consider technology an important factor in choosing their school destination.

(See <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20110726005355/en/CDW-G-Report-Campus-Tech-Top-Factor-College>)

Recommendation 4: Academic Support – Provide the Writing Studio its own line item within the University College’s budget that includes funding for additional staffing (at least three full-time professional writing consultants) and resources so it can be a more stable and effective unit on NCCU’s campus. (The Writing Studio became a part of University College effective July 1, 2012.)

Rationale:

Consultants (tutors) and resources for the Writing Studio come from a minimum of seven different units each year: QEP Office, University College, Title III, the Graduate School, Work Study, The Summer School Office, Community Service Office, and Individual Academic Departments (Work Aid). However, there is no single line item for the Writing Studio in the University’s budget, so the amount of money received varies greatly from year to year (depending upon how much those other units can give).

Graduate students are the primary staff members of the Writing Studio. (There is one administrative assistant and one full-time professional consultant.) However, with graduate enrollment decreasing and graduate assistants now being used in GEC classrooms, the number of qualified consultants continues to decrease. Thus, the ability to plan and service more students via online, evening, and weekend services is limited.

The Writing Studio served over 2,000 students each year in both 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 via tutorial sessions, classroom presentations and campus workshops. The Studio also turned away nearly 300 students in 2012-2013, and 220 students in 2011-2012 because all tutors were otherwise engaged in sessions.

In addition, the UNC System’s new focus on critical thinking and written communication as GEC competencies adds to the need for providing adequate support. Without a permanent line item in the University’s budget, the Writing Studio will cease to exist in its current form in the near future.

V. STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Recommendation 1: Create more Scholarships to recruit and retain highly motivated students. Provide incentives for students who maintain high academic standards and on track for graduation (i.e. work study /work aid, discounted parking decal, discounted meal plan, etc.)

Create a scholarship to recruit and support students with an SAT score of 1000 math and verbal (comparable to 1500 with new writing section included). The current Chancellor's Scholarships start at a minimum of 1650 (math, verbal and writing) on the SAT or 23 on the ACT and a 3.0 high school GPA. NCCU can also create a scholarship for students who do not have a 1650 SAT but who enroll in the university and compete for the scholarship after earning a minimum college 3.5 college GPA with at least 15 earned credits. This would help NCCU to recruit more high-achieving honor students who presently have higher four-year graduation rates.

Rationale:

A 2011 study by the Higher Education Research Institute demonstrated that a strong correlation exists between high school SAT scores and four-year graduation rates. Students with an SAT score higher than 1300 tended to graduate in four years at a rate of 62.2%. Students with an SAT score between 900-1000 graduated at a rate of 25%. The current composite SAT average of NCCU students is 886. Current NCCU honors students have a retention rate of 91%, maintain an average 3.6 GPA, and graduate in four years at a rate of 87%. They must have a 1500 SAT score (including new writing section) to be eligible for the program as incoming high school students. This SAT requirement is comparable to 1000 if only the math and verbal section is counted and if the writing section is excluded. Thus, there is an unmet gap to recruit more of these students who do not qualify for the Chancellor's Scholarships that start at an SAT score of 1650. On the contrary, other peer schools such as NC A&T have honors scholarship opportunities starting with a minimum SAT requirement of 1000 (verbal and math only, excluding writing). Based upon these data and the recruiting experience of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, scholarships for honors students who have SAT scores just below the current academic scholarship level offered by the Chancellor's Scholars Program are needed. This would increase the university's ability to recruit top students to NCCU who will graduate in 4 years.

Recommendation 2: Provide Additional Funding for Students' Attendance during Summer School

Rationale:

A report generated by Blackboard Analytics showed that in the Fall of 2013 students averaged attempting 13.33 credit hours a semester and in the Spring 2013 students averaged attempting 13.24 credit hours, earning an average of 11.12 credit hours. The report showed a similar trend every semester from the Fall 2008 semester. (See Rationale under Section 1: Academic Advising p.2) This shows that students do not attempt or earn enough credit hours per semester graduate in 4 years without taking classes in summer school. If students are failing classes, do not take at least 16 credit hours (or more), or are closed out of classes, it is not possible to graduate in 4 years without attending summer school. In the summer of 2012 federal funding for financial aid in summer school was cut dramatically due the elimination of Year Round Pell, leaving students with little financial option for summer school with many choosing to take classes during the academic year; foregoing summer school due to lack of financial aid (conversations with advisees). Increased summer school funding was discussed in the Task Force's meeting with Director of Financial Aid, in the Staff Focus Group meeting, and in all of the Student Focus Group Meeting.

Recommendation 3: Require students to participate in Financial Literacy Workshops and provide financial literacy information to Parents.

Rationale:

The cost of obtaining a degree has increased. Many students are obtaining Parent Loans and student loans to complete their degree. It is important that students understand the implications of their decision making in terms of course load, withdrawing from courses, repeating and dropping courses will have on the time to completing their degree as well as the total debt they accumulate. What are the implications after they graduate? How will they be able to maintain their lifestyle and pay back their loans. Required Financial literacy workshops can assist in helping students understand how to keep student debt under control. One option would be to require students to attend financial literacy workshops as a precondition to receiving financial aid. In addition, the Dimensions of Learning class should include a module on financial literacy. The table below demonstrates the level of financial aid provided to the student population. The data in table below indicates that 94% of the student population received financial aid.

NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY										
Undergraduate Degree-Seeking Enrollment, Fall 2012 and Spring 2013										
Unduplicated Fall/Spring Enrollment	Receiving Aid		Receiving Loans		Receiving Parent Loans		Receiving Pell Grants			
	Num.	Percent	Num.	Percent	Num.	Percent	Num.	Percent		
6698	6317	94.31%	5596	83.55%	598	8.93%	4449	66.42%		

VI. 4-YEAR GRADUATION MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Recommendation 1: Develop a media/communications plan titled “Finish in Four”. This plan will outline major steps that must be completed to graduate in four years. A media blitz will be developed and strategically located on the website, on the plasma screens around campus and other strategic locations.

[E2 = Finish in Four]

Rationale: Many students do not enroll in at least 15 hours every semester, or they do not earn at least 15 credit hours each semester. This media campaign will provide key information about the major steps that must be taken to graduate in four years. This information will be placed on the E Squared App, MY EOL, and NCCU homepage. It will be presented to prospective students and parents, new students and currently enrolled students at every available opportunity. This information will be shared at all major events which will include but not limited to: New Student Orientation, Open House, Fall Convocation, and other major events on campus. “Finish in Four” will also be reinforced by advisors, mentors, administrators, faculty and staff on a regular basis.

Finish in Four Check List

1. Enroll in and earn at least 17 credit hours each semester
2. Maintain at least a 2.0 each semester
3. Carefully select a major and keep that major
4. Complete the process of financial aid process in a timely manner
5. Meet with your advisor prior to registration each semester to review your 4 year plan
6. Monitor your academic progress by reviewing your 4 Year plan and utilizing the CAPP program.
7. Clear any holds on your account before the registration process begins
8. Review the academic calendar. Know and meet deadline dates
9. If necessary consider enrolling in summer school to remain on the target to “ Finish in Four.”

4- Year Graduation Challenge Survey Results

The survey results from 255 Students, 106 Faculty and 68 Staff revealed that quality teaching, academic advising (both in the University College and academic departments) and financial aid are major contributors to students’ successful 4- year graduation (see Survey Question #1, Table 1). In terms of recommendations of what NCCU should do to improve the 4- year graduation rate students, faculty and staff all agree we should improve advising. The survey results essentially confirmed and supported the recommendations in this report.

Table1. Question 1: Please select five factors which you think contribute most to students being able to graduate in four years.

Question 1	Response rates		
	Student (N=255)	Faculty (N=106)	Staff (N=68)
Effective Student Recruitment	9.8	49.06	38.24
Freshmen Orientation	10.98	16.98	10.29
University College Advising	43.14	31.13	33.82
Advising in my departmental Major	44.31	53.77	48.53
Career and professional advising	27.45	16.04	25
Quality teaching	56.86	53.77	57.35
Faculty Proficiency in English	10.59	9.43	17.65
Adequate course offerings each semester	28.63	32.08	41.18
Adequate financial aid	38.04	44.34	55.88
Helpful financial aid process	29.41	15.09	14.71
Helpful registration process	20.78	13.21	22.06
Limiting unnecessary courses	37.25	23.58	11.76
Limiting Changes in major	17.25	11.32	5.88
Access to books for courses	27.45	18.87	13.24

Research opportunities	3.14	5.66	5.88
Study Abroad opportunities	4.31	2.83	0
Internship opportunities	14.12	3.77	14.71
Participation in extracurricular activities	7.06	1.89	13.24
Feeling that I belong at NCCU	23.14	13.21	25
Personal or family concerns	14.51	25.47	16.18
Physical or psychological well-being	20.39	24.53	17.65
Limited work hours	11.37	33.96	11.76

CONCLUSIONS

The work of this committee is merely a scratch on the surface regarding the factors affecting student success, retention and 4-year graduation rates. There is the need for more research and follow-up on programs and strategies implemented. The research indicates that student success factors tend to fall into two general groups:

- those related to student circumstances, including socioeconomic status, parents' educational level, family dynamics, illness, and personal preferences; and
- those that arise from institutional characteristics, including admissions selectivity, curriculum structure, student support services, and enrollment –related policies, processes and incentives.

There is information that suggests the most important factors related to retention are the conditions in which we place students rather than the attributes of the students themselves. Tinto 1992 identified five conditions necessary for student retention.

Five Conditions Necessary for Student Retention

1. **High Expectations.** “Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that expect them to succeed”. We must create an “expectational climate” for all students, even those who have been “historically excluded from higher education.”
2. **Clear and Consistent Information and Effective Advising.** We need to make clear for students our institutional and graduation requirements (especially those who are undecided majors) and provide effective advising about the choices they have related to their discipline and subsequent career plans.
3. **Academic, Social, and Personal Support.** Most first-year students in particular need some kind of support (the first two listed above). The support could come from structured programs/organizations or from informal contact with faculty, staff, and advisors. In either case, “support needs to be readily available and connected to other parts of student collegiate experience, not separated from it”.

4. **Involvement/Feeling Like Valued Members on Campus.** “The frequency of contact with faculty, staff, and other students is an important independent predictor of student persistence” (3). This is especially important during the first year when “student attachments are so tenuous and the pull of the institution is so weak”.
5. **A Setting That Fosters Learning.** Most first-year students do not get very involved. Their experience is that of “isolated learners whose learning is disconnected from that of others”. The content learned in one class does not connect with the content of other units, so there’s “little academic or social coherence”.

The 4-Year Graduation Challenge Task Force’s recommendations are based mainly on the institutional characteristics with the goal of further analyzing the factors related to student circumstances. We recommend that ongoing data analysis be conducted as the university’s circumstances and needs continually change. This will allow the university to make informed, data-based decisions on this important topic. Correlative and multivariate analysis is needed to specify key factors that impact degree completion. This data collection and ongoing research will lead to identifying the most effective strategies to assist our students with reaching the goal of graduating in four years. A recent research study indicated there may be many impediments to degree completion to yet be explored that include tuition cost, advising, scheduling, and problems associated with changing majors. It is recommended that more research into at-risk factors should be an ongoing process. Donhardt, G.L.(2013). *The Fourth-Year Experience: Impediments to Degree Completion. Innovations in Higher Education* 38: 207-221.

NCCU participates in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) which administers the Freshmen Survey. This survey collects information on students as they enter college and provide a mechanism to calculate their expected graduation rate. This resource should be utilized and the results discussed to assist with ongoing evaluation of strategies to improve the 4-year graduation rate.