Quality Enhancement Plan – Lowering Student Debt   2/01/2022
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Executive Summary

The problem of student debt is a growing concern across the United States. Undoubtedly, a college degree is among the best means of escaping poverty and promoting social mobility. Student debt puts this important pathway at risk. At Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), the topic of "Reducing Student Debt" was identified by the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) committee as an opportunity to improve student success, and it was chosen as the consensus topic through a campus-wide process involving students, faculty, and staff. Efforts aimed at reducing student debt have been underway for some time related to SFA's strategic plan. These include reducing the cost of educational materials, significantly restructuring tuition and fees, and promoting financial literacy. **In an effort to build upon this momentum, this plan will focus on timely degree completion as a means of reducing student debt.**

We plan to accomplish this by implementing five strategies:

1) **Creating ideal degree sequences** (8 semester degree maps) and monitoring students' progress along their sequence or pathway. This includes potentially simplifying degrees where student progress is repeatedly being blocked at certain points in the sequence after performing a <u>curricular complexity analysis</u> of the degree with the department.

2) **Continually analyzing course demand** to make sure students have enough seats in required courses at the appropriate point along the pathway. The goal is data-informed schedules that enable students to consistently take <u>15 hours per term</u>.

3) **Creating student-centric schedules.** This involves preemptively eliminating scheduling conflicts between multiple required courses to be taken in the same term on the students' pathway.

4) **Doing informed intrusive advising** to eliminate concerns, roadblocks, and barriers affecting student success and to keep students on their pathway.

5) **Actively monitoring registration** to make real-time adjustments to course offerings based on student registration patterns and account for any variables affecting student completion not anticipated in the above strategies.

The following measurable objectives will be used to assess the success of the program:

1) Lower student debt to an average level below all other Texas 4-year public universities by 2026.
2) Reduce students' time to degree from an average of 4.4 years to 4.2 years by 2026.
3) Improve student 4- and 6-year graduation rates at least 2 percentage points per year through Fall 2026.
4) Lower excess credit hour accumulation (credits that do not go towards the student's degree) from 10 SCH to 8 SCH (2026).
5) Increase the percentage of full-time undergraduates taking ≥15 productive credits in a semester annually. (These are credits that count towards the degree.)
6) Increase students' degree velocity annually. (This is calculated by dividing the total productive credits per year by the expected credits per year, which is normally 30; so, if a student took 28 productive credits in a given year, the degree velocity would be 93%.)
7) Increase the productive credit ratio annually. (This compares the degree plan credits to all credits taken to determine how many credits were able to be used in the degree and how many were excessive, that is, how many did not fit into any part of the degree plan.)