



FINAL REPORT

Regents Universities Study Committee

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Chris Cournoyer, Co-chairperson
Senator Eric Giddens
Senator Tim Kraayenbrink
Senator Amy Sinclair
Senator Zach Wahls

Representative Gary M. Mohr, Co-chairperson
Representative Dustin D. Hite
Representative David Kerr
Representative Dave Williams
Representative Cindy Winckler

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AUTHORIZATION AND APPOINTMENT

The Regents Universities Study Committee was established by the Legislative Council and charged to “examine the administrative costs, staffing levels, and allocation of staff at the institutions of higher learning governed by the State Board of Regents, as well as graduation and student retention rates for each academic program at each such institution.”

I. November 12, 2021, Meeting

Members of the committee elected, by voice vote, temporary Co-chairpersons Cournoyer and Mohr as permanent co-chairpersons. Members of the committee adopted, by voice vote, the proposed rules for the committee that had been previously distributed.

Panel Members.

- Dr. Wendy Wintersteen, President of the Iowa State University of Science and Technology (ISU).
- Dr. Mark A. Nook, President of the University of Northern Iowa (UNI).
- Dr. Barbara J. Wilson, President of the State University of Iowa (UI).

A. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

1. Current and Projected Enrollment and Budget Modeling. President Nook stated that the 2025 enrollment cliff projected by ISU is related to the projected decline in the number of high school graduates in neighboring states, but added he expects enrollment at UNI to remain fairly steady because it does not draw in a large number of students from those states whose high school graduation numbers are expected to decline. President Nook mentioned that UNI is changing the ways it reaches out to students and is focusing more attention on nontraditional students and transfers from community colleges in an effort to maintain enrollment figures.

President Wintersteen stated ISU’s current enrollment is a good enrollment number from a financial perspective, and she described the focus ISU places on recruiting out-of-state students in an effort to maintain enrollment figures. President Wilson indicated that UI determines enrollment by examining, among other things, market demand and job trends. President Wilson also stated that bringing in out-of-state students and international students is important to maintaining enrollment.

President Nook addressed the link between budget modeling and enrollment projections. President Nook indicated UNI uses the Consumer Price Index for purposes of its budget modeling process. President Wintersteen stated that ISU runs each of its colleges like a business. Each college must look at things like the demand for a particular major and work with industry advisory councils on what is needed for employees to determine where to increase and decrease investments. President Wintersteen noted these decisions drive enrollment, which affects the budget.

President Nook stressed the importance of aligning academic programs with job needs of students and with what students are looking for. President Wilson stated UI was reasonably confident in its enrollment numbers and projections, and will follow up on those numbers periodically. President Wintersteen stated she felt very confident about student enrollment for the upcoming academic year.

President Wintersteen described the variety of new tools ISU uses to attract more students. President Wintersteen stated ISU expects to see increased enrollment from first-generation college students. President Wintersteen also stressed the importance of returning to prepandemic levels of international student enrollment. President Nook stated 50 percent of UNI’s enrollment decline this year is due to the decrease in international student enrollment. President Nook also stated it is important to focus more on bringing in first-generation college students.



The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with a breakeven number for enrollment for each State Board of Regents (BOR) university.

2. Return on Investment for Education. President Wintersteen stated that the BOR recently put together a study addressing the return on investment the universities provide to the state. President Wintersteen also addressed the number of people employed by the university research parks in the state. President Wilson addressed UI's return on investment in terms of health care by stating that 80 percent of dentists practicing in the state were trained at UI; 50 percent of the pharmacists in the state were trained at UI; and 50 percent of the physicians in the state were trained at UI. President Nook stated that the state invests roughly \$100 million in UNI annually and the annual economic impact of UNI to the state is in excess of \$1.2 billion. President Nook also addressed the return on investments students realize through obtaining degrees from the state universities.

3. Applications from Male Students. President Nook indicated this trend has been happening for several years. President Nook noted this decrease could be a function of the strong economy and low unemployment rate. President Wilson stated UI was concerned about this decrease in applications. President Wilson addressed the importance of helping families to appreciate the value of higher education. President Wintersteen indicated it is important to consider how to get more women into engineering programs.

4. In-State and Out-of-State Enrollment. President Nook indicated UNI would like to attract more in-state students. President Nook also addressed the importance of bringing in out-of-state students to help fill jobs that are needed in the state. President Nook pointed out that, as a result of the regent admission index, the universities do not turn away in-state students to take students from out of state.

5. Out-of-State Migration of Graduates. President Wilson informed the committee that the BOR recently entered into a partnership with the United States Census Bureau to better track graduates of BOR universities over time. President Wilson estimated the data generated by this partnership will be available in six to eight months. President Wilson also addressed the importance of attracting high-quality faculty to the BOR universities because those faculty members bring in grants and out-of-state students. President Wintersteen added that it was important to grow business opportunities in the state to keep more graduates in the state.

The committee requested that the panel provide the committee with information related to why graduates from BOR universities might leave the state.

6. Dropout Rates During the First Two Years. President Nook indicated UNI's retention rates are very steady at roughly 83 percent to 85 percent. President Nook stated UNI's three-year graduation rate has increased as a direct result of concurrent enrollment. President Nook acknowledged it is less costly to deliver the first two years of a college curriculum.

7. Student Loan Debt. President Wintersteen stated that roughly 35 percent to 40 percent of graduates of the universities have no student loan debt upon graduation. President Wintersteen indicated that the universities' student loan debt counseling provided to families and students addresses both financial literacy and future earnings. President Nook indicated UNI's student loan debt counseling program "Live Like a Student" has led to a decrease in the number of students who take out student loans and a decrease in the amount of student loans the students take out compared to what they thought they needed.

President Nook stated first-generation college students are more likely to take on student loan debt. President Nook indicated the students he is most concerned with from a financial perspective are those who are not eligible for Pell grants but are just above the cutoff for Pell grant eligibility. President Nook



acknowledged the connection between the tuition charged by BOR universities and appropriations to BOR universities. President Nook noted the issue is finding the appropriate balance. President Wintersteen indicated raising money for scholarships was an important part of this consideration. President Wilson described a new wraparound initiative at UI, “First Gen Hawks,” that has increased the retention rate of first-generation college students. President Wintersteen described the importance of grants to financially support students, especially those who are close to completing their college careers.

The committee requested that the panel provide data related to the student loan debt of in-state graduates, out-of-state graduates, and international graduates, broken down by degree programs.

8. Tuition Rates. President Wilson acknowledged students do mention the comparatively low tuition rates charged by the BOR universities during the recruiting or admissions process, but added that it stresses the institutions to keep tuition so low.

9. Scholarship and Grant Programs. President Wilson described a successful grant program in place in Illinois to help keep students in the state. President Wilson indicated improvements could be made in terms of funding scholarships for Iowa students. The committee discussed the possibility of funding the All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship Program at a higher level.

B. Academic Offerings

1. Programs and Degrees: Decisions to Create or Discontinue. President Wintersteen indicated that these types of decisions are made at the college level and take into account student demand and input from the business community. President Nook stated student demand is a prominent concern when determining whether to discontinue a program or degree. President Nook added the economic impact the program has on the state is also a consideration.

President Nook indicated the BOR took action to discontinue a degree program during its last meeting, and discussed the coordination that takes place between the BOR universities related to decisions of this nature. He noted that a group composed of persons representing regents universities, private postsecondary institutions, and community colleges exists to review academic programs offered throughout the state.

President Nook stated that student welfare is the primary consideration when determining whether and how to discontinue a student degree program, and added that an adequate teach-out plan needs to be put in place as early as possible.

2. Online and In-Person Course Instruction Methods — Costs. President Wintersteen stated online courses have been utilized for years, and noted the costs are essentially the same between in-person and online courses because the main cost is employing the professor who is teaching the course. President Wilson stated the main concern when making these decisions is what makes the most sense to further student learning. President Wilson noted that solely online courses for undergraduate students are utilized mostly during summer school and during classes held over winter session, and are targeted toward working professionals. President Wilson indicated there are different expenses associated with exclusively online courses, including course designer costs and technology costs. President Nook acknowledged the increased costs associated with technology for exclusively online courses.

Dr. Kevin Kregel, University of Iowa Executive Vice President and Provost, discussed how provosts coordinate on these issues using a layered process. President Wintersteen stated the universities do collaborate and learn from each other’s experiences. President Wilson acknowledged the high level of collaboration among the BOR universities in this area. President Nook discussed how accreditation factors into these decisions.



3. The Accreditation Process. President Nook indicated the accreditation process is an exhaustive process that takes place on a 10-year cycle. President Nook stated the accreditation process is even more intense for new programs offered by the universities.

4. Tenure. President Wintersteen stated that tenure is very important and is needed to attract faculty. President Wintersteen also explained the tenure process at ISU. President Wintersteen indicated the full impact of tenure is felt in the classroom preparing students for their careers. President Wilson emphasized that tenure is the norm in the marketplace — it is needed to attract prestigious faculty. President Wilson also elaborated on UI's tenure review process. President Nook stated tenure was needed to recruit effective faculty who can deliver a high-quality education. President Nook discussed how the cost of education would increase if tenure were no longer utilized.

President Wintersteen stated the General Assembly's recent discussion of tenure is certainly something faculty candidates are aware of. President Wintersteen added the discussion was a concern among current faculty as well. President Nook stated the discussion came up during UNI's search for an academic administrator.

President Nook stated that other industries and companies — law firms and certain medical entities — have systems similar to tenure. President Nook indicated tenure was a way of making a commitment to a person who has made a commitment to the university.

President Wilson stated that being tenured does come with a promotion, so there is a financial incentive. The committee asked the panel to explain what protection tenure provides. President Wilson explained that tenure protects faculty who conduct research that might be considered controversial. President Wilson added that there is a systematic review process for tenured faculty. President Wintersteen emphasized tenure is needed to hire the best faculty. President Nook explained that the political pressure often comes from within the department itself.

5. Staffing Waiver Process — Complaint Filed with the Iowa Public Information Board. Ms. Aimee Claeys, BOR General Counsel, explained the waiver process. Ms. Claeys stated that the general rule at BOR universities is that the faculty and staff positions are filled using an open, competitive process. However, Ms. Claeys indicated a waiver could be requested in exceptional circumstances. In terms of the status of the complaint, Ms. Claeys stated that the Iowa Public Information Board has received the complaint and started its investigation.

President Wilson indicated an accompanying spouse or partner is often at least as qualified as the original hire and the university may use the waiver process to hire such a person, but the accompanying spouse or partner is still screened by the hiring school. President Wilson added there are no guarantees and no department is forced to hire an accompanying spouse or partner.

C. Degree Completion

1. Cooperative Extension — History at ISU. Dr. John Lawrence, ISU Vice President for Extension and Outreach, explained how cooperative extension is funded. Dr. Lawrence indicated this program is embedded in Iowa's communities and works with faculty to interpret and disseminate research. He stated cooperative extension also helps people consider attending college.

2. Concurrent Enrollment and Community College Credit — Graduation Rates. President Nook stated that the arrival of students who earned college credit in high school has increased UNI's three-year and four-year graduation rates. He added UNI's retention rates have also increased as a result of high school students arriving on campus with college credit.



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President Nook stated these graduation rates were the same or slightly higher than that of other students, depending on how such rates are measured. President Wilson stated these students do just as well as students who begin their studies at UI. President Wilson noted that, with the addition of these students, students are graduating within four years more often now. President Wilson also indicated getting college credits before attending a four-year university allows the student the flexibility to pursue things like internships and studying abroad.

President Nook explained that, so long as a student was not enrolled in a community college, that student is considered a first-time, full-time student when they arrive on the university's campus.

President Nook discussed multiple things UNI is doing to increase student graduation rates, including emphasizing to students the importance of taking 15 credits per semester instead of only 12.

President Nook explained how difficult it is to try to collect data on the four-year or six-year graduation rates for students who change majors. He acknowledged it is difficult to track graduation rates in these scenarios and indicated it depends on how long the student has been out. President Nook stated UNI does track first-time, full-time students, but the national data is restricted in terms of the students to be included in this dataset. President Wintersteen acknowledged these students are not captured in the national data. President Wilson summarized the discussion by stating the six-year graduation rate is not a perfect measure but it is an important benchmark.

President Wintersteen stated ISU stays in contact with students who do not graduate in six years. President Nook indicated most of the students who do not graduate from UNI within six years are simply students who transferred to another school to complete their degree.

The committee discussed the possibility of working with the United States Department of Education to develop a better and more comprehensive data system.

House-Only Informational Meeting — December 6, 2021: *The House members of the committee convened a House-only informational meeting with BOR representatives on December 6, 2021, in Room 102 of the State Capitol Building from 11 a.m. to 1:40 p.m. A Legal Update summarizing the meeting has been published.*

II. Materials Filed with the Legislative Services Agency

Materials were distributed at or in connection with the meeting and are filed with the Legislative Services Agency. The materials may be accessed from the "Committee Documents" link on the committee's Internet site accessible at the following address: www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/committee?ga=89&session=1&groupID=36639

1. State Board of Regents Response to Request for Information
2. Legal Update: Regents Universities Study Committee Meeting — November 12, 2021
3. Legal Update: House-Only Informational Meeting — December 6, 2021
4. Regents Responses to Questions from November 12, 2021
5. Regents Responses from House-Only Informational Meeting — December 6, 2021