Title: Improved Retention and Graduation Rates

Description: All members of the Oregon University System have an opportunity to improve the rate of graduation of entering students through implementation or enhanced use of established methods of retaining students at all stages in their programs. This initiative would fund activities on all campuses of the system in a pilot program in the 2007-2009 biennium. A suite of methods would be employed to retain students to graduation, improving the success of Oregonians. Outcomes of the work would be documented and would guide future allocation of resources to improve the productivity of the System.

There are a number of methods that have been established to improve retention rates of students and their graduation success. These include summer bridge programs, new student cohort programs, learning and living communities, enhanced academic and career advising, and mentoring by upper division students, to name a few. However, the success of these methods depends on the specific academic environment and the characteristics of the student group engaged and well as other factors. Methods that may be successful for the motivated first time freshman with high academic aspirations may work poorly for the returning students seeking professional advancement or the community college graduate entering the university environment. Our universities have such a mix of student populations and missions that a single method would not serve our students well.

The unique character of each university in the Oregon University System argues for flexibility in implementing processes or enhancing existing activities that have been established to work well in other environments with other student populations. Each university will gage the impact of various techniques and implement process and procedure most likely to assure success in their environment. Each university will choose appropriate metrics and report their performance against expected outcomes. Although each campus may have unique metrics, there may be some common metrics selected for comparison of performance across the system.

Expected Outcomes:
- Improved retention from freshmen to sophomore year
- Improved retention to graduation for transferring students
- Improved graduation rates of all students

Performance Measures:
- Six-year graduation rate of first time freshmen
- Rate of retention of freshmen into sophomore year
- Rate of retention of transferring students into subsequent year
- Four-year graduation rate of transferring students
Budget Outline:
Funding for the biennium will be $2,000,000. The funds will be allocated to campuses based on their enrollment at the end of the fourth week of fall term.

Policy Package #20

Title: Integrative Learning Through Distance and Hands-On Course Delivery

Policy Initiative: Provide expanded opportunities for access to learning through the use of technology and innovative delivery that addresses high student demand courses available to university, community college, and high school students – seamless educational delivery.

Description: There is an extensive literature that reports the research on effectiveness of on-line, technology-assisted delivery of courses and student learning. The research, in brief, indicates that courses that combine on-line delivery with face-to-face contact with an instructor results in higher retention and higher learning than courses delivered totally on-line. One of the most extensive of these demonstration projects has been conducted by the National Center for Academic Transformation (Pew Foundation funded) involving course redesign at 30 institutions across the country in a variety of subject areas. The projects also found that the hybrid course designs resulted in improved learning and retention for first generation, minority and adult students. Portland State University participated in this project, redesigning the first year of Spanish instruction. The result was that PSU was able to double the number of students served while holding costs basically constant, and enhancing student learning through the reduction in seat time, placement of much of the course content on-line, and focusing the hands-on, in-class work.

Portland State University proposes to draw on its successful experience with course redesign that would use on-line technology initially to deliver select high demand (bottle-neck) courses, including science courses in conjunction with hands-on laboratories at locations around the Metro area. One of the most challenging aspects of delivering many high demand courses is the provision of hands-on components; e.g., labs, clinical components, or applications. PSU, for example, is out of lab space, running labs seven days a week, morning until night. By taking hands-on components of courses to other locations in the Metro area where space may be available at off-hours; e.g., community colleges, students could be given the important experience of experiential, hands-on learning while completing the remainder of the course on-line. This approach would allow PSU to expand access to a wide variety of courses to students in the Metro area who do not reside near the PSU campus, as well as allowing PSU to expand its hands-on components and lab space for on-campus students without having to add the expense of building new labs or classrooms.

Expected Outcomes: Reduce the number of bottle-necks in science/lab courses. This will allow students greater opportunity to complete requirements on time. This will also increase retention and graduation rates; expand access through on-line delivery of
primarily general education courses; provide opportunity for high school students to take college level courses; increase availability of courses in all parts of the state; and enhance student learning.