

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Strategic Planning Forum #1

Shawnee State as an Accessible University

Wednesday, January 20, 2016





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Overview

As part of Shawnee State University's strategic planning process, three community forums were held where participants were asked to explore the themes of access, academic programs, and service to students and the community, all in the context of the University's new guiding principles.

The first forum focused on "Shawnee State University as an Accessible University."

Participants discussed important aspects of being an open access university, the advantages and disadvantages of Shawnee State's open enrollment practices, and critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation of students.

Feedback from these forums will inform the institution's strategic plan.

Introduction of the Topic

Participants were provided with an overview of the forums, the strategic planning process, and the guiding principles. Key information shared included:

- Shawnee State University's history as an open access institution began during its community college days and needs to be examined and redefined.
- Enrollment trends show a decline in the number of students since 2011, a decline in the number of credit hours taken, and a student population with a large portion of those with low or no ACT scores and low college GPA. Degree attainment among this group is low (less than 5%).
- First-time freshman retention data among students from 2007 to 2014 indicate that opportunities exist to increase retention with students in the "murky middle," those with a grade point average of 2.0 to 2.9.
- First-time freshmen from 2008-2010 with a grade point average of at least 3.0 significantly outperformed all other groups of students in regards to degree attainment.
- The number of SSU students who default on their student loans has steadily increased since fiscal year 2009. A direct correlation exists between student default rates and drop-out rates.
- The state funding formula is directly tied to course completion and degree attainment.



Guiding Principles

MISSION

A mission statement succinctly describes why we exist — our purpose.

WE PREPARE TODAY'S STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN TOMORROW'S WORLD.

As a university, we serve many roles in society. At the heart of it all, we exist to prepare students to succeed today, and into the future.

VISION

A vision statement stakes a claim on our aspirations and states the kind of university we plan to become.

WE WILL BE A BEST-VALUE UNIVERSITY OFFERING A WIDE RANGE OF HIGH-QUALITY SIGNATURE PROGRAMS.

Our vision is to be recognized as a “best-value” university, combining academic excellence and student success with affordability, and establishing signature programs that give us a competitive edge.

ENDURING VALUES

Enduring values provide a foundation for everything we do. They guide how we behave in our interactions with our students, families, alumni, friends of the University, and each other. They tell our clients what is important to us and what they can expect from us.

STUDENT-FOCUSED SERVICE

We place students at the center of everything we do and every decision we make.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We value the diverse perspectives of the people within our community — on and off campus — and our role in enriching the lives of those who work, live, and discover here.

AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

We respect open, honest, and sincere two-way communication.

THOUGHTFUL RISK-TAKING

We value innovation and encourage those around us to dream big and explore new possibilities.

CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

We look for opportunities to make what we do well today even better tomorrow.

Forum Planning Activities

Participants were assigned to one of ten groups with eight participants per group. Following the topic overview and review of the institution's guiding principles, participants were asked to:

1. Identify the most important aspects of “open access” as currently practiced at Shawnee State University.
 2. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of “open access” as currently practiced at SSU.
 3. Identify the critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation of students at Shawnee State University.
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Results

Common Themes

Shawnee State's current open access practices provide opportunities for many, but to the detriment of students and the institution.

- Shawnee State University's open access provides needed opportunities for students in the region and the state, particularly first-generation and non-traditional students.
- Shawnee State needs to redefine what it means to be an open access institution to continue to provide a chance for every student to receive an education without compromising student and institution success.

Students and the Institution share accountability for student success.

- Students and the University share in the responsibility of student success and each need to be held accountable for their specific roles.
- Students need to be invested in their education in some tangible way from the beginning and demonstrate ongoing progression toward a degree.
- The institution needs to provide resources, combined with strong academic advising and career counseling.

Financial literacy of students needs to be addressed.

- Stronger steps need to be taken to help students understand the difference between different types of funding, the implications of grants and loans, and the life-long impact of defaulting on loans.

An accessible college education goes beyond cost.

- Affordability is a key component of making a college education accessible, today and into the future, however, students also want the process of getting an education to be simple and easy, they want flexibility in course scheduling and course delivery.





Group Discussions

The following summaries for each key topic were presented during each groups' report-out to the entire forum audience.

Group 1

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Giving people alternative pathways to a career
- Educating the community, particularly first-generation students, veterans, and local educators

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- No ACT. Can be an advantage because it gives a second chance and an opportunity to get a career, but students have to demonstrate they have the ability
- Affordable tuition. Allows us to attract more students.

Disadvantages:

- No ACT. Disadvantage because students who don't have an ACT are much less likely to reach graduation, not succeeding or advancing.
- Limited funding and resources for underprepared students, yet requires a lot of resources.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Providing a quality education, good advising, setting real expectations, providing career and education pathways. Students need to know what it is going to take to succeed, especially those who are not prepared.
- Remaining affordable, yet keeping up with the cost of current education - technology, equipment, laboratories, facilities.





Group 2

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Gives everyone an opportunity to succeed and earn a degree.
- This is a place where non-traditional students can prove themselves and get a degree.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Everyone gets a chance.
- Sometimes encounter a Phoenix, find the diamond in the rough, someone who may not test well but has potential.

Disadvantages:

- It sometimes sets students up for failure.
- High loan balances for students and high default rates.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Affordability across the board - meal plans, housing, they all need to be affordable.
- Require student investment - something in admission process beyond ACT to determine if a student has what it takes to succeed.





Group 3

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Opportunity for local students, first-generation, and non-traditional students; opportunity for students who maybe didn't do well in high school and aren't college-ready.
- Help people with social mobility.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Serve diverse group of people, people who are middle-class, traditional and non-traditional.
- Encouraging staff who want students to do well, believe in what we're doing, care about the Appalachian region

Disadvantages:

- Many students don't understand the financial implications, that student loans and federal grants are not free money. They don't understand that they don't have to take the max. that they can take in loans, or the implications of bad credit if they default.
- We make it too easy for students to get in over their heads, no deadlines, no accountability.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Affordability!
- Offer developmental coursework for students to get a leg up and become college ready, need a shot, brush up skills and get a degree





Group 4

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Affordability –offer an affordable education and that is something we continue to do
- Diverse opportunities; first gen

Advantages and disadvantages of “open access” as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Affordability is the biggest advantage
- Hope – if you want a different lifestyle, we give you hope
- Opportunity to complete foundational work. We don't want to be the community college, but students can come and invest here and engage here.

Disadvantages:

- Opportunity for financial exploitation. We see individuals sign-up for aid and drop out after they get their refund.
- Perception that open access means quality of education is diminished because we have no admission criteria.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Financial responsibility – affordability but also not allowing students to be here if they aren't making progress and are going to default.
- Flexible scheduling and flexile formatting of classes. Need to have weekend and evening classes, not just traditional blended and completely online classes.





Group 5

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Open enrollment, opportunity for everyone.
- Opportunity for local students to have university experience.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Very welcoming for first-generation college students, comfortable.
- Access for non-traditional students, great resources.

Disadvantages:

- Students underprepared; makes retention low
- Access to financial resources without financial literacy – take out huge loans and then they drop out

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Access to students likely to succeed, need admission criteria.
- Support for financial students and underprepared, first-generation students don't always understand what loans mean long-term.





Group 6

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Opportunity for students to achieve, particularly first-generation college students. Opportunities for students to change their socioeconomic status.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Anyone can attend,
- We serve our community and the state.

Disadvantages:

- Many students underprepared.
- Low graduation rates, which translates to low funding.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- We have focused on the most underprepared for too long. Need to focus on our middle and top third, create a new approach to focus on "murky middle," focus our efforts on them to attain a college education.

Group 7

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Provides pathways for students without other opportunities, including non-traditional students.
- We are helping people reach their potential.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Positive impact to the local economy.
- We allow students to start a new cycle to break out of patterns of dependency. Those students then help others.

Disadvantages:

- Open access creates financial stress for us and students.
- Wrong impression with students who are prepared and think we have no standards in our classrooms.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Distinguish between providing an opportunity for everyone and admitting everyone; students need to earn their way into the university.
 - Improve communication between areas of the university so support areas help students plan their careers in addition to academic advising – financial aid advising, etc.
-



Group 8

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Provide opportunities for students who don't have them elsewhere.
- Provide extensive support, but at a cost.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- We get enrollment gains, provide opportunities for unlikely success stories.

Disadvantages:

- Recruiting challenges, perception that we have low academic standards.
- State funding loss from students who aren't successful.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Provide lots of information about what happens to college students and define academic success. Intentionally provide realistic information for students about programs, cost and what it all means. Help students make a Plan for Success
- Keep costs low so we remain a viable opportunity.





Group 9

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Opportunity for all students.
- Diversity of student, from those over prepared to those underprepared

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Personal and community economic development, wherever they are from, they are a benefit to society
- Improved individual self-worth.

Disadvantages:

- Funding model
- Lack of retention of qualified students because of underprepared students

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Need a balance, maintain an open access pathway.
- Need to redefine what open access is – min. requirements and then using that to benefit SSU in the funding model





Group 10

Most important characteristics of Shawnee State's open access

- Provide education opportunity for all.
- Provide very strong levels of support for everyone no matter where they are when they enter.

Advantages and disadvantages of "open access" as currently practiced at SSU

Advantages:

- Opportunity for all.
- Support services.

Disadvantages:

- Possible lifetime debt, especially among students who should not have been here in the first place.
- Challenge of providing support for all diminishes available services and resources for those who have the potential to succeed.

Most critical aspects of an accessible college education for a new generation

- Develop assessment tools for admission beyond the ACT, need clear understanding of where they are and where they need to be.
- Need intensive reality-based career counseling.





Participants

Group Discussions

Elinda Boyles, administration
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