The 2021 Efficiency Advisory Committee Report

Prepared by the Ohio Department of Higher Education

Ohio | **Department of Higher Education**

Mike DeWine, Governor
Randy Gardner, Chancellor

Introduction

Ohio Revised Code section 3333.95 requires the Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) to maintain an "Efficiency Advisory Committee" that includes an "efficiency officer" from each state institution of higher education (IHE). Each IHE must then provide an "**efficiency report**" updated annually to ODHE, which is compiled by the Chancellor into a statewide report shared at year end with the Governor and General Assembly.

The current reporting process has been heavily influenced by the Ohio Task Force on Affordability and Efficiency in Higher Education (Task Force), which was created by Executive Order 2015-01K. The Task Force's charge was to review and recommend ways our public institutions can be more efficient, offering an education of equal or higher quality while simultaneously decreasing costs for students. The Task Force issued its report, "Action Steps to Reduce College Costs," on October 1, 2015.

Since then, the institutions have completed an annual efficiency review based on the recommendations of the Task Force and provided a report to the Chancellor that includes how each institution will implement the recommendations and other cost savings measures.

Over the last few years, changes have been made to the template utilized by the institutions to report their annual accomplishments and the status of institutional plans. Whereas the original template served as an inventory of the Task Force recommendations, the FY19 template focused on specific areas aligned with the priorities of the DeWine-Husted administration. This allowed for a few new points of emphasis such as information requests regarding online delivery models for education, financial literacy efforts related to college debt, and student accounts collection practices.

In light of all that has happened since the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, several questions related to its impacts and how institutions are responding were added to the template last year. Most of the initiatives reported by the institutions over the past several years remain in place. Nonetheless, the impacts of COVID-19 are still being

felt at all of our colleges and universities. For instance, although institutions have transitioned back to significant levels of on-campus instruction this academic year, most are still experiencing some level of enrollment decline. The effects of COVID-19 on our economy also continue to create uncertainty that has the potential to affect the overall fiscal strength and stability of colleges and universities.

In addition to the information collected on how institutions are responding to the pandemic, this year's report also continues to track progress by institutions in selected areas. For instance, questions remained regarding regional compacts, textbook affordability, online offerings, and managing student accounts.

*Cincinnati State Technical and Community College*

Regional Compacts

Ohio Revised Code Section 3345.59 calls for the creation of regional compacts among Ohio's public institutions, requiring them to collaborate more fully on shared operations and programs within their region. ODHE defined the regions in 2017 and assigned each IHE to a specific region. Each region was required to have an executed agreement in place by June 30, 2018. All IHEs participated and executed the required agreements by the end of FY 2018. Per O.R.C. §3345.59 {E} colleges and universities must report within their annual efficiency reports the efficiencies gained as a result of the compact. While many efficiencies were reported this year as a result of the regional compacts, the following represent some of the more significant developments:

- The **Greater Cincinnati Collegiate Connection (GC3)** taps the collective power of 16 higher education institutions in Greater Cincinnati, including Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, the University of Cincinnati, and Miami University, to strengthen every aspect of the regional economy, culture, and quality of life. Through cross-registration and other programs, GC3 members serve more than 138,000 students and their families, helping every student – of every age, ability, and aspiration – discover the spark that drives their personal success and achievement. The GC3's collaborative network of professors, instructors, and administrators represents one of the nation's most accomplished and knowledgeable collections of subject experts and thought leaders, and serves as a leading voice on higher education trends and issues in Greater Cincinnati and around the U.S.

- The **Northwest Ohio Allied Health Education Consortium** is composed of five higher education institutions: Rhodes State College, Marion Technical College, Northwest State Community College, Clark State College, and Terra State Community College. The Consortium increases access to a variety of allied health education programs within a 25-county service region. The consortium combines the resources of the five member institutions to provide students with more degree options and a seamless educational experience. Students can complete a degree in an allied health program offered through the consortium by attending the institution that is closest to them. Students take general education courses locally and program courses (offered at the distant college) via distance learning format. Students' clinical requirements can also be completed at local hospitals and healthcare facilities.

- **Wright State University**'s (WSU) Wright Path program broadens access to bachelor's degrees to students attending a nearby community college. Students begin their journey by earning an associate degree at a community college – Cincinnati State, Clark State, Edison State, Sinclair, or Southern State. They then transition to Wright State to finish a bachelor's degree. Along the way, students can enjoy the experiences and communities found on both campuses. WSU offers a number of transfer guides to guide students from the associate to bachelor's degree. Academic advisors also help to ensure credits will transfer and apply toward the bachelor's degree. Wright Path students get to take advantage of unique benefits such as access to transfer scholarships, library services, and WSU campus housing.

- For two years, **Ohio University** (OU) has had a workgroup studying how it can better address contemporary workforce education. It is proposing a two-pillar approach. One will focus on the development of certificates, stackable certificates,

Wright State University
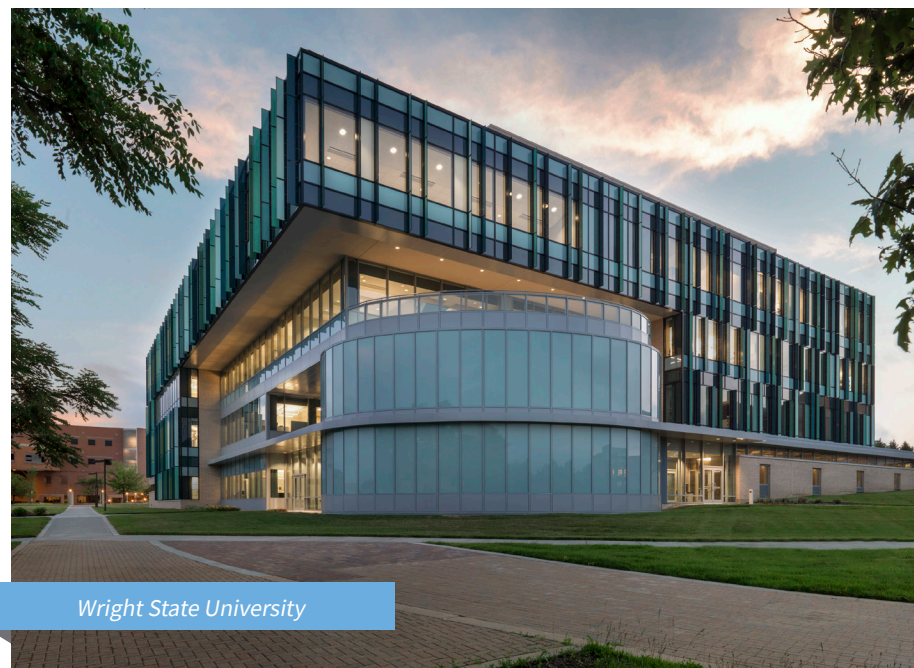
and micro-credentials within and across the colleges in areas associated with select JobsOhio designated areas, along with entrepreneurship and financial technology, among others. Business leaders are helping OU understand need. The process may extend to include new full-degree program areas in the years ahead. The other pillar focuses on educational partnerships, working with the two-year sector and starting with Columbus State Community College and Columbus City Schools. The regional campuses are included in this work.

- **Lakeland Community College** utilizes TES (Transfer Evaluation System) to manage course equivalencies from other institutions. Lakeland efficiently and effectively manages transcript evaluation for students who attended another institution and seek to enroll at Lakeland. Transfer credit equivalencies

are automated for regional institutions including Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland State University, University of Akron, Bowling Green State University, University of Toledo, Ohio University, and Kent State University. Students can also earn credit for prior learning completed during military service or in the employment world.

Academic Practices

This section covers areas more directly related to instruction, such as the cost of textbooks, alternative delivery methods, and academic course and program reviews. Academic improvements provide an opportunity to reduce student costs and/or improve student outcomes such as graduation rates, time to degree, and student loan debt.

This year's report continued to collect information on textbook affordability. One of the most significant expenses that students incur beyond the cost of tuition is the cost of textbooks and learning materials. Ohio Revised Code Section 3333.951(D) requires Ohio's public colleges and universities to annually conduct a study to determine the current cost of textbooks for students enrolled in the institution and submit the study to the Chancellor. The FY21 efficiency reports mark the third year that IHEs have submitted this data to ODHE. The data provided imply that average textbook costs continued to decline marginally in FY21. However, the likely long-term solution to the cost of textbooks is increased utilization of alternative resources and methods to provide learning materials to students.

In addition to requesting the cost data referenced above, institutions were also asked to report on their use of alternative methods of providing learning materials to students. Specifically, they were asked about their utilization of inclusive access and open educational resources (OER). Inclusive access refers to the practice of making digital texts available to the entire class for a fee. Since all or most students purchase the content, the cost is generally lower. Another advantage is that the material is normally available by the first day of class.

OER are freely accessible, openly licensed text, media, and other digital materials that can be utilized within course instruction in place of a traditional textbook. Faculty are increasingly developing and incorporating such methodology into their courses.

Nearly every institution is utilizing OER in some areas of their curriculum. As the utilization of OER is growing, institutions appear to be better tracking their use on their campuses. Several institutions are strategically investing resources to expand the use of OER.

- **Kent State University**'s (KSU) Inclusive Access Program is entitled Flash Books. This program is designed to bring electronic content to students at a significantly lower cost than traditional paper copies. Content is made available to the student as soon as the course is made available via KSU's Learning Management System (Blackboard or Canvas). KSU

sends information to faculty by email each semester, informing them of the availability of Flash Books. Last year, nearly 40,000 Flash Book textbooks were accessed by KSU students in 1,271 sections of 148 courses. Kent State has also purchased access independently to OER and electronic textbooks, or through OhioLink for more than a decade. Among the sources that KSU utilizes are Safari Ebooks @ Kent, Directory of Open Access Books, Directory of Open Access Journals, Oxford Scholarship Online, Openstax, Peer Reviewed Instructional Materials Online Database, and OER Commons.

- **Stark State** uses a textbook committee that manages OER materials, sponsors faculty to attend trainings and statewide meetings, and often produces textbook materials that give intellectual property ownership to Stark State so the college can provide it to the students for free. Last year, OER were utilized in 12 different courses, impacting more than 10,000 students. In addition, Inclusive Access was utilized for more than 50 courses, impacting another nearly 10,300 students.

Stark State College

- **Owens Community College** provided Inclusive Access options for 244 course sections from spring 2021 through fall 2021. A total of 3,249 students participated in those courses over that time period.

Alternative Delivery

Online delivery methods have been growing in acceptance and popularity over the last decade. Out of necessity, their utilization was dramatically increased in response to the pandemic as campuses moved to remote learning. Last year's template asked institutions to compare their online offerings from before the pandemic to fall 2020. Institutions have since returned to on-campus learning. Therefore, they were asked to compare their online offerings before the pandemic to their return to campus in the fall of 2021. Specifically, the percentage of courses offered online and percentage of students enrolled at the beginning of spring 2020 versus fall 2021.

The share of courses and enrollments online this fall are lower than last year, but still higher than prior to the onset of COVID-19. At Ohio's public universities, the share of courses offered online is nearly double the pre-COVID share. At community colleges, which already offered a higher share of courses online, the share increased 60%. The share of students attending online courses did not increase quite as dramatically as the offerings.

Many institutions have proactively enhanced support to faculty to assist in the transition to remote learning.

- **Central State Global**'s course design process integrates learner analysis, navigational design, content development, and evaluation practices specific to given learning objectives. The purpose of the latter is to ensure that the online course contains elements of student-to-content, student-to-student, and student-to-instructor interactivity aligned with stated learning objectives. In the spring of 2021, Central State University began the migration to a new learning management system (LMS) and launched it the summer of 2021. This new LMS possesses the necessary tools to ensure that consistency in design structure for online courses is available. Learnings of varied technical abilities are assisted through the LMS user interface and a wealth of orientation and other instructional materials.

Central State University

- **The University of Toledo** has continued to provide pedagogical support to faculty, instructors, and graduate assistants through the University Teaching Center (UTC) and UToledo Online. The UTC provides workshops, trainings, and web-based resources on a variety of topics relevant to teaching in multiple modalities and supporting student learning needs during the ongoing pandemic. UToledo Online provides centralized support to faculty teaching online. The help desk is available seven-days-per-week by phone, email, and live chat to provide technical support to faculty, students, and staff. Educational technologists provide one-on-one technology training for the learning management system, web conferencing, lecture recording, and other online teaching tools. Instructional designers provide pedagogical support for development and teaching of online courses through the faculty development offerings through the Pathway to Master Online Instructor program, one-on-one consultations, and an incentive-based course development process. Instructional designers have helped faculty at the university achieve Quality Matters certification for 125 courses at the institution since 2014. With 109 of the certifications current, the university has the seventh-most QM certifications in the world and the most in the state of Ohio.

- **Lorain County Community College**'s (LCCC) eLearning Team and the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) developed an online, centralized support repository that provides faculty with resources and instructions on transitioning to remote teaching. The TLC pulled materials from across higher education while the eLearning Team used the Hub as a central location to provide guides and instructions on using various educational technologies and for advertising training opportunities directly to faculty. Though originally focused on the immediate steps for faculty to transition to remote teaching, the Faculty Learning Hub has now expanded to include general best practices in

online teaching. Additionally, the eLearning Team is creating a common template and brand for all how-to guides and training guides while also working on common Facilitator-Guide templates for LCCC's in-person or online synchronous offerings. This will allow consistency between various facilitators for workshops.

- **Marion Technical College** (MTC) has provided support to faculty to develop OER courses. The support has been primarily grant-funded through innovation grants similar to ODHE grants. MTC is currently exploring ways to sustain OER courses – keep the OER materials up to date – and to expand OER to additional courses. MTC is also exploring additional grant opportunities to fund OER. As faculty develop new courses, they are encouraged to use OER as a standard part of the course development. In FY21, MTC offered 119 courses as OER courses (no textbook purchase required).

Marion Technical College

- Throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, **Zane State College** utilized 1.5 FTE staff to support faculty teaching online. Part of the responsibility of the online learning department is to assist faculty with converting content and lectures to an online format and enhancing resources available to students outside of the typical classroom environment. Equipment was purchased to increase capacity of "Zoom rooms" so more faculty could teach in a hybrid format. Zane State purchased equipment for "Zoom rooms" on campus to continue with hybrid delivery. The College upgraded meeting spaces to include cameras and Zoom technology. Faculty were provided with upgraded cameras, microphones, and devices in order to teach online. Other technology purchases included video cameras to record lectures and labs.

Policy Reforms

This section captures state IHE responses to suggested policy reforms originating in gubernatorial task force efforts, legislative joint committee reports, and student loan debt advisory group reports. In recent years, a number of stakeholder perspectives have been shared with institutions. The emphasis in this section revolves around financial services to students such as collection of outstanding balances when necessary and development of College Comeback programs that provide students an opportunity to return to campus and have past outstanding debts forgiven so that they may complete their education.

ORC Section 131.02 requires state IHEs to certify their outstanding

debt to the Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO) for collection either 45 days after the amount is due or within 10 days after the start of the next academic session, whichever is later. However, Ohio's institutions certify their outstanding debt pursuant to varying policies and practices.

Within the template, institutions were asked about their practices for certifying outstanding student balances to the AGO for collection. For instance, institutions were asked if they had minimum fund balances for sending a balance to collection. Most institutions have set a minimum balance; of those that do, the amount ranges from $5 to $1,000.

Institutions were also asked how many accounts were sent to collection last year, the average value of those accounts, and the average number of credits already earned by the students that had accounts sent to the AGO. Of those that reported this information, the average balance among the universities was $2,935. For community colleges, the average balance was $1,195. The average number of credit hours earned by the students at the universities was nearly 34 (versus 120 typically required for a baccalaureate), and at community colleges, roughly 14 (versus 60 typically required for an associate degree).

Based on the responses received on this topic, there is some variation in how institutions collect fees and certify outstanding balances to the Attorney General. It should be noted that not all campuses reported this information. In addition, several campuses stated that they did not certify any balances to the AGO last year in response to COVID-19 in an effort to assist students dealing with the hardships it has caused.

There is growing awareness that outstanding balances, if not managed correctly, can be a barrier to access to college. Over the past year, ODHE has developed guidelines to help institutions better understand their discretion to manage student accounts even after being sent to the AGO (see **College Comeback | Ohio Higher Ed**). In addition, these guidelines encourage institutions to create "College Comeback" programs that allow students who have stopped out to return and students who have outstanding balances owed to the institution forgiven as long as they make academic progress toward their degree or credential. Such programs need to have specific criteria developed by the institution identifying eligibility requirements and stipulations of academic progress for getting balances forgiven.

• **College Comeback** made possible an innovative pilot program designed to provide a sustainable solution to the problem of stranded credits – college credit that is inaccessible to a student because of an unpaid balance at the IHE where the student earned the credit, and the transcript is held as collateral. In December, 2021, eight public universities and community colleges in Northeast Ohio (Cleveland State University, Cuyahoga Community College, Kent State University, Lakeland Community College, Lorain County Community College, Stark State College, The University of Akron, and Youngstown State University) partnered with Ithaka S+R to design and pilot a first-in-the-nation, inter-institutional agreement allowing for the settlement of institutional debt and release of transcripts for students with

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stranded credits returning to any of the intuitions in the pilot program. This regional compact has the potential to impact as many as 60,000 Ohioans with stranded credits residing in Northeast Ohio[1].

- **Cleveland State University** (CSU) and College Now Greater Cleveland collaborate on a grant-funded project called (Re)Connect to College to support "comeback" students in earning their degree. The goal is to recruit, retain, and graduate students in the Cleveland area who have previously stopped out of the university before completing their undergraduate program. CollegeNow provides outreach and objective third-party counseling as well as assistance with Free Application for

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[1] https://sr.ithaka.org/blog/a-sustainable-solution-to-settle-students-debt-and-re-lease-stranded-credits/

Cleveland State University

Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion before turning students over to CSU to meet with an advisor to facilitate re-enrollment. Additionally, the Project Restart Debt Forgiveness Program allows CSU students with a 2.0 cumulative grade point average or above to request debt forgiveness for previous semesters by agreeing to a set of requirements. Students who return and enroll full time (12 credit hours or more) may have up to $5,000 forgiven. Students who enroll part-time (fewer than 12 credits) may have up to $2,500 forgiven. (These programs were paused in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic but have been restarted for 2021.)

- **Cuyahoga Community College**'s (Tri-C) College Comeback program was developed in fall 2021. The program assists students with past due balances by forgiving up to $1,000 owed. Balances paid through this program will be canceled with the Ohio Attorney General's office, allowing students to return to college. As of September 17, 2021, 30 students have been approved for the program. Tri-C is focusing on students who have less than $1,000 in bad debt who stopped out between fall 2018 and February 2020 and had a cumulative 2.0 GPA. There are 638 students who match these criteria with an average debt of $390. Re-enrollment is a requirement to participate in the College Comeback program. Tri-C has also begun working with students who are eligible for bad debt relief through the use of HEERF funds. The debt forgiveness program has paid off balances for more than 2,300 students and reduced balances for 800 additional students with average debt of approximately $459. Program requirements are similar to College Comeback, but re-enrollment is not a requirement. To date, 14% of students participating in the program have re-enrolled.

- **Bowling Green State University** (BGSU) has participated in Degrees When Due, a national initiative to facilitate degree

completion for adults with some college and no degree. BGSU launched a pilot program in summer 2021 to review the records of 337 students in good standing who had stopped out with 90 or more credits. This provided an opportunity to assess their degree plans and assist several stopped-out students in planning a path for degree completion. Changes in higher education have made earning a degree more attainable for some with more online courses/programs, more robust Prior Learning Assessment options, and regional partnerships. The first students in this new program are in advisement and planning for enrollment.

Within the Efficiency Report template, institutions often highlight notable initiatives that cannot be limited to a specific topic already emphasized within the template. The following are examples of exciting programs that fit this description:

Rhodes State College

- OE@OSU is an innovative Operational Excellence initiative designed to transform how **Ohio State** operates. The OE@OSU team identified the need to lead change from within and developed a program to maximize the potential of human capital at the OSU. OE@OSU provides a special infrastructure to train staff in the Lean Six Sigma methodology and has certified more than 1,000 yellow, green, and black belts. The belts learn to facilitate cross-functional teams through a project management framework and utilize data to make decisions. Since FY14, projects led by these internal change agents have resulted in more than $160M in cost savings or avoidance.

- **Youngstown State University** (YSU) is in the late stages of completing its Academic Program Enhancement & Effectiveness Initiative, the most comprehensive review of academic programs ever undertaken at YSU. The Academic Efficiency component of the initiative is in early-stage implementation. As this initiative

wraps up, YSU is looking toward the likelihood of a similar analysis of its academic support areas.

- **Rhodes State College** is enhancing the role of faculty in academic advising to better connect students with a single point of contact and expertise. All full-time faculty are serving a caseload of 10-30 students based on the student's major. Faculty begin advising students on the 16th day of their first semester and remain the students' primary advisor unless they change majors. This advising model also reduces the caseloads for staff advisors, allowing them to provide coaching and increased support for students on academic warning and probation, which promotes success using the academic coaching model in addition to traditional advising services.

Conclusion

IHEs continue to wrestle with COVID-19 and its impact on higher education. Uncertainty about future enrollment – and its fiscal impact – and concerns about student access to remote learning opportunities will likely continue even as institutions have returned to in-person instruction. To the degree there is growing acceptance of these multiple delivery models, how will they impact student behavior? How will institutions respond to such changes in behavior? What are the most critical investments necessary to continue to serve students in this changing environment?

As stated above, the full fiscal impact of the pandemic may not be fully understood at this point due to the significant federal support provided over the past year. Institutions will be challenged to adjust to the changing needs driven by the pandemic as well as manage their long-term resource level post-pandemic.

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Within that context many institutions reported ongoing efforts to generate savings from initiatives that have been implemented in previous years.

The template continues to provide institutions an opportunity to share any positive practices they have implemented that benefit student affordability, efficiency, and institutional effectiveness. In addition, institutions continue to track their progress in five-year plans that they have been submitting since 2017. The colleges and universities are to be commended not only for the work necessary to complete the annual reports, but also for all their efforts to be responsive to the need to reduce costs and better serve their students.

The institutional reports submitted this year provide increasing insight into the progress being made in areas that most directly impact students. There are significant opportunities for colleges and universities to save students money through how they manage the utilization of teaching materials, including textbooks and OER. In addition, an increased emphasis is being placed on the institution's role in providing access to students that have faced setbacks in their education, which is being addressed by programs such as College Comeback.

Finally, campuses need to continue to build partnerships to strengthen overall effectiveness. Plenty of examples have been provided over the last couple of years of shared resources among IHEs as well as partnerships that include entities outside of higher education that have resources or expertise to share.

There has been substantial progress made over the last several years in improving efficiencies and effectiveness at the institutional level. The level of uncertainty experienced today will continue and resources will continue to be restrained. The ongoing need to find efficiencies will continue, and the need to effectively deliver instruction in diverse and responsive ways to students will certainly grow.