



UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA SYSTEM

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**Strengthening and Advancing the UL System with Respect to
Diversity, Student Cost Savings, and Transparency**

By

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Presentation to UL System Board of Supervisors, University Presidents, and the Management &
Leadership Institute Class of 2018–2019

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OVERALL INTRODUCTION

“More than ever before, quality of life and economic empowerment are dependent upon educational attainment. The abilities to think critically, solve problems, and communicate effectively are essential. We develop those core competencies in more than 90,000 students every year. These students are our future, our promise.”

- Dr. Jim Henderson
UL System President and CEO

Earning a college degree is an achievement that greatly affects the trajectory of a person’s life. Statistics show that post-secondary graduates fare better on average in lifetime earning potential and health outcomes than individuals without a degree. As institutions comprising the University of Louisiana System, it is our responsibility to empower student success by removing barriers to achievement such as low student and faculty diversity, high costs of educational attainment, and a lack of institutional transparency. The Management and Leadership Institute Class of 2018–2019 has worked to define more clearly each of these issues and provide actionable recommendations to reduce their impact on our System’s and Institutions’ visions, missions, and goals.



DIVERSITY: ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

*A presentation associated with the 2019 ULS
Management and Leadership Institute Program*

*Images from Google Images retrieved 2/4/19



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Group 1: Diversity, Addressing the Elephant in the Room

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Our group, “The Bulldozers”, was charged with investigating the topic of diversity within the University of Louisiana (UL) System. Specifically, we were tasked with examining who we, as a System, serve and how we serve them. To complete this task, we have asked several questions:

- How is/are our System/Institutions viewed by others?
- Is/are our System/Institutions representative of those whom we serve?
- Do our System-wide policies have different impacts on different groups?
- If so, how can we eliminate any inequities those differences may cause?

As the UL System aspires “to produce 150,000 new graduates who are prepared for life and career success” and “to increase participation and success among all populations”, we must acknowledge the importance of a diverse workforce as well as a diverse student population. We provide several recommendations that will allow our System/Institutions to achieve greater diversity and, therefore, greater success.

“For us to compete nationally, we’ve got to find ways to reach populations that have been historically underserved.”

- Dr. Jim Henderson
UL System President and CEO

Abstract and Introduction

There exists an inextricable link between diversity, equity, inclusion and educational excellence. Diversity in education equalizes opportunity, educates all sectors of society, and enriches the educational experiences of all students by introducing differing perspectives, cultures, and ideas. Insights gained from these perspectives are central to higher education in the UL System and in the greater educational system across the United States.

Social science research finds that when confronted with challenging problems, groups of people with diverse backgrounds and views perform better than those with like backgrounds and views, even when the latter group consists of those deemed to be the best individual performers (Page, 2007). Another study found that “strong emphasis on diversity” is associated with “widespread beneficial effects on a student’s cognitive and affective development.” (Astin, 1993). Yet, there is no single approach to achieving diversity in higher education. What works for one university may not work for another. There is no substitute for the careful consideration of many factors in a competitive admissions process. It is, therefore, crucial that universities continue to be afforded discretion to make thoughtful judgments on which students to admit and how best to conduct higher education.

If we were to survey various populations across our campuses to gain their perspective on diversity and inclusion, we may find that the feedback would vary. One of the fundamental factors in such a dissimilarity could be our variations in how we both define and approach diversity and inclusion.

To ensure that we developed a clear picture of diversity issues within our UL System, we reached out to the diversity and inclusion committees and departments of task force at each

institution in the System. We asked these groups to provide us with their institution's definition of diversity, then used their responses to develop a comprehensive definition of diversity for the UL System:

Diversity is differences in racial and ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic, and academic/professional backgrounds. It encompasses people with different opinions, backgrounds (degrees and social experiences), religious or political beliefs, sexual orientations, heritage, and life experiences.

Diversity is an organizational matter. McKinsey & Company, a global management company, has as its goal to “help organizations across the private, public, and social sectors create the change that matters.” It is the desire of this company to help their clients identify and set their direction toward their most important goals - ultimately working together to turn ambitious goals into reality. In their report “Diversity Matter” re-released in February 2015, McKinsey & Company identified that organizations within the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity were 35% more likely to generate above average returns clearly demonstrating the value of a diverse workforce.

According to Thompson and Cuseo (2012), educators should be aware of the following points regarding the importance of diversity in higher education:

1. **Diversity expands worldliness.** College might be the first time faculty, staff, and students have the opportunity to have real interaction with people from diverse groups.
2. **Diversity enhances social development.** Interacting with people from a variety of groups widens students' social circles by expanding the pool of people with whom they associate and develop relationships.
3. **Diversity prepares students for future career success.** Successful performance in today's diverse workforce requires sensitivity to human differences and the ability to relate to people from different cultural backgrounds.
4. **Diversity prepares students for work in a global society.** No matter what profession students enter, they will find themselves working with employers, employees, coworkers, customers and clients from diverse backgrounds—worldwide.
5. **Interactions with people different from ourselves increase our knowledge-base.** Research consistently shows that we learn more from people who are different from us than we do from people who are like us.
6. **Diversity promotes creative thinking.** Diversity expands our capacity for viewing issues or problems from multiple perspectives, angles, and vantage points.
7. **Diversity enhances self-awareness.** Learning from people whose backgrounds and experiences differ from our own sharpens our self-knowledge and self-insight by allowing us to compare our life experiences with others whose life experiences differ sharply from our own.
8. **Diversity enriches the multiple perspectives developed by a liberal arts education.**

The overarching goal of the UL System is to educate the future generations of Louisiana's residents in a productive and safe environment while fostering an atmosphere conducive to a

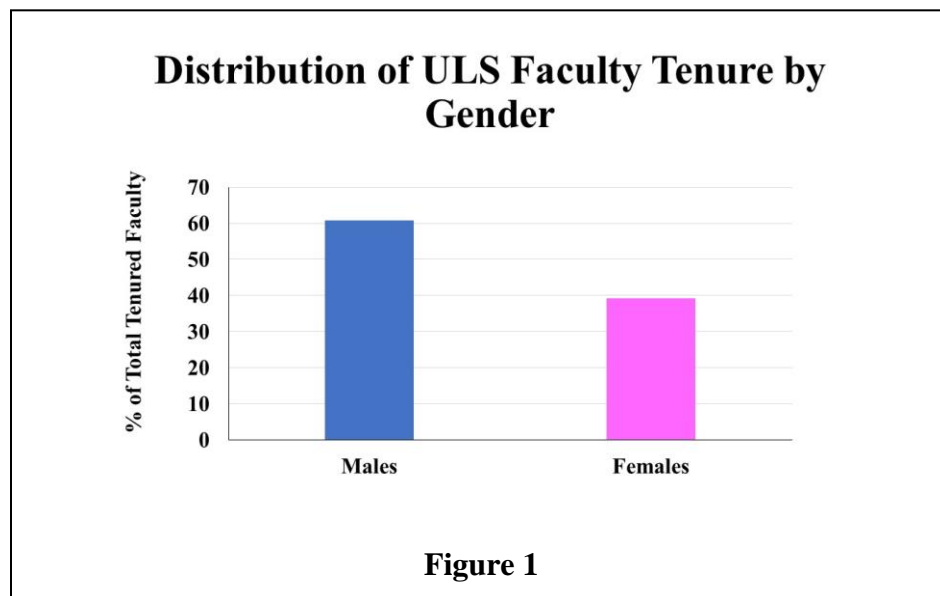
quality educational experience. To achieve this goal, each institution in the System must function as a team with its faculty and staff at the core. Diverse faculty/staff teams are composed of members with their own unique knowledge, skills, and abilities who can come together to share their experiences and create a collective campus culture far greater than the sum their individual efforts. To elicit the greatest effort from diverse faculty and staff teams, we must actively engage all members of our campus communities (regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs) such that everyone sees themselves as productive and contributing members of their institution.

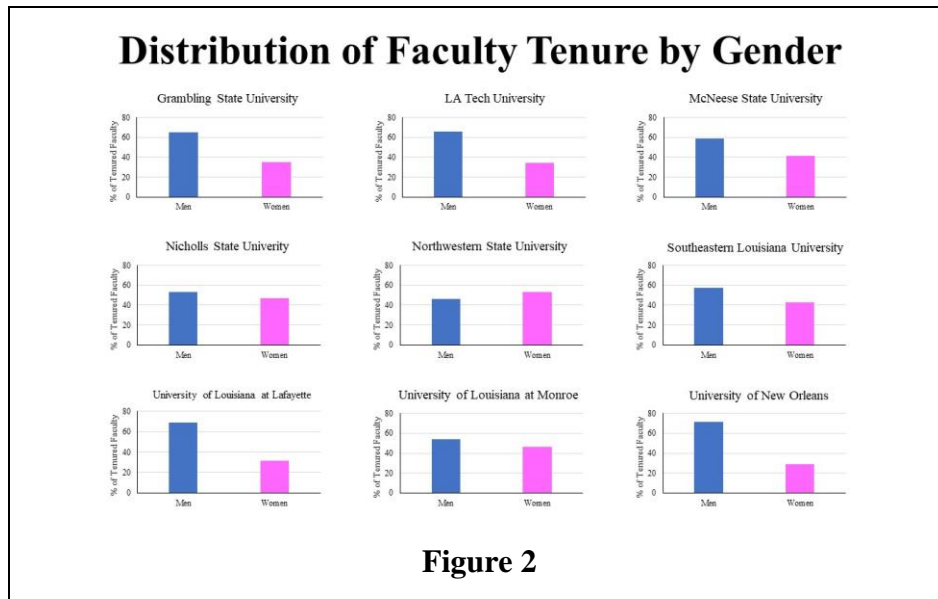
Given that a diverse faculty/staff team is critical for the successes of our institutions, our group has specifically focused on identifying ways in which the UL System can build greater faculty diversity.

Building a Diverse Faculty Population

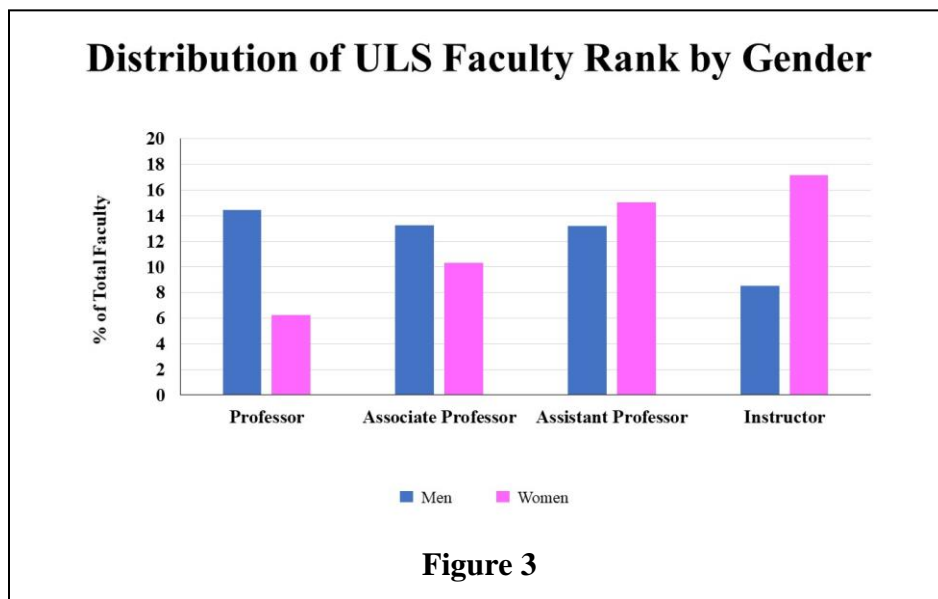
Examining Faculty Diversity

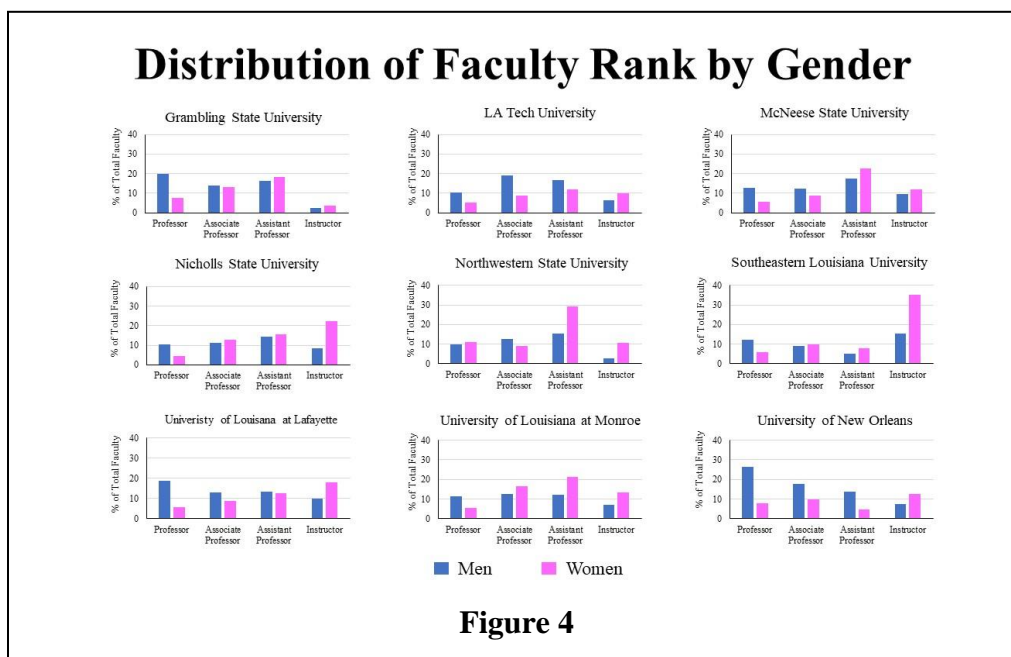
There are many aspects of faculty diversity that could be examined. These include but are not limited to race, nationality, and gender. While each of these areas is important and should be considered when discussing the creation of a diverse faculty population, we focused our research on gender diversity. We began by first examining tenured faculty. Using the data reported to the IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>) in Fall 2017 (the most recent data available), we analyzed the gender profile of tenured faculty members for the entirety of the UL System (Figure 1) as well as at each of the nine institutions that comprise the System (Figure 2). For the UL System as a whole, there are 20% more tenured male faculty than female faculty (60.9% vs 39.1%) (Figure 1). This trend was consistent at eight of the nine institutions (Figure 2) although the disparity between the percentage of male and female tenured faculty varied greatly among the institutions.





To further this analysis, we examined the gender distribution of various faculty ranks: professor, associate professor, assistant professor, and instructor. When examining the entire UL System faculty (Figure 3), there are more male than female faculty at the higher faculty ranks of professor (14% vs 6%) and associate professor (13% vs 10%). In contrast, there are more female than male faculty at the lower faculty ranks of assistant professor (15% vs 13%) and instructor (17% vs 9%). When the analysis was expanded to examine each institution of the UL System (Figure 4), the results were similar. At eight of the nine institutions, there were more male than female faculty members at the rank of professor. At the rank of associate professor, six of the nine institutions had more male than female faculty. At the rank of assistant professor, only three of the nine institutions had more male than female faculty, and at the rank of instructor, none of the nine institutions of the System had more male than female faculty.





There are some caveats to consider when examining this data. First, some of the largest discrepancies uncovered by examining the gender distribution of tenured faculty were seen at the University of Louisiana Lafayette and Louisiana Tech University (Figure 2). These institutions have historically been strong in male-dominated fields such as engineering. The only institution with more female than male tenured faculty was Northwestern State University which has historically been strong in the female-dominated fields of education and nursing. Does this play a role in the faculty gender distribution at these institutions? While more research is required to answer this question, it is important for institutions to look not only at the gender distribution of their entire faculty population but also at the distribution within individual colleges/programs within their institution.

Second, each of the nine institutions in the System have more female faculty than male faculty at the instructor level (Figure 4). What would cause such a discrepancy? In many institutions, the instructor position is reserved for faculty who lack a terminal degree in their respective field. Does this mean that there are more female faculty without terminal degrees in their field? Further investigation into this issue is required. An alternative explanation to this gender difference could be attributed to a bias in promotion. Are male and female instructors hired at the same rates, but male instructors are promoted to assistant professor at a higher rate than female instructors are? Further investigation into hiring and promotion trends as well as the transparency associated with these processes may be beneficial in examining this possibility.

Recommendations for Building Greater Faculty Diversity

To achieve greater success, the UL System must place diversity and inclusion at the forefront of its initiatives. As discussed above, there is a lack of gender diversity in the UL System faculty population. One way to address this concerning issue is to develop a plan for the recruitment and selection of a more diverse population of faculty.

Currently, the UL System has a Policy and Procedure Memorandum (PPM) governing Searches for University Presidents (Policy Number: FS.III.II.A-1) as well as a PPM for Search Policies and Procedures for Positions of Dean or Higher (Policy Number: FS-III.II.B-1a). These two policies provide consistent protocols for institutions recruiting and selecting presidents, provosts and deans. However, a similar set of guidelines do not exist for the recruitment and selection of faculty and staff.

At universities, most faculty positions fall below the level of dean. The absence of formulated guidelines for recruiting and selecting faculty to vacant positions can add to disparities in faculty population diversity. This can be of critical importance at leadership positions below the dean's level, such as directors and department heads, which are often appointed positions. If the faculty population lacks diversity, the resulting pool of departmental leadership is limited. To minimize these effects and to maximize faculty population diversity in the UL System, we recommend the establishment of a transparent policy providing guidelines for protocols to be used when recruiting and selecting faculty.

Goals for the Policy Guiding the Process of Recruitment and Selection of Faculty

- Job Announcements
 - In accordance with employment opportunity and affirmative action efforts, all vacancies must be listed with the Office of Human Resources for normal job posting procedures.
 - When a vacancy occurs or a new position is established, an announcement concerning the open position should include (at a minimum) the job title, job level, and minimum skills, experience, and educational requirements.
 - Job announcements should be posted for a minimum number of days.
- Job Postings
 - All Faculty, Exempt, and Non-Exempt positions require posting through the Office of Human Resources by creating a posting in the Applicant Tracking System (ATS).
 - Upon posting a position, hiring managers must consult with the dean/administrator/vice president's office to determine what goals have been established for the appropriate unit. The scope of the recruitment efforts should be encouraged to go beyond the unit and University postings. National exposure should be considered where appropriate.
 - It is the responsibility of the unit to ensure that the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Policy is followed by verifying the accurate completion of search steps on the ATS.
- Recruitment
 - A detailed recruitment plan for open faculty positions should be developed.
 - Applicants should be actively recruited for all open positions.
 - Position descriptions should be broadened to increase applications where appropriate.
 - Statements of the institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion should be included in the description/advertisement of every position.

- Selection
 - All applicants' credentials should be objectively and impartially reviewed as they relate to posted job descriptions.
 - An objective ranking or rating system should be utilized when evaluating all applicants.
 - Counter-stereotype imaging should be employed.
 - The entirety of the application packet should be evaluated for each of the applicants.
 - The unit should be dedicated to increasing the representation of women, minorities, veterans, and disabled employees in their area(s).

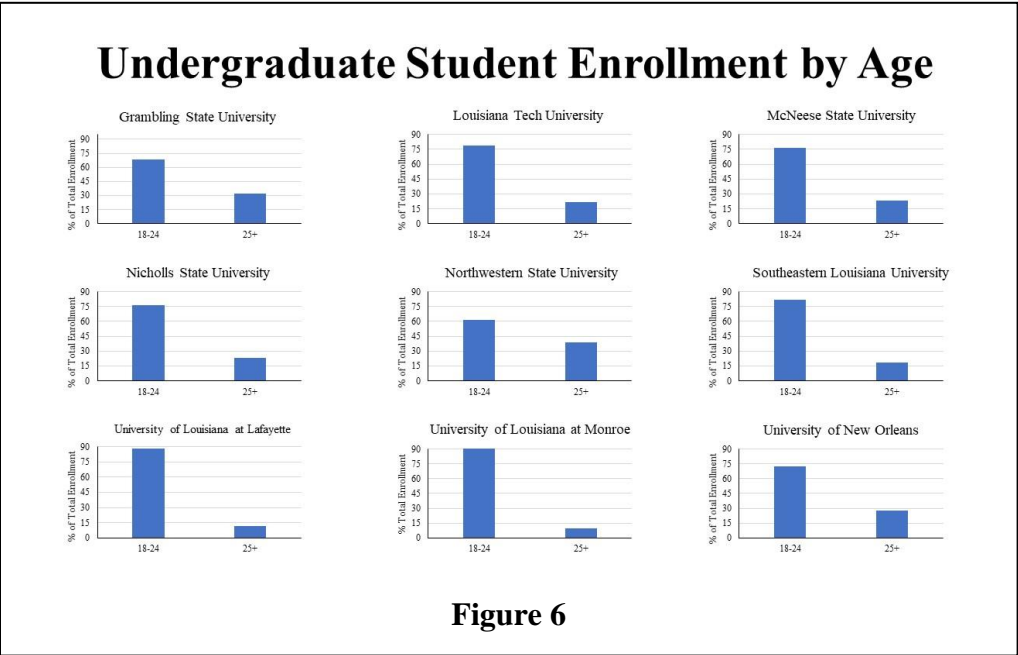
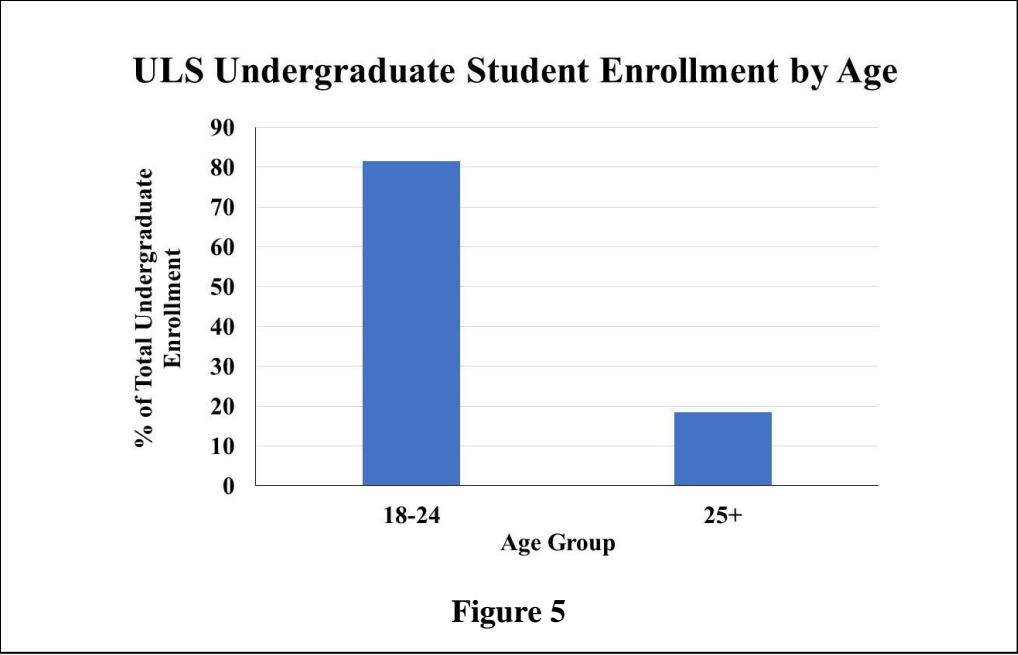
Having clearly defined, measurable, and communicated guidelines for faculty and staff searches could be a significant step toward achieving greater diversity and inclusion across our institutions. Such an approach would allow each institution to ensure that they are considering everyone's needs, leveling the playing field, tackling unconscious biases, and creating cultural change. Furthermore, these guidelines can provide focus and a greater sense of direction, transparency, and purpose while supporting the mission, vision, and values of each institution as well as the System as a whole.

Building a Diverse Student Population

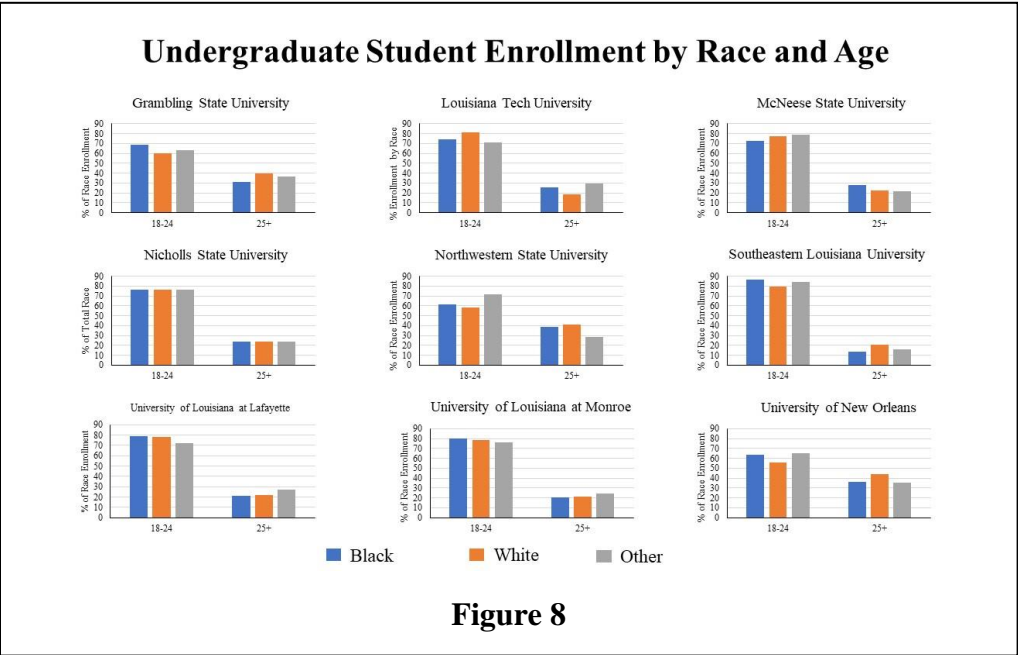
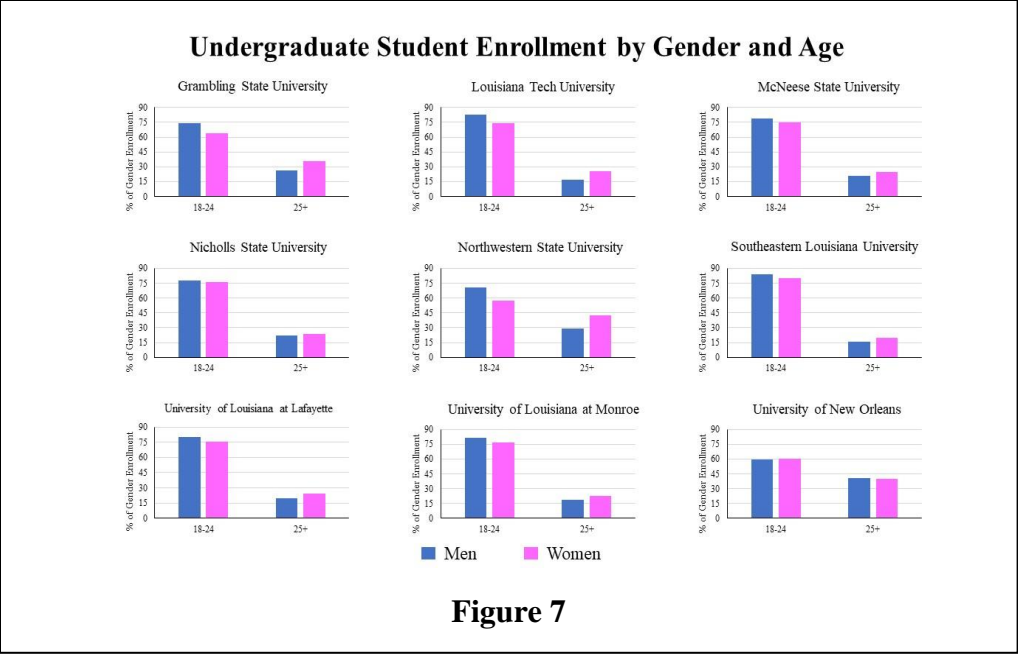
Examining Student Diversity

While faculty/staff are at the core of a university, students are its lifeline. Therefore, the diversity of a student population is just as important to consider as the diversity of a faculty population.

There are many aspects of student diversity that could be examined. These include but are not limited to race, nationality, age, gender, and socioeconomic, geographic, or educational backgrounds. While each of these areas is important and should be considered when discussing the creation of a diverse student population, we focused our research on age diversity. With respect to age, a traditional undergraduate student is between the ages of 18 and 24 while students 25 or older are considered non-traditional. We analyzed data reported to the Louisiana Board of Regents' Statewide Student Profile database (<https://regents.la.gov/data-publications/statewide-student-profile/>). Using data for Fall 2017 (the most recent data available), we examined the age distribution of all undergraduate students in the UL System. As is evident in Figure 5, the vast majority of our students (81%) are of the traditional age (18-24) while only 19% are 25 or older. As expected, this trend was reported for each of the nine institutions in our System although the differences in these populations of students varies greatly (Figure 6). For example, at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, 90% of the student population is 18 to 24 years old while at Northwestern State University this age group only comprises 61% of the student population.

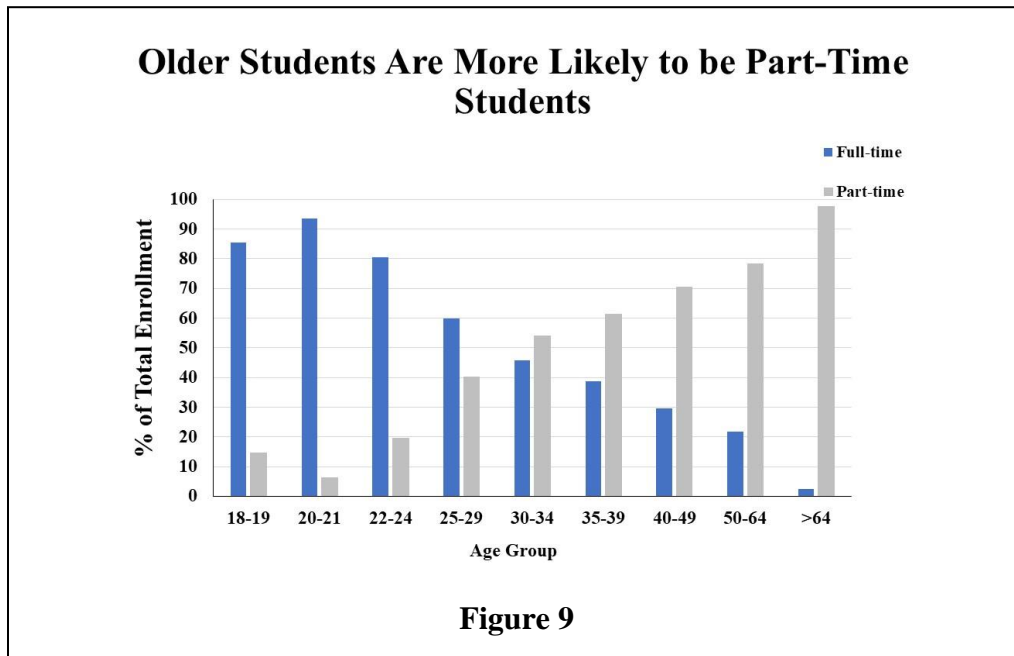


To explore further this aspect of the student population, we next examined the two age groups of students (18-24 and 25+) with respect to gender (Figure 7) as well as race (Figure 8) for the each of the individual UL System institutions. At eight of the nine institutions, there were more female than male non-traditional (25+) students (Figure 7). With respect to race, there was no clear indication that there were more students who were black, white, or other races in one of the two age groups (Figure 8).



Age isn't the only characteristic that can be used to classify a student as "non-traditional". To further examine the non-traditional student population of our System, we analyzed the distribution of full-time vs part-time students who are enrolled at a UL System institution. More specifically, we examined all undergraduate students enrolled in the UL System with respect to their age group (18-19, 20-21, 22-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-49, 50-64, or 65+) and enrollment status (full-time or part-time) (Figure 9). As expected, as the age of the student population increases, the number of full-time students decreases and as the age of the student population increases, the number of part-time students increases. In other words, older students (25+) are more likely to be enrolled at a UL System institution as a part-time student than as a full-time

student. It should be noted that for this analysis, we disregarded students who were younger than 18 years old as they typically represent dual enrollment students who are, by definition, part-time students.



The data indicated that non-traditional students are more likely to be part-time students. What else do we know about these students? We further analyzed this student population with respect to gender (Figure 10) and race (Figure 11). Figure 10 demonstrates that part-time students are more likely to be females who are at least 25 years old. Figure 11 demonstrates that part-time students over the age of 25 are more likely to be black or white than any other race.

What could account for this difference in gender and/or race distribution? Students who are 25 or older are more likely to be financially-independent which means that most are likely employed while attending school, a responsibility that may make being a full-time student impossible. These students may also have families, a responsibility which may also prevent them from being enrolled as a full-time student. Since females are more often the primary caregivers of family units, it is not surprising to find more female part-time students than male-part time students (Figure 10). The observed data is consistent with these assumptions.

What about the race distribution? Data reported to the Board of Regents’ Statewide Student Profile database only distinguishes three race options: black, white, and other. For most of the institutions in our System, the “other” option most likely indicates international students. As most of these international students are recruited to our institutions, many of them have scholarships to offset their educational costs. Do these scholarships provide these students with financial independence such that they do not need to work while in school thereby allowing them to be enrolled as full-time students? Can reducing costs to our students allow more of them to transition to full-time status? If so, then it is easy to see why the “other” race would not be as highly represented in the part-time student population (Figure 11).

A Disproportionate Number of Part-Time Students Are Women

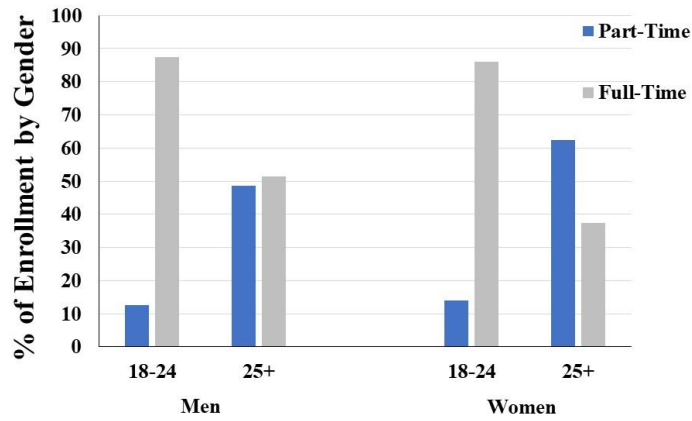


Figure 10

A Disproportionate Number of Part-Time Students Are Black or White

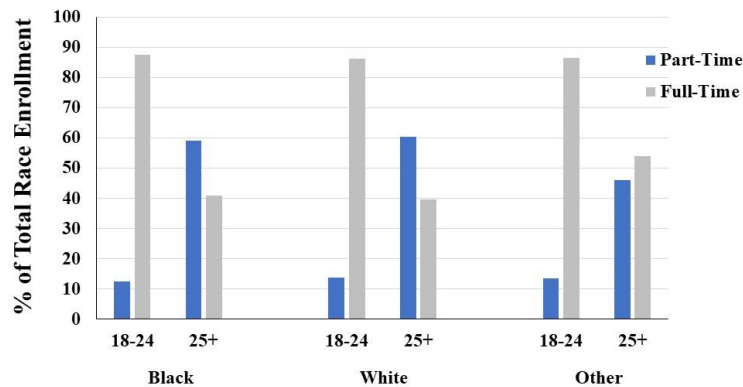


Figure 11

Why is it important for us to understand more about this population of part-time students? First, these students represent a significant source of income for our institutions. The more we know about these students, the better job we can do recruiting and supporting them. Their recruitment and retention are imperative to the successes of our individual institutions and, therefore, our System as a whole. With a greater understanding of their demographics, we can gain a greater appreciation of their needs. The support of those needs is critical for maintaining this population of students at our institutions. Second, it is widely accepted in higher education that it is easier and more cost-effective to retain an enrolled student than it is to recruit a new student. If

institutions can develop a plan to improve the support of part-time students thereby converting them into full-time students, this student population may become an important means by which to increase institutional revenue.

Recommendations for Building Greater Student Diversity

The UL System mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. Integral to furthering that mission is supporting efforts to create diverse and welcoming campus communities for all students. The System has encouraged institutions not only to attract and admit students from various backgrounds and experiences but also to support and retain these students once they are on our campuses. It is expected that the System will support efforts by its institutions to use legally-permissible strategies to promote student body diversity on their campuses. Such support may include providing guidance and technical assistance to help institutions in this process. With each of these strategies, the UL System can achieve its goal of preparing our students to become great citizens of the world and to compete in a global environment.

Below are key recommendations for attracting and retaining a diverse and inclusive student population:

- **UL System institutions should be pathways for social mobility.** This may involve the establishment of programs that cater to first generation students as well as programs that provide opportunities for non-traditional students seeking greater employment opportunities. Higher education is a key pathway for social mobility in the United States. At roughly 2.5%, the unemployment rate for college graduates is about half that of the national average. Among Hispanics, adults who have only a high school diploma earn \$30,329 annually compared with \$58,493 for those who have completed at least a 4-year degree. Among blacks, adults with a high school diploma earn \$28,439 annually compared with \$59,027 for those who hold a bachelor's degree.
- **UL System institutions should be pathways to bridge gaps in education, earning, and employment.** Over the past seven decades, the US has seen racial and ethnic disparities in higher education enrollment and attainment, as well as gaps in earnings, employment, and other related outcomes for communities of color. While the share of the population with a high school diploma has risen over time for Hispanic, black, white, and Asian adult U.S. residents, the gap in bachelor's degree attainment has widened for both black and Hispanic adults compared to white adults. Specifically, the gap in bachelor's degree attainment has more than doubled (from 9% to 20% for Hispanic residents since 1974 and from 6% to 13% for black residents since 1964). This has significant effects on students' lives; among all races and ethnicities, there are significant gaps in post-college earnings and employment between those with only a high school diploma and those with a bachelor's degree. With the creation of opportunities that attract minority students and provide adequate assistive programs to allow these students to succeed, the UL System can help to bridge this gap.

- **UL System institutions should work to improve the application, admission, enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates of underrepresented students of color.** The participation of underrepresented students of color decreases at multiple points across the higher education pipeline - application, admission, enrollment, persistence, and completion. A smaller proportion of black or Hispanic high school graduates than white graduates enroll in college, and more than 80% of Hispanic, black, and Asian students have a gap between their financial need and grants/scholarships, compared with 71% for white undergraduate students. Moreover, degree completion rates are lower among black and Hispanic students than white and Asian students; nearly half of Asian students who enrolled in postsecondary education complete a bachelor's degree compared with fewer than 20% Hispanic and black students. With the establishment of programs that provide scholarships, learning centers, and programs to keep these students in school, the UL System can make great strides in improving these disparities.
- **UL System institutions should be committed to promoting student body diversity and inclusion on their campuses.** Research shows that colleges and universities seeking to promote campus diversity directly identify how diversity relates to their core institutional mission and the unique circumstances of their institution. For example, mission statements and strategic plans that promote student body diversity and inclusion on campus establish priorities that can, in turn, lead institutions to allocate the necessary funds and resources for those purposes. UL System institutions should be encouraged to consider enhancing their capacity to collect and analyze the data required to set and track their diversity and inclusion goals.
- **UL System institutions should exhibit diversity across all levels of their institution.** Research shows that diversity in campus leadership, including the faculty population, plays an important role in achieving inclusive institutions. For example, faculty members' curricular decisions and pedagogy, including their individual interactions with students, can foster inclusive climates. Also, students have reported that it is important for them to see themselves reflected in the faculty and curriculum to which they are exposed to create a sense of belonging and inclusiveness.
- **UL System institutions should provide outreach and recruitment for underrepresented students.** Institutions committed to student body diversity can take steps to improve outreach and recruitment to a diverse population of prospective students. For instance, institutions often work to proactively develop relationships and provide support to the elementary and secondary schools that are located within their surrounding communities. Some strategies supported by research include comprehensive and ongoing support from administrators and peer to peer advising provided by similarly-aged students, targeted support for critical steps such as completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and test prep, and exposure for students to college-level work while they are in high school.
- **UL System institutions should provide support services for its students.** In general, student support services are associated with improved academic outcomes, including after students' first years in college. Well-designed course placement strategies mitigate the time students spend in remedial education without making progress toward a credential. Individualized mentoring and coaching can increase the odds that students remain enrolled in school.

First-year experience programs, such as summer bridge programs that support incoming students, can improve academic achievement and credit-earning.

- **UL System institutions should foster an inclusive campus climate.** Students report less discrimination and bias at institutions where they perceive a stronger institutional commitment to diversity. Institutions are encouraged to develop and facilitate programming to increase the cultural competency of leadership, faculty, staff, and students. Institutions are also encouraged to perform an assessment of their campus climate related to diversity to identify areas in which improvement may be needed. Many institutions include cultural competency training in new student orientation and require that students take coursework in diversity as freshmen. Cultural and socio-emotional support systems like personal mentoring and counseling can help all students to thrive on campus and are important for students who do not comprise a racial or ethnic majority. Institutional leaders should create support systems individualized to students' needs that are highly visible and accessible and engage students in the decision-making process regarding campus climate. Successful institutions must also be committed to making financial support available to close the financial gap experienced by economically-disadvantaged students.

These steps can help shape a path forward toward enrolling, retaining, and graduating more students from underrepresented groups in higher education and the promise of equal educational opportunity for all students. The UL System needs to focus on making college more affordable and accessible to more students, including low-income students and students of color. However, the path forward will require a thoughtful discourse and a range of strategies.

Diversity Without Inclusion Is Meaningless

It is difficult to separate the topics of diversity and inclusion. While most discussions of diversity naturally also involved the topic of inclusion, action plans typically only address the diversity component. However, inclusion should not be neglected. The implementation of inclusion should be less focused on meeting legal requirements and more focused on fully-integrating diverse populations. When inclusion is fully achieved, an organization is functioning in a space of respect and understanding, and all legal requirements governing how that organization operates will be satisfied. When our institutions realize this level of inclusion, where comfort, positioning, and beliefs across our campuses are considered, our faculty and staff will perform at higher levels.

To achieve inclusion at our institutions, we must set a foundation on which we can build a welcoming and engaging workplace for our faculty and staff. This will also help to ensure that we are building a welcoming and engaging learning environment for our students. To do so means that we must go beyond the traditional parameters of race, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. We cannot limit ourselves or the scope of what diversity and inclusion covers. We must question our individual and collective unconscious biases. This process begins with a simple awareness of what our biases are.

Many institutions across the US have standalone offices with the expressed goal of addressing diversity and inclusion, while others have simply added the responsibility of addressing diversity and inclusion to the duties of an existing position. During our research process, we surveyed faculty and staff across the UL System and found that many would like to see a standalone office on each campus. While we acknowledge that there is no one-size-fits-all approach or solution, there are other university system examples (*e.g.*, the University of California system) that could be further studied to help guide us toward the creation of our own solution. We also acknowledge that many of our institutions are charged with doing more with less, as budgets limit the scope of what can be accomplished. However, to affect real change, it is vital that we integrate diversity and inclusion into everything that we do on our campuses.

Our approach to diversity and inclusion leads us to understand that adopting diverse and inclusive work styles allows those around us to thrive and be themselves, which results in enhanced performance and increased community. As the benefits of our diversity and inclusion initiatives manifest, they support one another. The happier and more productive our campuses are, the more we can recruit and retain the best talent in Louisiana. The results will be that the UL System will produce the most educated generation in the history of the State of Louisiana.

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Group 2: Strategies for Lowering Student Costs

Presentation to UL System Board of Supervisors, University Presidents, and the Management & Leadership Institute Class of 2018–2019

Baton Rouge, LA
April 10, 2019

Ms. Quaneshia Armstrong – Grambling State University
Mr. John Paul Domiano – Southeastern Louisiana University
Dr. Chris Gissendanner – University of Louisiana Monroe
Ms. Devonia Love-Vaughn – Louisiana Tech University
Dr. Margarita Perez – University of Louisiana Lafayette
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Introduction

Increasing costs of education for college students is on the rise nationally, and Louisiana has the second highest tuition increase of all 50 states based on *Trends in College Pricing* data collected from the 2018–2019 College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges. Based on average published student fees, the state of Louisiana has increased tuition and fees 34% in the past five years. Since the University of Louisiana (UL) System’s institutions serve more than 91,500 students, we have a great responsibility to address this upward trend.

Nationally, there is a direct correlation between the affordability of higher education and diversity on college campuses. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2016 Report on *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education*, students of color were most effected by the rising costs of education. The report concluded that the unmet need of lower income and underrepresented students was higher than that of the majority students thus creating a “financial gap” that was cost preventative to their enrollment in college or completion of a college degree.

The UL System’s mission is to enhance the quality of life for the State’s citizens through quality education that is cost effective to both students and taxpayers, thereby enabling students to reach their highest potential. This paper explores four cost saving opportunities that directly impact students in the state of Louisiana:

- The promotion of dual enrollment programs to address college readiness
- The development of a model in which students can complete a bachelor’s degree in three years
- The reevaluation of summer sessions
- The development of a centralized transfer credit portal to reduce the number of credits lost during the student transfer process

As we consider these four areas of cost reduction, it is equally important to consider how to implement these proposed changes in a transparent and inclusive manner. Our stakeholders need to know, feel, and believe that any reduction in educational costs is a to benefit students. Faculty, staff, students, and communities with a vested interest may need to be a part of the broader conversation and feel invested in the decision-making processes when discussing pricing, costs, and value.

The Promotion of Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual enrollment is the simultaneous enrollment of a student in both high school and college such that the student receives credit on both their high school and college transcripts for the same course. Students may enroll in college courses at local technical, community and/or four-year colleges. The students enrolled in a college course must follow the college curriculum, and the course must be taught by either a college instructor or a high school instructor who is credentialed to teach that college course.

Using a dual enrollment program, students may begin earning college credits while still in high school, thus providing a smoother transition to college following their graduation. With this “jump start”, students also can complete their college degree faster.

Increase and Strengthen Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual enrollment programs were established to create a seamless transition for students moving from high school into college. There are many benefits to participating in dual enrollment programs. Their utilization can be a cost-saving strategy for students as the course costs are often paid by their high school system. Also, according to the Department of Education, college credits earned prior to high school graduation reduces the average time it takes for a student to earn his/her degree and increases the likelihood that they will retain and persist to graduation. Finally, participation in dual enrollment programs have also been shown to decrease the need for remedial classes during college.

Research indicates that providing college-level courses in high school leads to the development of students who are better prepared for and ultimately more successful in college. Other benefits associated with this college-level coursework may include the following:

- Increase the number of historically-underserved students who are ready to enter college
- Increase the academic rigor of the high school curriculum
- Assist low-achieving students meet higher academic standards
- Reduce high school dropout rates and increase high school graduation rates
- Provide realistic information to students about college expectations
- Motivate students to attend college
- Decrease the costs of college by decreasing the time it will take to earn a college degree

Allow Students to Enroll in Developmental/Remedial Courses Through Dual Enrollment Programs

If a student is identified as not meeting college-readiness benchmarks before high school completion, why postpone interventions until their freshman year of college? A partnership between BESE and the Board of Regents would allow students to use the access time during the student’s senior year of high school to complete developmental/remedial coursework through a dual enrollment program. Together, we can ensure that developmental interventions are targeted to specific areas of student need and are aligned with research and best practices.

Learn from Dual Enrollment Programs in Other States

Texas

Many states are investing in dual enrollment programs. Earlier this year, the University of Texas System released one of the most comprehensive studies on dual enrollment to date. The findings of their study include:

- Dual enrollment students are twice as likely to graduate in four years than students entering college with no dual credit.
- Among students who graduate in four years, dual credit students, on average, graduate one semester earlier than students with no prior college credit earned.

- Students who earned dual credit reported that their early exposure to college better prepared them for the college courses they took after graduating from high school.

Florida

Florida has been a leader in dual enrollment programming for many years. They have focused on creating a credible, affordable, and seamless K-20 educational system utilizing a comprehensive array of choices by which students can earn college credit while still in high school. In their state, dual enrollment is viewed as a pathway to a college degree. Furthermore, this pathway is not limited to gifted students but is also available to those on the career or technical track.

Georgia

The Accel Program in Georgia is designed for high school junior and seniors enrolled in accredited public or private high schools. It allows students to enroll in dual enrollment courses at approved public, private, and technical colleges and universities. Georgia offers dual enrollment programs for gifted juniors, senior enrichment, and the Advanced Academy of Georgia. The Advanced Academy of Georgia is a residential, early entrance to college program that targets bright and motivated high school students who are interested in accelerating their academic careers. The “Move on When Ready Act” allows 11th and 12th grade students in Georgia to leave their assigned high schools and attend college institutions full-time to earn course credit that will apply toward both high school and college transcripts.

North Carolina

The Early College Initiative focuses on preparing students for the education needed in a post-manufacturing knowledge economy. Participating North Carolina students enroll in an accelerated program of blended high school and college coursework. North Carolina leads the nation with 71 early colleges. The National Center for Education Statistics show 86% of students completing early college enroll in college.

Dual enrollment programs can play an important role in college readiness and completion. To achieve fully its mission, these programs must continue to be well-supported and implemented at both the state and local levels. For our state to realize the successes associated with effective dual enrollment programs, we need to ensure complete participation from students, high schools and colleges.

The Establishment of a “Degree in Three” Model

Bachelor’s degrees have traditionally been considered 4-year degrees. The minimum accreditation standard to earn a bachelor’s degree is 120 degree credit hours. When students enroll in two semesters per year (typically fall and spring semesters) successfully pass 15 credit hours per semester, they can complete their degree in 8 semesters. One way to lower the costs of college for students would be to offer a 3-year degree model. In this model, students would enroll in eight consecutive semesters (fall, spring, and summer) for three years. The reduction in time needed to complete their degree would result in students saving money and time and would

result in earlier progression into the workforce or graduate school. One area in which this model could save students money would be living costs. As depicted in Table 1, a student at Nicholls State University would see a \$4,724 savings in resident housing and meal plan costs with the completion of their degree in three years.

Table 1: 4-Year Degree Model vs 3-Year Model Resident Housing and Meal Plan Costs*

	4-Year Model	3-Year Model
Housing	\$16,432	\$13,388
Meals	\$13,696	\$12,016
Total:	\$30,128	\$25,404
	Savings:	\$4,724

* Pricing is for Nicholls State University as an example

Students completing their degree in three years would also save money on tuition and fees. As depicted in Table 2, a student at Nicholls State University would see a \$498 savings in tuition costs with the completion of their degree in three years.

Table 2: Tuition Cost Difference*

	4-Year Model (15 credits per semester)	3-Year Model
Cost for Tuition and Fees	\$31,927	\$31,429
	Savings:	\$498

*Degree pricing is for Nicholls State University as an example

When considering these savings together, a student completing their degree in three years would experience a savings of \$5,222 at Nicholls State University.

As another example of the costs savings associated with a student completing their degree in three years, we examined the resident housing and meal plan costs (Table 3) and tuition costs (Table 4) at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. When considering these together, a student completing their degree in three years would experience a savings of \$6,166 at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Table 3: 4-Year Degree Model vs 3-Year Model Resident Housing and Meal Plan Costs*

	4-Year Model	3-Year Model
Housing	\$18,120	\$15,676
Meals	\$13,176	\$11,442
Total:	\$31,296	\$27,118
	Savings:	\$4,178

* Pricing is for University of Louisiana Lafayette as an example

Table 4: Tuition Cost Difference*

	4-Year Model (15 credits per semester)	3-Year Model
Cost for Tuition and Fees	\$42,192	\$40,204
	Savings:	\$1,988

*Degree pricing is for University of Louisiana at Lafayette as an example.

Although the direct cost savings is modest in these examples, it does represent a reduction in costs that could significantly impact a student’s financial status. The larger financial impact to the student would come from entering the workforce one year earlier than expected. This early entrance would allow the student to begin earning a salary ahead of schedule and to become a tax-paying member of the state’s workforce.

The limitations of TOPS have played a role in reducing students’ willingness to enroll in summer school. However, TOPS can be utilized for payment of summer school tuition. If students are maximizing their course loads and following a 3-year curriculum plan, they can receive their earned TOPS benefits for summer semesters. The proposed Degree in Three model would also result in a slight cost savings to the state. It should be noted that other forms of financial aid,

such as Pell Grants, can also be utilized year-round (*i.e.*, including summer semesters) and can be received for a total of 12 semesters.

Each of the nine institutions in the UL System should perform an analysis to determine the potential cost savings to students at their institutions who would participate in a Degree in Three model and investigate which degree programs would best lend themselves to this configuration. It should be noted that more summer school courses may be needed for implementation of the Degree in Three model to ensure that students can complete their degree within the prescribed 3-year timeframe.

The Re-Envisioning of the Summer Semester: An Improved Value Proposition

Summer semesters provide unique opportunities for student and university success. Students can utilize summer semesters to accelerate their projected degree plan, to reduce the strain of high fall and spring course loads, and to ensure financial aid eligibility. For a university, a successful summer semester can provide a vibrant campus year-round, increase retention and graduation rates, and improve operational efficiency. However, challenges presented by students and faculty can prevent the summer semester from reaching its full potential at many institutions.

During the Spring 2017 semester, Southeastern Louisiana University held focus groups to uncover some of the underlying student issues limiting summer semester enrollment and participation. Issues identified included the following:

1. Cost of attendance
2. Lack of available scholarship funds
3. The need to work during the summer
4. Limited class offerings
5. Last-minute class cancellations by the University

Opportunity cost is an important factor for students deciding to attend the summer semester. The student must consider the cost of tuition as well as the time investment of classes, which can reduce the number of hours left in the week for gainful employment. These combined opportunity costs can quickly make the enrollment in a summer semester unaffordable to a student. Southeastern Louisiana University used a multi-pronged strategy to mitigate the challenge this opportunity cost issue presented to its students. First, research was conducted to understand the current summer semester tuition structures for public 4-year institutions in Louisiana. Next, summer scholarship offerings were reviewed. Based on the findings of this research, a decision was made to offer a \$300 scholarship to each student enrolled in a summer semester. The scholarships were independent of any other financial aid received by the student and were offered without regard for the number of courses taken.

Lowering the opportunity cost of attending a summer semester was a good first step, but there were other factors impeding enrollment. A comprehensive evaluation of summer course offerings and scheduled class times was also needed. The University used a data driven model, which analyzed high demand courses from the fall and spring semesters as well as other inputs.

The summer schedule of courses was built to better reflect the current needs of students rather than just relying on historical offerings. Summer class sizes were reviewed and aligned with those of offerings in the fall or spring semesters. Student surveys revealed that over 60% of students preferred online coursework, with most expressing a preference for 100% online classes. For those students taking face-to-face classes, over 80% of students preferred morning classes. Based on these results, Southeastern Louisiana University began to offer more online courses during its summer semesters. The process and timeline for class cancellations was also altered to prevent last minute scheduling problems for students. An earlier date for class cancellations for low enrollment gave students more notice to make schedule changes. An earlier faculty commitment to teach date was established to provide the department head more time to find a replacement rather than cancel the course if a faculty member chose not to teach.

For the new approach to the summer semester to be successful, Southeastern Louisiana University needed to also understand and address concerns of the faculty. Because summer enrollment had decreased for the previous four summer semesters, faculty members had experienced reduced summer salaries and workload because of proration and class cancellations. These factors reduced faculty interest in teaching during the summer semesters. Southeastern Louisiana University modified its proration process for all courses and helped faculty members plan for summer workload and salary amounts by setting minimum guarantees based on preliminary enrollment. Another change involved establishing that a faculty member's finalized pay for summer classes was based upon enrollment after the last day of drop/add and that this pay would be increased with additional enrollment as necessary.

After addressing the concerns of the aforementioned stakeholders (students and faculty) Southeastern Louisiana University student credit hour production has increased by 2,610 hours from Summer 2016 to Summer 2018 semesters. Southeastern Louisiana University also increased the ratio of online versus face-to-face courses while simultaneously reducing the total number of courses offered. As improvements to the summer semester offerings/enrollment continue and generate additional revenue, funding can be invested in a mixture of increased scholarship offerings and additional student support services. Such resources will empower students to attend summer semesters without placing themselves in precarious financial situations or risking burn out. The results will be students following a faster path to graduation, leaving the university with less debt, and reducing their risk of stop/drop out.

Establishment of the *ULaneS* Transfer Portal: Facilitating the Transfer of Course Credits to UL System Institutions

Transfer students represent a significant portion of students enrolling in four-year colleges or universities in Louisiana. Students transfer to other institutions for many reasons, and their choice of which institution to transfer to depends on specific circumstances for each student. In some cases, students may have multiple options within the state, whereas the transfer options may be limited for others. In either case, transfer students face many challenges. Institutional processing of applications and transcripts can take a significant amount of time and may lead to compressed timeframes for students at their new institutions. Following their application and acceptance, students need to learn and navigate new student information and advising systems.

Communications with institutional staff and faculty regarding advising and transfer credits may be inconsistent, unclear, or provide conflicting information. Age, socioeconomic status, and lack of familiarity with institutions of higher education may make these challenges more difficult for some students.

Lost credits in the transfer process can also represent a significant cost burden for students and could lengthen their time to graduation. Tools that facilitate the transfer process and maximize transfer credits, for both in-state and out-of-state transfers, would have significant benefits for both the student and the UL System institutions accepting these students. Increasing the transferability of community college courses and courses taken at other 4-year institutions would reduce costs for these transfer students and would increase college completion rates. The implementation of such a plan would also benefit non-traditional students seeking to re-enroll at a university.

We propose the development of a centralized transfer portal for the UL System. This portal, with the proposed name “*ULaneS*” would be an online tool for transfer students to easily access degree plans and pathways for each of the UL System institutions. *ULaneS* would also provide transfer credit information for each institution based on the Board of Regents’ articulation matrix as well as course equivalencies based on specific institution or degree program-level review.

The *ULaneS* portal will address the student needs by providing the following:

- Information on articulation agreements and course transfer data for student view/evaluation
- Explanations of how transfer courses fit into specific degree plans or pathways
- Accessible course transfer information so that students can make informed decisions regarding their transfer institution

The *ULaneS* portal would also offer advantages for UL System institutions:

- It could function as an official repository of articulation
- It could increase efficiency of transfer course evaluation. Transfer credits outside of articulation agreements are currently determined at the institutional or program level. Therefore, there is often duplication of efforts across campuses to assess the transferability of courses. Such duplication may not be necessary and its reduction would simplify advising and prevent institutional inconsistencies.
- It could function as an organized database of transfer information that would be easily accessed and updated by advisors and program administrators.
- It could directly provide important course equivalency information to students thereby improving the efficacy of institutional communication with prospective and incoming students and make the advising process more efficient.

Transfer Portals in Other States

There are several examples of university systems with online transfer portals. The following are two such examples:

Public colleges and universities in California utilize www.assist.org as a student-transfer portal. Transfer students in these systems can use assist.org to determine how course credits at one public college or university could be transferred to another. The portal has a course transferability tool and allows students to explore majors at California public institutions. Community college transfer pathways for popular majors are also housed at this site.

The State University of New York uses the portal <https://www.suny.edu/attend/get-started/transfer-students/> to provide several resources for transfer students. These resources include transfer paths and course equivalencies. A “Planning Your Coursework” tool at this site that allows students to identify courses within their major at their current institution that have equivalents at their transfer institution.

Features of *ULaneS*

The proposed web portal would be accessible through the UL System web page with easily accessible links on the web pages the System’s nine institutions. The portal would have four broad functionalities:

- 1) *Major Transfer Paths*: This service would allow a student to best prepare for transfer to any UL System institution. The tool would summarize common degree requirements shared by all UL System institutions. It could be used not only by transfer students but also by students planning to complete lower division courses at 2-year institutions. Students would have the ability to select a major at their current institution and be provided with a list of courses common to that major at any of the UL System institutions.
- 2) *Course Transferability Search*: With this tool, a student could search for courses that are part of the Board of Regents’ articulation matrix. Outside of this articulation matrix, other course transfer data could be archived to the portal by individual institutions when specific transfer course credit is accepted. Therefore, a student (and their advisor) could identify easily any courses from any institution (either in-state or out-of-state) that have been accepted as transfer credit for a given major.
- 3) *Degree Program Browsing*: This portal would allow a transfer student to easily browse degree programs from all UL System institutions. A student could simply click on a course in the degree plan and see equivalent courses at other institutions.
- 4) *“What If” tool*: With this tool, a transfer student could visualize how a specific course fits into a selected degree program at any given UL System institution. This tool would provide a four-year overview of the program with the student’s transfer information included.

ULM Advising Model and Commercial Web-based Products

The University of Louisiana Monroe has developed an in-house advising tool called “FlightPath” that provides some of the functionalities described above including the “What If” tool and a course equivalency search. Figure 1 in the Addendum shows a degree plan over four years. This screen is populated with completed or transferred courses. A similar output could be used for degree plan browsing and a “What If” tool in the *ULaneS* portal.

FlightPath also functions as an archive for transferred credits (from both in-state and out-of-state institutions). This information is entered as transfer credits are accepted and greatly increases the efficiency of advising of transfer students (Addendum, Figure 2).

There are also commercial, web-based products available for establishing a transfer student portal. The following are three such products:

<https://www.eab.com/technology/transfer-collaborative>

<https://www.transferology.com/>

<http://www.collegesource.com/products/tes-transfer-evaluation-system/>

UL System Transfer Credit Policies

The UL System should also consider developing specific policies to guide a cohesive approach to evaluating transfer credits across its institutions. Such a policy might include:

- A statement that institutions will make efforts to maximize the acceptance of transfer credits
- Guidelines for evaluation of transfer credits
- A requirement for institutions to enter transfer credits into a transfer portal
- A requirement that a lower division course that fulfills a core at one UL System institution must be accepted as a core course at any UL System institution

Conclusion

The promotion of the usage of dual enrollment programs, the reduction in time required to earn a degree, the restructuring of summer semester programs, and the creation of a system-wide transfer portal are proposed solutions to address directly the tuition inflation epidemic that plagues the average college student in Louisiana. By implementing these strategies, the System would be opening the door to higher education for students who may otherwise choose a different route for their futures. Students from lower income households, underrepresented students, and students who struggle academically would all benefit tremendously from the opportunity to receive dual enrollment credits, participate in summer school, complete their degree in shorter timeframe, and experience a seamless transfer credit system. Our goal is not only to lower costs for students but also to give all students the opportunity to remove barriers to their success and to attend college. The addition of these students to our campus communities will increase the diversity within our institutions thus providing a richer, more meaningful educational experience for everyone on our campus. Lowering the costs of higher education is not a university's financial aid or institutional advancement issue - it is a system issue. This important issue will continue to negatively impact our future working citizens until collective efforts are employed. The implementation of any of the four proposed strategies will require the UL System administration and representatives from each of its nine institutions to work together to break the silo chains and bridge the gaps within the System. Specialized task force teams will be needed to plan, manage, and evaluate the initiatives. The System's and its institutions' collective efforts will no doubt evoke more conversation and effect even greater change.

Addendum

Figure 1: Image capture from FlightPath showing a four-year degree plan for Biology. Completed courses and grades automatically populate the degree plan. Transfer courses and substitutions are indicated as well. The same output also occurs with the “What If” tool when a different degree plan is populated with the courses the student has completed. Icons indicate core curriculum courses and degree electives.

Biology

[Change degree](#)

Display by Year Display by Type [Print](#)

Viewing Blank Degree Plan				
Major:	Biology	Catalog Year:	2018-2019	
Progress				
Major Requirements: 0 / 45		Degree Progress: 0 / 120		

Freshman Year				
	Course	Hrs	Grd	Pts
<input type="checkbox"/>	BIOL 1020	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	BIOL 1021	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	BIOL 1022	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	BIOL 1023	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 1007	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 1008	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 1009	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 1010	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	UNIV 1001	1		
	» Click >> to select 6 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 3 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 3 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 3 hours.			

Sophomore Year				
	Course	Hrs	Grd	Pts
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 2030	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 2031	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 2032	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CHEM 2033	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CSCI 1070	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	MATH 1016	3		
	» Click >> to select 7 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 3 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 6 hours.			

Junior Year				
	Course	Hrs	Grd	Pts
<input type="checkbox"/>	BIOL 3005	3		
<input type="checkbox"/>	ENGL 3024	3		
	» Click >> to select 7 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 7 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 6 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 3 hours.			

Senior Year				
	Course	Hrs	Grd	Pts
<input type="checkbox"/>	BIOL 4099	1		
	» Click >> to select 3 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 9 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 9 hours.			
	» Click >> to select 8 hours.			

Figure 2: Image capture from FlightPath showing transfer credit equivalencies. In this example, ULM equivalencies for courses taken at a Connecticut college are indicated. Following program-level review, transfer credits are entered into this system and can be viewed by students and advisors.

Transfer Credit Equivalency School Results

Selected state: [Connecticut \(change\)](#)

Selected school: [CAPITAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE \(change\)](#)

The Transfer Credit Equivalency/Comparison Search allows prospective students to view ULM equivalents for courses taken at other institutions. It is to be used as a reference tool only and does not guarantee that every course will be accepted as equivalent by every department at ULM. An official evaluation of your transfer credit will take place after you apply for admission to ULM, submit official college transcripts from all schools attended, and meet with your academic advisor at ULM.

When there is no exact ULM equivalent for a course, the ULM course number begins with a number that indicates the level, followed by three X's (Ex: 1XXX or 2XXX). The course title repeats the title of the course at the transferring school.

This database contains only transfer courses that have already been evaluated. Course equivalencies continue to be added, and equivalencies already in the system are updated regularly. If courses you have taken are not included, they will be evaluated when you submit your official college transcripts.

Tip: Mark the checkboxes next to the transfer courses, then click the 'Try out degrees' button at the bottom of the page to see how these courses fit into a ULM degree!

CAPITAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE			University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM)		
Transfer course	Course title	ULM course	Course title	Hrs	
<input type="checkbox"/> BIO G105	INTRO TO BIO LECTURE	BIOL 1001	LIVING WORLD	3	
		BIOL 1009	LAB EXPERIENCE LIFE SCIENCES	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> COM G173	PUBLIC SPEAKING	COMM 2001	PUBLIC SPEAKING	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> CST G150	WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT I	CINS 1XXX	WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT I	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> ENG G101	COMPOSITION	ENGL 1001	COMPOSITION I	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> ENG G102	LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION	ENGL 1002	COMPOSITION II	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> MAT G085	ELEM ALGEBRA AND PRE-ALGEBRA	DEVL 0XXX	ELEM ALGEBRA AND PRE-ALGEBRA	6	
<input type="checkbox"/> MAT G137	INTERMEDIATE ALGEBRA	MATH 0093	INTRODUCTORY ALGEBRA	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> MUS G105	INTRO MUSIC BUSINESS	MUSC 1XXX	INTRO MUSIC BUSINESS	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> POL G111	AMERICAN GOVERNMENT	POLS 2001	AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> PSY G111	GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY I	PSYC 2001	INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> PSY G112	GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY II	PSYC 1XXX	GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY II	3	
<input type="checkbox"/> SOC G101	PRIN OF SOCIOLOGY	SOCL 1001	INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY	3	

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Group 3: Transparency

Presentation to UL System Board of Supervisors, University Presidents, and the Management & Leadership Institute Class of 2018–2019

Baton Rouge, LA
April 10, 2019

Ms. Ryan Bell – University of New Orleans
Dr. Michael Buckles – McNeese State University
Dr. Michele Caruso – Nicholls State University
Ms. Sheilah Faucette – Grambling State University
Dr. Julia Letlow – University of Louisiana Monroe
Dr. Mohammad Saadeh – Southeastern Louisiana University
Dr. Peter Sheppard – University of Louisiana Lafayette

Introduction

What is transparency? Although there are many different definitions of transparency, all include discussion of disclosure and understanding between parties. At the micro-level, transparency occurs when people think, act, and report in ways that are understandable to those with whom they interact. (Coates 5). In simple terms, complete transparency occurs “where, with minimal effort, everyone can figure out what is going on and why.” A transparent organization is one that acts in ways that make it “easy to see and understand what (the organization) is doing and why” (Coates 5). This concept can be applied broadly to any entity, such as the UL System or one of its nine institutions.

Why does an organization need transparency? In higher education, the largest driver for increased transparency is the rising cost of tuition (Coates 14). Tuition has risen sharply over the past several years, both across the nation and within the UL System (although within the UL System, the average cost of tuition is still well below the national average). With students assuming a larger burden of education-associated costs, “individuals are likely to seek more information on access, participation, and outcomes to guide their investment in (their) higher education” (Coates 16).

One could argue that the institutions comprising the UL System are transparent. For example, the institutions must regularly report data to various agencies like IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System). Additionally, universities must disclose information to comply with mandates such as Title IX and the Clery Act. Other operational and assessment measures are often posted and readily accessible on their websites. Recently, governmental agencies have sought to redefine and expand the practice of transparency in higher education. For example, the Louisiana Checkbook initiative allows any citizen to examine the expenditures of any statewide agency, including public universities. Congressional leaders are also seeking to expand mandated disclosures by universities. It is expected that universities will soon have to report outcomes-based assessments (including post-graduate outcomes) at the student and program levels (College Transparency Act of 2017).

The government isn’t the only group seeking institutional transparency in higher education. We surveyed individuals who work within the UL System institutions and found that transparency was important to them as well. Employees of the UL System institutions would like to see operational transparency. With a greater understanding of their universities’ operational policies, these employees can make better judgments and operate in a manner that is fully-compliant with university regulations/requirements (Patton 20).

Therefore, UL System institutions need to be very concerned with both external and internal transparency. This concern will allow the universities to report their successes and to define better their operational practices. As a System, it is essential that we recognize the importance of transparency and use that understanding as the transformative potential to drive change in higher education (Coates 3, Henderson, Crain PPT).

Context

A true understanding of the concept of transparency requires some clarification. There are straight-forward, pragmatic definitions regarding transparency in our daily job duties and responsibilities. There are ideological definitions that drive us toward a more philosophical view of transparency in organizations. Because we were charged with examining transparency in higher education, we explored what transparency looks and feels like specifically within the UL System.

The national conversation about transparency in higher education is focused primarily on data: what kind of data is needed, who collects the data, how and with whom is the data shared, who calculates the value of/imposes meaning on the data, and how is the data's value/meaning communicated. Everyone agrees that measurable outcomes of colleges and universities are vital for forecasting, decision making, and public accountability and, as such, should be reported for those institutions that receive government funding. However, the logistics of gathering and reporting this information and the issues of ownership and security of this data becomes increasingly more complicated. There are several existing systems aimed at addressing some of these concerns, including the federally-mandated IPEDS and the voluntary Association for Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU)/Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AACU) Voluntary System of Accountability, but none are all-encompassing or without a multitude of inefficiencies.

Despite the tedious and complicated nature of these data-related issues, transparency has tremendous value in higher education. The impact that earning a post-secondary degree has on an individual's ability to attain and sustain financial security and all of its associated benefits has been proven time and again. Unfortunately, the costs associated with achieving that education continues to rise, and colleges and universities are being asked/required to quantify their value. Sadly, this quantification typically omits consideration of the inherently individualized experience of education as well as the immense variance in institutions' missions and communities served while simultaneously having the effect of downplaying the importance of education on society. The national conversation regarding transparency in higher education must continue until college/university leadership and elected leadership in government reach a shared panoptic understanding of the role that higher education plays in the long-term success of our communities, regions, and nation.

We began our research into the issue of transparency with localized conversations. We found that UL System employees were far more likely to be concerned with transparency in their institutions/system than in a nationwide context. These individuals are more focused on how their respective institutions embrace transparency and the effects this transparency has on their daily lives. Many also had ideas for increasing transparency and expressed concern regarding the problems that transparency may sometimes cause. While we acknowledge the importance of the nationwide conversation on transparency (including the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and the inclusion of the College Transparency Act), we focused on examining

transparency specifically within the UL System and how its implementation can be used to empower UL System employees at any level to take ownership in their institution's mission.

Methodology

Literature Review

Given the breadth of the subject matter and the heterogeneity of its stakeholders, a robust examination of transparency in higher education required that our literature search be extended beyond traditional academic journals. Therefore, we also reviewed content published by national associations in service of the higher education community, informational websites produced by federal authorities, and public testimonies. This thorough review provided us with the historical and political context needed for a relevant conversation about transparency, as well as a sampling of opinions held by various stakeholders, and an enriched understanding of the ideological challenges associated with achieving transparency.

In "Neoliberal Ideologies, Governmentality and the Academy: An examination of accountability through assessment and transparency," Natasha Jankowski and Staci Provezis propose that the current climate surrounding transparency and assessment in higher education is being controlled by parties who treat education as a commodity in a market. They contend that these parties hold the oversimplified expectation that a competitive market will drive the quality of education in the US to new heights. Jankowski and Provezis also argue that this oft-communicated misunderstanding of the value of education should serve as an impetus for institutions of higher education to take a more active role in conversations about how the data shared through transparent activities is assessed, valued, and communicated.

P. Daniel Chen and R. Michael Haynes, authors of "Transparency for Whom? Impacts of Accountability Movements for Institutional Researchers and Beyond," shed light on the added stresses placed on offices of institutional research/effectiveness when transparency and resultant accountability are enforced as top priorities by governing and funding bodies. While these offices have always been reliable workhorses, the additional pressures to not only provide the data but also to use that data as comparative and forecasting tools should be met with more support from administration in the form of larger, highly-trained staff.

The Association for Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) has published a variety of texts on the issue of transparency. The organization names accountability and transparency as its primary priorities and initiatives. The APLU's publications on these topics range from letters to the United States Senate to editorials on its website about why the ban on student-level data in the Higher Education Act should be lifted. In its letter to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, the APLU declares its support of the inclusion of the College Transparency Act, H.R. 2434/S.211 in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, as a means of overcoming the dearth of "comprehensive, accurate data on student outcomes at each college and university in the U.S." (APLU Letter page 5). They explain that when student-level data is highly restricted, the data available to create the College Scorecard and similar so-called

comparison tools are misleading and result in the misrepresentation of institutions' true impact on their respective students, scholars, other stakeholders, and the economy at large.

The American Council on Education wrote a similar letter to the same Senate Committee outlining guiding principles intended to assist those tasked with writing the bill for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The fourth principle included in their letter is as follows: "Institutions should be responsible for defining their mission and the nature of their academic programs." While transparency is not directly referenced in this language, this principle addresses a primary concern of many educators - proposed methods and executors of assessment are misaligned and ill-equipped to determine the full value of education to the future of America. They state that "the federal government has a legitimate interest in collecting and reporting a broad array of student outcomes such as completion rates, loan repayment, earnings, and defaults, but it should have no role in evaluating academic quality because it lacks the expertise and resources to do so."

"Lessons from the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA)" by Christine Keller gave a detailed account of how the APLU and AACU partnered, at the request of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, "to develop a system that would satisfy the desire for more comparable information but at the same time represent the diversity of institutional missions." Keller emphasizes VSA's agile nature resulting from its voluntary participation and institution-led structure, its contribution to more cohesive understanding of the efficacy of institutions using learning outcome measures, and the lessons learned on "how institutions should think about organizing themselves to respond to current federal policy agenda for higher education." Several other programs and initiatives are also mentioned, indicating that the APLU and AACU are not the only presidential higher education associations actively pursuing improved methods of response to current demands for transparency.

Finally, we analyzed testimony, titled "Reforms to Increase Transparency in Higher Education," from Mark Schneider, Vice President and Institute Fellow at the American Institutes for Research, presented to the House Subcommittee on Higher Education. In the testimony, Schneider addressed the inefficiencies of IPEDS and the lack of accurate, accessible, useful data for consumers of education. He describes that parents and students researching schools have access to the system's privately-created rankings which are based on undisclosed methods and universities' self-touted successes. Schneider also noted that post-graduation data, such as earnings reports, is practically non-existent and far from comprehensive which makes the comparison tool lack utility. He further proposes "re-purposing existing administrative data collected by various federal agencies...[by] creating a different culture of data sharing and building an infrastructure to allow the merging of data often governed by different laws regarding use." Schneider's concerns and suggestions are consumer-focused. His comment that "Market competition works best when consumers can find and use clear, comparable information about the costs and quality of different offerings." indicates that he indeed views higher education as a commodity.

Our literature review indicates that transparency in higher education is an area of concern. For decades, the discourse between the federal government and institutions of higher education

resulted from a lack of common understanding of the value of higher education and how that value is best measured. Given the rising costs of higher education in America, students and their families are increasingly interested in understanding the risks and rewards accompanying an investment in a college education. Our research indicates that the national conversation about transparency in higher education has many key players, each with distinctly variegated understandings of the need for and implications of transparency, accountability, and ultimately, the value of higher education.

Data Collection

National literature, local journalism, and public opinion tell the story of a public demand for transparency in higher education related to financial and quantitative data such as enrollment and graduation rates. The UL System's Operational Transparency website was established in response to this demand. When considering transparency as a holistic concept, it is easy to view current UL System employees and students as valuable data sources. We decided to engage these stakeholders to determine their perceptions of transparency and any impact that transparency or a lack of transparency has on them. Our engagement involved a brief qualitative survey conducted using a convenience sample comprised of targeted individuals. These participating individuals came from all areas of a UL System institution including faculty, unclassified staff, classified staff, students, and administrators. Each participant was given the choice to complete a survey in writing or to meet with the requesting group member to respond verbally to the survey.

The questions included in the administered survey were as follows:

1. How do you define transparency?
2. As it relates to higher education, have you experienced times when limited transparency caused problems? If so, please elaborate.
3. As it relates to higher education, have you experienced times when transparency was strong and helped you or others succeed? If so, please elaborate.
4. What ideas do you have for improving transparency in higher education? This response can be applied to any or all levels (your unit, your university, the UL System, Board of Regents, LA State Department of Education).

To expand our data collection and engage more UL System stakeholders, we performed a similar survey in an open forum at the 2019 *ULS For Our Future* conference. During one of the conferences' peer sessions, we surveyed session attendants using the following questions:

1. How do you define transparency?
2. When did limited transparency cause problems for you?
3. When did strong transparency contribute to success?
4. What ideas do you have for increasing transparency in higher education in Louisiana?

The responses of session attendants were analyzed for word repetitions, recurrent elements, and themes.

Findings

The results of our survey and the responses in our forum session indicated that while internal and external transparency are viewed as different components with different dynamics they have a similar potential impact on the success of higher education. UL System employees' responses suggested a very ardent desire for transparency in all strata of their institutions (*i.e.*, their administration, their direct supervisors, and their direct reports). These individuals also indicated that the quality of transparency affects the quality of and satisfaction with their jobs. The most commonly used words related to transparency across the surveys and conference session responses were information/informed, open/openness, communication/communicate, access/accessibility, honest/honesty, decisions, and sharing. Together with our national and local literature review and the review of the Operational Transparency website, our data indicates that

- It is important to tell our higher education story with meaningful and timely data.
- Internal transparency is vital to the success, morale, and motivation of UL System employees.

Recommendations

Given the varied discourse surround even the very definition of transparency, it is unrealistic to consider that a single solution will mitigate the challenges associated with transparency in higher education. Therefore, it is important to identify several adaptive means of enhancing transparency between and among all cohorts of constituents within and associated with the UL System.

Recommendations that may have an immediate, positive impact on transparency in the UL System include:

- **The UL System and its institutions should communicate successes often and widely.** Each institution contributes immensely to the betterment of education, the growth of its varied students, and the enhancement of its community. Having all constituents, especially external ones, hear and understand these contributions can directly enhance the perception of institutional activities. By sharing this data, institutions can, in a very transparent manner, garner greater appreciation and support.
- **The UL System should continue/support the Operational Transparency website and highlight reports like the Economic Impact studies for each institution.** The Operational Transparency website should be marketed and distributed widely to all campus employees, students, and alumni. Marketing efforts should establish knowledge of the website's existence and create easy access for future data usage.
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should incorporate transparency into strategic plans.**
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should demonstrate the value it places on transparency.**

- **The UL System and each of its institutions should incorporate systematic professional development directly related to transparency.** This might begin at the System level with executive leadership from each campus. Thereafter, each administration might develop meaningful professional development experiences at their individual campuses. Examples may include effective means of incorporating transparency while considering legally-protected information and individual privacy.
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should appoint an ombudsperson to address employee/student concerns about transparency.**
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should eliminate “closed” committee meetings and/or provide minutes of such meetings related to budgets, position approvals, and other widely-impactful decisions.**
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should improve websites to ensure that pertinent “transparency-associated” information is readily accessible and user-friendly.**
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should provide more frequent and meaningful communication.** This communication may be in the form of “state of the university” addresses and “town hall” type gatherings.
- **The UL System and each of its institutions should be intentional with transparency.** This intentionality would empower all members of the higher education community and those it serves to feel genuinely valued.

Conclusion

Students, their parents, and the public have become increasingly concerned with the financial burden associated with attending college. Higher education in Louisiana has been affected by recent budget cuts that have forced the institutions to adopt a financial model that is heavily reliant on tuition-based revenue. This new model resulted in a spike in tuition and fees to unprecedented levels in our state leading to demands for greater transparency regarding the value of higher education and a more user-friendly explanation of how higher education funding is utilized. Higher education institutions, through their offices of institutional research, typically collect data pertaining to graduation and retention rates, job placement, entry level salaries, and other metrics that have great importance to many stakeholders, namely students, their parents, administrators, and policy makers. Using such data, students and their parents can assess whether the long-term benefits of earning a degree from a specific institution would outweigh the costs associated earning that degree. When institutions of higher education provide such data to its constituencies, they are practicing effective transparency in communication.

With our literature review and our internal institutional sampling, our findings indicate that transparency within the UL System and its institutions is of great concern to its employees and students. Survey respondents from six universities within the UL System described their desire for and expectations of open, honest, and timely communication related to institutional factors such as policies, budget, and decision making.

With the evolution of this project, it became apparent that our context of transparency was holistic in nature and that our recommendations should reflect the expansive nature of transparency and its impact on every group of constituents impacted by higher education. These constituents include government officials, the public/communities, prospective students and their families, enrolled students and their families, and employees. As economies, public sentiment, student experience, and other such factors change, so must our concept and application of transparency. With this in mind, regardless of the most contemporary “definition” used, transparency itself is vital to the investment into and the success of higher education.

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OVERALL CONCLUSION

“By focusing on the needs of our students and partnering more closely than ever with our business and community leaders, we can help our stakeholders understand higher education is not a cost, but an investment. The return on that investment is invaluable.”

- Dr. Jim Henderson
UL System President and CEO

Each member of the UL System Management & Leadership Institute has accepted an individual call to serve in higher education. It is through our journey together that we collectively stand with unified perspectives and concepts of leadership as they apply to higher education. It has been through our work together that we have gained a deeper understanding of what effective leadership in higher education entails. We have also forged friendships across the System institutions that will enhance our impact on our campuses, the UL System, and most importantly the students whom we serve.

Meeting the needs of our students and altering public perception of higher education cannot be achieved without strategic attention to diversity and inclusion, cost savings to students and parents, and transparency. As we emphasize the link between diversity, equity, inclusion, and excellence, we offer actionable solutions to building greater faculty and student diversity to realize the System’s overarching goal to provide a productive and safe environment that fosters a quality educational experience. As we recognize the impact of rising costs to students and their families, we offer viable and robust solutions that challenge the System and its nine institutions to collaborate in unprecedented ways to continue the System’s mission to enhance the quality of life in Louisiana through quality education that is cost effective to students and taxpayers. As we fully embrace the necessity for and expectation of transparency between and among all levels within the System and its external constituents, we offer practical and mindful solutions that are holistic in context and aimed at allaying public inquiry and fostering internal environments that positively impact morale and productivity. The three project foci easily stand alone as vital components of the future of higher education in Louisiana. However, when viewed as interrelated concepts, none can be fully implemented without the others. Diversity and inclusion require transparency to be brought to life. Transparency is inherent in any cost savings discussion or action. Transparency denotes a commitment to truth, accuracy, and inclusion. We submit this project as a testament to the persistence and faithfulness of the University of Louisiana System to improve the future of the State of Louisiana and its citizens.

Each Management & Leadership Institute participant was selected because of their potential for increased leadership responsibility and achievement within higher education. As our program concludes, we step into an expanded pool of future leaders of our institutions and System. We serve with the knowledge that our work continues. We submit this project as a testament to the persistence and faithfulness of the University of Louisiana System to the future of the State of Louisiana and its citizens.

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