

Benchmarking Working Group

Summary Report

Charge

The purpose of the Benchmarking Working Group is to identify “stretch” peer institutions and to benchmark their strategic choices, competitive patterns, and organizational positioning with the intent of informing and improving PFW’s strategic planning.

Members

- Tim Heffron – Chair
- Ken Christmon
- Farah Combs
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- Kent Johnson
- Cynthia Springer
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Introduction

While the original charter of this group was to ascertain and utilize information of aspirational peers, the group quickly redefined the peers as stretch instead of aspirational. The stretch peers in this report are not institutions that PFW should necessarily emulate. The group used the stretch peers to find specific intentional strategic initiatives that made a significant impact at a specific institution. Identifying aspirational peers will entail a more thorough effort.

Data Collection and Selection Methodology

In November 2018, the Benchmark Workgroup gathered data from Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) in order to create a list of ‘stretch’ institutions from which we can learn strategies they pursued that resulted in higher levels of organizational performance. Institutional data were derived from the annual administrated IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey, Institutional Characteristics Survey, Financial Aid Survey, and 150% Time Graduation Rate Survey. All institutional characteristics and student demographic information derived from the most recent survey data available. The universe of all public, degree-granting, 4-year and above institutions that receive Title IV funding formed the basis of the population. This criteria resulted in 761 institutions in the candidate pool. In a second round of refinement, the Benchmark Workgroup developed the following list of criteria to reduce the list of potential institutions:

1. Percent of Tenured/Tenure-Track faculty as a percent of total number of faculty between 30% and 50%.
2. First-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate retention rate between 62% and 75%.

3. Graduate enrollment as a percent of total student population between 4% and 10%.
4. 6-year bachelor degree graduate rate between 30% and 40%.

Based on this criteria, the workgroup reduced the initial list of 761 to 13 candidate institutions. Based on each Workgroup member’s analysis of IPEDS data as well as qualitative analysis of publically available information, each Workgroup member selected five institutions they would like to interview for more in-depth study. Each member submitted their votes to the Tim Heffron who tabulated the results. The following five institutions received the majority of the votes:

1. Saginaw Valley State University
2. University of Michigan-Dearborn
3. Tennessee Tech University
4. Arkansas Technical University
5. Purdue Northwest

Preliminary Findings, A Summary of Best Practices

The condensed timeframe for contacting and gathering information from the comparison institutions was limited. In an effort to get the most detailed information possible, the workgroups conducted phone interviews and requested additional information through email. A primary consideration in the selection of institutions was enrollment management performance. Specifically, the initial group of institutions was selected to gather information on demonstrated best practices to enhance retention and increase graduation rates. Table 1 provides a summary of retention and graduation rates for PFW and for the selected institutions.

Table 1:

Institution Name	First-Time, Full-time Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Retention Rate	Graduation rate - Bachelor degree within 4 years	Graduation rate - Bachelor degree within 6 years
Purdue Fort Wayne	58	11	30
Arkansas Tech University	72	24	40
Saginaw Valley State University	74	11	40
Purdue University Northwest	68	12	34
University of Michigan-Dearborn	81	17	54
Tennessee Technological University	79	25	49

The decision to focus on enrollment management was based on a related two part rationale:

1. The additive effect of reductions in enrollment resulting from organizational realignment in which one of our larger enrollment units (Health Sciences) was transferred to Indiana University in a period in which the national trend in comprehensive university enrollment is declining requires action to mitigate potential financial impacts.
2. The reputational impact of retention rates and graduation rates influence enrollment decisions of potential students. Increased retention is associated with most external quality metrics used to rate the quality of higher education institutions.

Asked about enrollment management efforts, some practices are common. These include:

- An assigned person or office with responsibility for retention
- A coordinated advising center staffed with professional advisors with the responsibility for advising in the first and second year.
- A process for professional advisors to partner with faculty advisor to ensure a smooth transition of students from general to specialized advising in the major
- Shared responsibility for recruitment between the admissions office and colleges (Tennessee Tech is unique in that recruiting is not centralized – the Enrollment Office works with colleges and programs on specific recruiting strategies based on unit goals)
- Financial aid packaging focused on maximizing the potential for aid to contribute to continued matriculation to degree through a mix of merit and needs based aid.

Additional information was gathered on a variety of issues at the discretion of the groups conducting the interviews. An analysis of their findings will be included in the final report to be produced once the data collection process is completed in January.

For the complete list of Key Indicators and the supporting IPEDS data selected by the Benchmarking Working Group to inform the benchmarking activity, see [here](#).