



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Nebraska Higher Ed Report Declares Positive College Enrollment and Grad Rates, Warns of Declining High School Graduation Trend

LINCOLN, Neb. (March 5, 2009)— A new report released today from Nebraska's source for comprehensive, higher education data says that Nebraska is staying its positive course in educating more college and university students. But unless high school graduation rates improve, the report concludes, the state's postsecondary institutions will continue to struggle to increase its first-time freshmen enrollments, which could result in smaller freshmen classes and could, ultimately, reduce the number of college grads the state produces.

In its *2009 Higher Education Progress Report*, the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) stated that, since 2003, total postsecondary enrollments have increased and statewide freshmen retention and college graduation rates have improved slightly. However, since the number of high school graduates is projected to decrease between now and 2015, increasing first-time freshmen enrollments will continue to be a challenge for the state's postsecondary institutions.

"Based on the thorough information presented in this year's *Progress Report*, Nebraska continues to do fairly well in educating its college students," said Marshall Hill, executive director of the CCPE.

"However, this report reminds us that we continue to have significant disparities among the educational attainment of our various groups of white, Asian, Hispanic and African American students."

For the *2009 Progress Report* executive summary and the complete report, please visit

www.ccpe.state.ne.us.

The report—approved by the CCPE at its Commission meeting today—focuses on three key priorities that serve as the basis for monitoring the progress of Nebraska's postsecondary education system. These priorities were defined by the Legislature's Higher Education Task Force in 2003 and include:

- 1) Increasing the number of students who enter postsecondary education in Nebraska;
- 2) Increasing the percentage of students who enroll and successfully complete a degree; and
- 3) Reducing, eliminating and then reversing the net out-migration of Nebraskans with high levels of educational attainment.

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(Add one)**

The following information provides more detailed findings related to the priorities.

Priority One – *Increase the number of students who enter postsecondary education.*

Among its findings under priority number one, the study found that:

- Nebraska's total postsecondary headcount enrollment increased 6.6 percent from fall 2003 to fall 2007.
- Since fall 2003, total headcount enrollment has increased across all sectors of Nebraska's postsecondary education system, but the greatest enrollment increase has been at the community colleges.
- Even though Hispanic students graduate from high school at a lower rate than white non-Hispanics and Asians/Pacific Islanders, they are projected to account for 18 percent of Nebraska's high school graduates by 2018-2019, compared to four percent in 2002-2003.
- Data from ACT, Inc. for the class of 2008 suggest that only 27 percent of Nebraska's ACT-tested high school graduates are sufficiently prepared to succeed in all four common areas (algebra, biology, English and social science) of entry-level college coursework.
- More than 65 percent of Nebraska's high school graduates from the class of 2005-2006 went on to college within the first 12 months of graduation. About 80 percent of them enrolled at in-state colleges.
- Minority students who graduate from high school tend to be equally represented among Nebraska's first-time college freshmen as they are represented among their high school graduating classes.

Priority Two – *Increase the percentage of students who enroll and complete a degree.*

According to the *Progress Report*, the overall freshmen retention rate and the college graduation rate have increased slightly since 2002-2003.

- Statewide, freshmen retention rates for full-time students increased from 71.4 percent to 72.6 percent from fall 2004 to fall 2007.
- Statewide, the postsecondary graduation rate for full-time students increased slightly from 48.4 percent in 2002-2003 to 49.1 percent in 2006-2007.

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Priority Three – *Reduce, eliminate and reverse net out-migration of Nebraskans with high levels of educational attainment.*

The report states that data from the 2000 U.S. Census revealed that Nebraska experienced a net out-migration of college-educated adults at all levels of education beyond high school between 1995 and 2000. During the same period, Nebraska attracted a significant net in-migration of adults with less than a high school education.

- Beginning in 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau started collecting data annually to estimate net-migration by education level. These estimates are based on very small samples of people moving into and out of the state. As a result, it is impossible to draw even tentative conclusions about the migration patterns.
- The CCPE will continue to monitor the annual estimates, however, in an effort to determine whether the net out-migration of Nebraskans with college degrees has been reduced or even reversed since 2000

The Nebraska Legislature requires the *Progress Report* be produced every year in order to provide the Legislature with statistics to assess Nebraska's postsecondary education progress.

About Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) is a state constitutional agency that serves as an independent voice within Nebraska's higher education system. It serves to promote sound policies that apply to the best interests of taxpayers, students and Nebraska's postsecondary institutions. The CCPE recommends policy to the legislative and executive branches to improve and support postsecondary education. The CCPE also reviews and recommends operating budgets, administers the Nebraska State Grant program, approves academic degree programs, and reviews for approval new tax-funded building projects proposed by Nebraska's public institutions. The CCPE is governed by 11 commissioners appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Nebraska State Legislature. For more information about the CCPE, please visit www.ccpe.state.ne.us.

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