
Project Information

The John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (Gardner Institute), one of the nation's leading non-profit student success organizations, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), the nation's leading membership organization that strengthens higher education governing boards, recently received support from Ascendium Education Philanthropy to jointly conduct a first-of-its-kind, 3.5 year Equity in Student Success project. The effort is focused on significantly and equitably improving student retention, graduation, and employment rates – especially students from low-income, rural, and historically marginalized race/ethnicity backgrounds.

The Governing Board Equity in Student Success Project leverages the power of higher education governing boards to oversee, envision, and drive equity-focused student success transformation with and through the senior administration. After a rigorous selection process, the Commonwealth of Kentucky was invited, and the Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education has accepted the offer to become a partner in this pilot initiative. This student success initiative consists of two integrated governing board-related and equity-focused components to be applied in Kentucky. These components include:

- 1) *The Governing Boards Equity in Student Success Academy*
- 2) *The Retention Performance Management Process – Governing Board Focus*

The Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy is designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of the governing board members of Kentucky's higher education institutions and senior administrators as they build capacity for oversight of institutional initiatives that lead to equitable student success and completion outcomes.

The Academy draws on the respective areas of expertise and experience of the Gardner Institute and AGB to offer an ongoing professional development program that will better prepare governing boards to:

- Understand the centrality of equity in student success in the future of their institutions, economy, and society;
- Understand the respective roles and responsibilities of board members, administration, and faculty in shared governance for student success;
- Develop a solid understanding of policies and practices that contribute to student success and the connections between equity, student success, financial vitality, and other areas of board responsibility (enrollment, athletics, financial aid, campus climate, etc.);

- Consider how equity in student success affects the reputation of the institution and its accreditation;
- Ask better critical questions about student success and equity and come to shared definitions so all stakeholders will be “speaking the same language”;
- Ensure that their boards are structured in ways that elevate issues of equity and student success and maintain sustained commitment, even in the face of CEO or CAO transitions;
- Consider key board level metrics and institutional best practices for equity in student success and how to interpret/use this information;
- Provide sample dashboards and encourage boards and leadership teams to create a set of metrics related to equity in student success that are regularly reviewed and discussed; and
- Generate and share new ideas for how boards and senior leaders can work together to address aspects of institutional culture that facilitate or inhibit equity in student success; for boards, gain a better understanding of the challenges presidents face in enhancing equity in student success and how they can be more effective thought partners in overcoming these challenges.

Academy Format and Content. The Academy consists of:

- Annual seminars organized with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education as part of the Trusteeship Symposium in fall 2021, 2022, and 2023. Several sessions will be led by Gardner Institute and AGB staff and subject matter experts. The first will be held in Louisville, KY on September 14-15, 2021. Future dates TBD.
- Annual seminars organized in collaboration with the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education in conjunction with the spring student success summit. This additional programming, in person or virtually, will be focused on governing boards.
- Webinars & Workshops—virtual or in-person learning opportunities will be offered throughout the year, live and/or on-demand, to deepen understanding of issues and serve as resources for new and continuing board members and administrators.
- Peer-to-Peer Conversation in an ongoing Governing Board Community of Practice. This will include a workshop as part of AGB’s National Conference on Trusteeship in April 2022 (virtually) and April 2023 (in person). Additional opportunities will be provided for the cohort of board members from the seven Kentucky institutions that are part of the RPM process.
- Access to specialized dashboards examining equity in student success analytics
- A dedicated website with selected readings concerning student success; justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion; and governance, available to project participants. This will include

resources from AGB and the Gardner Institute as well as participating institutions and other sources.

- Blog Posts—Academy participants and project staff will be invited to share best practice ideas with each other and the higher education community through blogs posted on AGB.org.
- A culminating virtual event for the broader higher education community featuring project participants and representatives of KY CPE, AGB, and the Gardner Institute to share best practices and lessons learned about equity in student success.

The Retention Performance Management Process – Governing Board Focus

The Retention Performance Management (RPM) – Governing Board Focus process is a further deeper, student success, performance improvement experience facilitated by the Gardner Institute for a subset of seven institutions involved in the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy. Retention Performance Management is a two-year, evidence-based, task-force-driven institutional strategic retention planning and implementation process that includes:

- A year-long evidence analysis and strategic planning process leading to an institutional Equity in Retention planning retreat and the subsequent development of a strategic retention plan; and
- A year-long implementation, assessment process during which the institutions will pilot their plan and assess (and revise) the plan based on the evidence.

This intensive consultation will be provided to seven institutions selected by the project leaders from a variety of institutions in Kentucky.

While each institution will identify key campus leaders to participate in the RPM process, governing board members will be involved meaningfully in this process and engaged in planning for how governing boards should structure their work to ensure equity in student success remains a strategic, evidence-based priority. These pilot institutions will also be invited to present to their colleagues about the process and outcomes of this experience in the twice-annual Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy convenings.

Eligibility for the Academy and RPM Process

The Governing Boards Equity in Student Success Academy is open to all postsecondary education governing boards and senior-leadership teams in Kentucky. Institutions may come from all sectors: two-year, four-year, public, and private. Seven Kentucky institutions will be selected to participate in the intensive RPM process.

Suggested participants:

- Board Chairs
- Board Members
- Board Professionals
- Presidents/CEOs
- Vice Presidents
- Cabinet Officers
- Representation of faculty leadership

How to participate:

Register for the [2021 Postsecondary Education Trusteeship Conference](#) and attend the first session on September 14th (either in-person or virtually). At the session, there will be an opportunity to formally sign up for the Academy.

If you cannot attend the September 14th session but still want to participate, contact jjohnson@agb.org.

Project Leadership:**John N. Gardner Institute**

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