Student Success is OUR success....but it is not an overnight phenomenon, particularly when the objective is access AND success and not access OR success....

To this end, the Retention and Completion Plan for The University of Akron on the consent agenda to be considered by the Board of Trustees today is a roadmap for access AND success.

This plan is an example of campus constituencies, represented via the University Council, coming together to debate, deliberate, and then decide on the pathways that optimize student success. In addition, the chair of the Faculty Senate was consulted and provided guidance and advice to assure academic program matters are appropriately left to the Faculty Senate to deliberate. The University Council unanimously endorsed the Completion Plan you are acting on today.

It is appropriate to recognize the hard work and diligence of Dr. Stacey Moore and Ms. Julie Burdick as well as the Student Success and Retention Steering Committee chaired by Dr. Paul Levy as they spent many hours following last year’s Retention Summit developing the state and the campus retention and completion plan. We will brief the Board on the campus retention and completion plan, particularly on execution strategies and tactics at the December meeting.

As I mentioned at the beginning, student success is not an overnight phenomenon but is the result of a persistent and robust focus on factors and issues known to influence retention and persistence. But just as important is the same persistent and robust focus on attracting new students to this great university. The autumn census information reveals what is quite possibly a turning-point for The University of Akron as the entering class has the highest average GPA (3.37), the largest entering Honors freshman class with total Honors College enrollment at an all-time high, significant gains in retention of all students who entered as freshmen in fall 2013 and the highest number of minority entering freshman honors students, and significant strides in retention among all minority freshmen who entered in 2013.

More specifically let me make the following observations:

- **Overall freshmen enrollment** held relatively steady at 4,131 students (compared to 4,177 last year). This 1.1% decline is a significant improvement over enrollment declines for the last two years (freshmen enrollment was down 8.6% in 2012 and down 9.4% in 2013).

- Among **first-time, full-time freshmen on main campus pursuing a bachelor’s degree** (the cohort traditionally used to compare universities), enrollment is up 8% from a year ago, and the average GPA -- the best predictor of college success -- is up slightly.
• The Honors College is seeing record enrollment with 578 new freshmen students (compared to 354 last year) and an increase in minorities enrolled, from 4.2% last year to 9.0% in this year’s entering Honors freshman class. The overall enrollment of all Honors students is a record 1,833. Entering Honors freshmen in 2014 average a 3.92 GPA and a 28.9 ACT.

• Minority students comprise one-quarter of the entering class, and nearly 7% of the entering class comes from outside the state of Ohio.

• An increased number of students (up at least 12%) are receiving scholarship funding as the university increased general scholarship funds based upon merit and provided more scholarships to more students with need.

• Retention rates—an important indicator of student success—are much improved. Overall retention of the traditional cohort of freshmen (from fall 2013 to fall 2014) is 74%, up 8 percentage points from 66% for the entering cohort of 2012. Looking at retention among subsets of students in the entering class:
  
  o The retention rates for minority students, African Americans, African American males, PELL eligible and first-generation students are up between 8 to 16 percentage points.

In addition, the Finish In Time initiative (FIT) has more students taking more credits this fall semester than ever before:

• Nearly 68% of entering freshmen are enrolled in 15 or more credits in their first semester (up 24.5 percentage points)

• 54% of undergraduate students are enrolled in 15 or more credits for fall semester (up 8.7 percentage points)

This initiative should result in more students completing their degrees sooner and quite possibly at a lower cost and with less incurred debt.

All of this information bodes well for degree completion for which The University of Akron has made great strides over the previous years. In fact our increased graduation rate over previous years is our contribution to the Talent Dividend for NE Ohio as coordinated by the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education-NOCHE. The CEOsforCities calculates that for every 1% increase in the population of NEO with a post-secondary associates degree or higher, there is an economic impact of roughly $500M. As the Federal Reserve Bank has reported many times, economic prosperity is linked to education and innovation, and this University of Akron is a major contributor to both.
Speaking of innovation or better yet, distinction, it is the faculty of The University of Akron and what they do that distinguishes us and enhances our reputation, and I have the great fortune to ask faculty from across campus to address the Board to give you a sense of the depth and breadth of faculty talent and expertise at UA. Today, we will hear from Dr. David Baker a professor of psychology and the Margaret Clark Morgan Executive Director of the Drs. Nicolas A. and Dorothy M. Cummins Center for the History of Psychology.