Campus Responses to Outcomes-Based Funding in Tennessee: Robust, Aligned, and Contested

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Executive Summary

In January 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA), which led to the implementation of an outcomes-based funding model to replace the decades-old enrollment-based funding methodology. Tennessee's formula represents a radically new approach to higher education funding rather than dedicating a smaller amount of state funds to award institutions based on performance. The goal of introducing an outcomes-based model was to affect institutional change that would lead to improvements in student retention and graduation, job placement, and research activity. In order to properly understand the institutional response to the outcomes-based formula, this study takes a deeper look into institutional practices and policy changes initiated by campus leaders in response to the CCTA and, specifically, the new outcomes-based formula.

The overarching finding that emerges from this ethnographic case study of four campuses—Middle Tennessee State University, Pellissippi State Community College, Southwest Tennessee Community College, and University of Tennessee, Knoxville—is that of robust campus-level completion activity. Our interviews with more than 100 key campus and system actors included 660 references to completion initiatives that ranged from campus-wide strategic plans to enhanced mentoring programs to constructing one-stop shops to implementing new advising software and strategies to eliminating a $25 graduation fee and many others. The case narratives for each campus reveal some differences in the scope of completion programs and their perceived effects on campus culture and the student experience. And, three cross-case thematic findings account for perceptions related to the motivations for campus completion activity—"it's just the right thing to do"—and to the possible consequences of the outcomes-based funding model—reduced inter-campus collaboration and insufficient premiums for under-represented students.

Given this study's salience for the public institutions operating under the funding formula, this study may help institutions learn from these four campus responses and help states learn from the benefits of outcomes-based funding models and some possible unintended consequences. The study concludes with recommendations for campuses and states.

Recommendations for campuses:
- Align strategic planning efforts with state formula
- Prioritize student learning
- Seek additional resources

Recommendations for states:
- Promote a public agenda for higher education
- Communicate clearly the formula's measures and objectives
- Account for campus context in formula
- Accentuate collaboration among campuses

Section 1:
Introduction and Overview

The national higher education landscape has recently converged around a completion policy agenda, incentivizing institutions to improve completion rates and the efficiency with which they educate and graduate students. Indeed, the Obama administration has set a national goal to lead the world in educational attainment by 2025. And, many national foundations and policy organizations—namely the Gates and Lumina Foundations, Complete College America, and regional higher education compacts— have promoted college completion and have provided substantial funding for states, higher education systems, and campuses.

State policymakers within this policy regime are increasingly looking to performance funding as a strategy to achieve their state's objectives for higher education. In January 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA). The CCTA charged the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to develop a funding formula based entirely on outcomes, effectively jettisoning the decades-old enrollment-based funding methodology. Tennessee's formula represents a radically new approach to higher education funding rather than dedicating a smaller amount of state funds to award institutions based on performance.

The goal of introducing an outcomes-based model was to effect institutional change, so it seems appropriate to examine what and how institutional practices did in fact change. The scope of campus responses can also be expected to relate to the perennial tension between campus autonomy and accountability to the state. In order to properly understand the institutional response to the outcomes-based formula, a deeper look into institutional practices and policy changes initiated by campus leaders in response to the CCTA and, specifically, the new formula, is needed. This ethnographic case study explores the campus response to the implementation of Tennessee's outcomes-based funding formula. It seeks to further examine how the new state finance policy has impacted how Tennessee institutions serve students and how students experience the institutions.

Outcomes-based Funding

Our study is informed by previous research on performance funding approaches in higher education, especially more recent studies that evaluate the effectiveness of these policies. Few, if any, studies examine campus responses to performance funding, instead emphasizing the adoption of these policies (e.g., Dougherty & Puleio, 2011; McLendon, Hearn & Deaton, 2006; McLendon & Hearn, 2013) or the ultimate effects of such policies on the outcomes of interest, especially completion rates (e.g., Tandberg & Hillman, 2013). In this section, we outline the evolution of these programs and summarize evidence of their effectiveness.

Origins and evolution

Performance funding, a method of tying state funding for public higher education institutions formulaically and directly to institutions' performance on pre-specified metrics (Burke, 2002), stands in contrast to the traditional way of allocating state funds, determined either by enrollment counts or based

upon adjustments to previous funding levels (McKeown, 1989). State policymakers have long been interested in identifying strategies for increasing productivity and accountability among public higher education institutions, sometimes adopting performance funding policy solutions in their pursuit to influence institutional behavior and to align campus and public priorities.

In 1979, Tennessee became the first state to adopt a form of performance funding for higher education. In the subsequent decade, performance funding policy approaches spread across the U.S. states with eventual abandonment of the policies in at least two-thirds of these states due to institutional objections, implementation costs, and challenges to the validity of the performance indicators (Dougherty et al., 2012). Recently, state higher education decision-makers have expressed a renewed interest in this funding approach and at least 30 states have adopted a form of performance funding (Davies, 2014; NCSL, 2015). Some higher education observers argue that recent versions of these policies are distinct from the original approaches, referring to this second wave of policies as "Outcomes-Based Funding" or "Performance Funding 2.0." [1] Dennis Jones (2013) reports that 16 states are implementing outcomes-based funding and presents an inventory of how these programs differ on 16 design principles. Another report by HCM Strategists (Davies, 2014) distinguishes the 31 states that have adopted some performance metrics by noting that only 12 states allocate more than five percent of the budget based on performance. Others differentiate old performance funding from new models by contending that new policies are characterized by tying base funding (as opposed to "add-on" funds) to performance (Dougherty et al., 2012); by emphasizing degree production (Albright, 2009; Jones, 2014; McLendon & Hearn, 2013); and by aligning funding with workforce needs and institutional missions (McLendon & Hearn, 2013). Notably, many new policies resemble earlier versions on the aforementioned characteristics. Furthermore, some older policies, such as South Carolina's, included many features of "Performance Funding 2.0" (Gorbunov, 2013).

Most recently, a report by HCM Strategists (Snyder, 2015) advances a typology of outcomes-based funding formulas, distinguishing these by characteristics relating to the strength of the formula and to other policy design features. In particular, in the report, Snyder identifies four "types" of outcomes-based funding policies, ranging from the least sophisticated (Type I) to the most "evolved" and robust (Type IV). The most sophisticated funding formulas are characterized by: (1) being coupled with statewide completion goals, (2) tying part of the "base" funding to outcomes (as opposed to an add-on funding program), (3) tying a substantial level of funding (25% or greater) to performance metrics, (4) allocating funds based on outcomes for all institutions, (5) differentiating by sectors, (6) including degree or credential completion in the performance metrics, and (7) prioritizing outcomes for members of underrepresented populations. Notably, contrary to popular perception, most new outcomes-based funding programs are grouped as "Type I" in this classification scheme.

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[1] The subject of this examination is Tennessee's Outcomes-Based Funding formula, which was adopted in 2010 (see the section on the Complete College Tennessee Act). The state retains a version of the original performance funding formula in addition to the new outcomes-based funding model. The performance funding program incentivizes quality assurance by distributing supplemental funds to colleges and universities (up to 5.45 percent of institution's funds).

Tennessee's formula fits all seven of the aforementioned characteristics, making Tennessee one of two states (the other being Ohio) with a funding formula categorized as Type IV. Further, although North Dakota ties a larger percentage of funding to outcomes (100% compared to Tennessee's 85%), Tennessee awards the greatest percentage of funding to progression and degree completion metrics as compared to all other states. North Dakota ties all funding to course completions.

Evidence of effectiveness

Numerous state officials and policy organizations, including the National Association of State Budget Officers and the National Governors Associations, support this resurgence of performance funding in the states. Many of these proponents of performance funding argue that traditional funding models, which allocate state funds to colleges and universities based on inputs, like enrollment, rather than outputs do not incentivize institutions to improve persistence and completion rates. Though perhaps a compelling theoretical argument, extant research on the outcomes of performance funding finds the relationship between performance funding and improved outcomes tenuous, at best (e.g., Dougherty & Hong, 2006; Dougherty & Reddy, 2013; Fryar, 2011; Hall, 2000; Jenkins et al., 2009; Sanford & Hunter, 2011; Shin, 2010; Shin & Milton, 2001; Volkwein & Tandberg, 2008). Given the sparse and recent adoption of what Snyder (2015) classifies as Type IV outcomes-based formulas, these studies of performance funding overwhelming examine Type I programs. For example, a recent quasi-experimental study found no significant effect, on average, of performance funding policies on Bachelor's degree completion (Tandberg & Hillman, 2014). The authors did find, in some states, evidence of small improvements in degrees awarded after seven years of program implementation. A similar study of performance funding policies' effectiveness in enhancing Associate's degree completions, documents a small negative association between performance funding programs and completions (Tandberg, Hillman & Barakat, forthcoming).

In addition to examinations of performance funding policies' impact on ultimate intended outcomes, the performance funding literature includes some attention to policy impact on campuses. Specifically, Dougherty and Reddy (2012), in a thorough review of the performance funding literature, note the immediate and intermediate effects of performance funding policies, many of which were experienced at the institutional level. For instance, the authors find some evidence of increased awareness of state goals and of institutional performance within campuses. Intermediate effects of performance funding policies include increased capacity for institutional learning, increased use of data, and changes in programs and policies to improve student outcomes. For example, at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, the College of Education restructured departments into smaller, faculty-designated units in response to the adoption of the performance funding policy (Hall, 2000).

The evidence of institutional responses, which focuses largely on earlier performance funding approaches, also points to negative unintended consequences of these polices. Among some Florida institutions, for instance, researchers found that administrators were increasing selectivity and removing

obstacles to graduation, including hard-to-pass course requirements. Dougherty & Reddy (2012) note that some institutions find mechanisms for "gaming the system," such as by lowering standards or creating new credentials that would "count" for additional funding. The final related study is a recent report by the Southern Education Foundation (Jones, 2014) on performance funding at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) that reviews the states' performance funding metrics and discusses their effects on MSIs. Jones (2014) concludes the report with the following five recommendations for developing performance funding policies for MSIs: (1) include MSI leaders in policy development, (2) reconsider the utility of commonly used metrics, (3) metrics should be responsive to input factors, (4) address campus-level data capacity before implementation, and (5) use performance funding policies to address racial and ethnic equity. These considerations may be particularly relevant to one of the MSIs in our study: Southwest Tennessee Community College.

Yet, despite these important contributions, the performance funding literature overwhelmingly neglects analyses of campus responses to performance funding formulas. For example, we currently lack an understanding of culture and morale on campuses and of the alignment between state and campus goals   Moreover, previous studies have focused on older programs and to date have not examined campus responses to a performance funding policy that ties nearly all funding to performance. Our study fills this significant void in the literature by exploring the responses of four diverse campuses to Tennessee's outcomes-based funding formula.

Complete College Tennessee Act

In January 2010, the Tennessee General Assembly passed and Governor Phil Bredesen signed the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA). The result is that now state appropriations to campuses are determ[2]ined by outcomes-based measures rather than a primarily enrollment-driven formula. As mentioned earlier, this new funding model builds on the long-standing connection between institutional performance and state funding and retains the earlier Performance Funding program. The CCTA outlines an agenda for public higher education that emphasizes building the state's economic development and meeting the projected national average in educational attainment by 2025. The legislation did not, however, identify the specific measures and metrics that would constitute the formula. Instead, the CCTA charged the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to develop the funding mechanism with representation from public systems and campuses. The 24-member Formula Review Committee, which included members from the University of Tennessee and the Tennessee Board of Regents campuses and systems, including representatives from community colleges and universities and from two of the four pubic MSIs, leaders in Tennessee government, and three national higher education leaders, deliberated throughout 2010 and ultimately determined the funding model that would go into effect in 2011-12. Although state appropriations followed the new outcomes-based formula immediately, in the first three

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[2] MSI members included Nashville State Community College and University of Memphis. Tennessee State University and Southwest Tennessee Community College are the other two Tennessee MSIs according to Jones (2014).

years additional state funds supplemented outcomes-based funding to adjust overall institution funding to be consistent with previous funding levels.

The outcomes measures for the new formula, which are listed with definitions in Appendix A, account for three important factors. First, they are all aligned with the Statewide Master Plan for Higher Education. Second, they include the same measures for all institutions in the same sector. That is, all universities follow the same eight outcome measures and all community colleges follow the same 11 outcome measures. Also, all universities and community colleges receive 40% premiums for Pell-eligible and adult students as they progress in the retention and completion measures. Third, the universities vary in the weighting of the measures to reflect their institutional mission. For example, based on its Carnegie classification as a high research university, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville has 15% weight on Research and Service and 10% weight on Doctoral and Law degree production. Whereas the University of Tennessee, Martin has weights of 10% and 0%, respectively, based on their master's medium Carnegie classification. This final factor allows for the outcomes-based formula to align with institutional mission and is aligned with the CCTA requirement that THEC approve institutional mission statements. [3]

Unlike the relatively longer period of time for states to follow Tennessee's initial Performance Funding program in 1979 when the first two states did not adopt policies until five and ten years later (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006), since the adoption of the CCTA outcomes-based formula, many states and other nations have pursued similar funding mechanisms. Given this broader state and national interest, it seems appropriate to examine the initial campus response to this new funding model.

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[3] More information on the outcomes-based formula measures and resources can be found at the following links: http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/Fiscal/funding_formula/1-Outcomes%20Based%20Formula%20Narrative%20-%20for%20website.pdf, http://www.state.tn.us/thec/complete_college_tn/ccta_files/outcomes_based_ff/Outcomes_Based_Formula_Explanation.pdf, and http://www.state.tn.us/thec/Divisions/Fiscal/outcomes_resources.shtml

Section 2:
Research Design

This study uses a comparative case study design that incorporates ethnographic techniques to examine how four public campuses responded to the outcomes-based funding model. This qualitative approach is appropriate based on the study's intent to deepen our understanding of how and what campuses have done in response to a new state-level funding model. Indeed, rather than analyzing the effectiveness of state or campus policy, our study's primary focus is to describe the campus-level college completion initiatives and how various campus actors perceive their connection to the outcome-based funding model. In addition to standard qualitative data sources, such as interviews and documents, we employ ethnographic techniques (e.g., observations, focus groups, prolonged engagement) to enhance our understanding of each campus' unique context and culture.

Case Selection

We employed Yin's (2003) "theoretical replication logic" and the "most-different systems design" (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994) to select four institutions—University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Middle Tennessee State University, Pellissippi State Community College, and Southwest Tennessee Community College— that vary along four dimensions. First, there is variation by institution type with two four-year universities and two two-year community colleges. There is also variation within institution type with a flagship and comprehensive university and community colleges of varying enrollments and student profiles. Second, there is variation in the state higher education system membership with three Tennessee Board of Regents institutions and one University of Tennessee system institution. Third, there is geographic variation with all three grand divisions of Tennessee represented. And, fourth, the institutions vary in their initial performance in the outcomes formula with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Pellissippi State faring better with the new outcomes-based formula and with MTSU and Southwest not faring as well. Through this approach, our intent was to strike a balance of having enough institutional variation to examine how campus context may affect an institution's response and of having few enough institutions to examine each of these cases in detail.

Data Collection

Based on the comparative case study and ethnographic research design, we collected data from interviews with and observations of policy actors in each sample institution and from relevant documents and archival materials. Descriptive information about each institution provides a broader view of the institutional contexts. We conducted a review of various documents such as institution websites, institutional memos and reports, speeches from university administrators, newspaper accounts, and information from "planning templates" that institutional representatives completed at the Tennessee College Completion Academies (made available to us by THEC) to build an understanding of the institutional response to the CCTA and the new outcomes-based formula. Archival documents served as part of the initial data collection plan to gain more information about the scope of college completion initiatives on each campus and as one way to identify informants and guide the development of the interview protocol, as well as provide additional sources of evidence to support informants' recollections.

To collect interview and observational data, we conducted two site visits at each campus for three to four days in summer 2013, then again during the fall of 2013. For the first visits, we focused primarily on interviews with key actors. We selected targeted informants based on identification from the document analysis as actors most integral in setting new institutional practices and initiating policy changes in response to the CCTA and, specifically, the new funding formula. We also employed the snowball sampling technique whereby we asked the initial interviewees to recommend others to interview and campus completion-related events or meetings that we might observe. We pursued these additional interviews and observations for our second visits to each campus.

As Table 1 reports, the 104 participants selected for this study are from varying backgrounds, including academic affairs, academic advising, finance and administration, student services, and faculty members. We also interviewed senior leaders in both the Tennessee Board of Regents and University of Tennessee systems. In addition to these campus and system leaders, we also interviewed student leaders to ascertain effects on the student experience. As reported below, we conducted focus groups with three to eight students at all campuses. These sessions, which followed a semi-structured format, allowed us to identify topics for discussion and the flexibility to pursue students' perceptions. Based on this group dynamic, we include focus groups as events and count the participants in the students row for interviews. For interviews with other participants, we followed a similar semi-structured protocol of nine open-ended questions, to examine consistent a priori themes. We also allowed for exploration of new topics of importance to the participants to emerge (Mertens, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each participant agreed to an audio recording of the interview and we collected extensive field notes during the in-person interviews.

Following the ethnographic case study approach, we observed 19 events mostly during the second campus visits, which we scheduled to align with key events. There is some variation across campuses in the number and type of events we observed due to the timing of our visits and the level of access we were granted. For example, at UT, Knoxville and Pellissippi we attended multiple planning meetings related to campus completion initiatives and special events that were central to the campus response to the outcomes-based formula. During these and other events, we followed an observer-participant role (Merriam, 2007) in which we were introduced and briefly described our project, then observed the meeting or event as unobtrusively as possible. Typically, we observed from the back of the room or from around the conference table at smaller events. We collected extensive field notes related to the content, setting, and group dynamics of these events.

TABLE I. Interview and Event Data by Institution

	UTK	MTSU	Pellissippi	Southwest	TBR	UT System	TOTAL
Interviews							
President/Chancellor	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Academic Affairs	2	3	2	1	1	1	10
Academic Advising	3	1	2	1			7
Student Services	6	3	5	4			18
Finance/Administration	1	2		1	1	1	6
Students	7	7	6	5			25
Faculty	3	3	2	2			10
Others	4	7	6	4		1	22
TOTAL	27	27	24	19	3	4	104
Events							
Planning meeting(s)	3	1	1				5
Special event(s)	1		1	2			4
Faculty Senate	1	1	1				3
Student focus group	1	1	1	1			4
Orientation	1			1			2
Cohort course			1				1
TOTAL	7	3	5	4			19

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for the qualitative interviews and observations and for archival documents followed both deductive and inductive approaches. Based on our descriptive interest in understanding the scope of campuses' responses to the new state funding model, we developed a series of emerging codes related to campus initiatives that exceeded 40 types of initiatives. Then, based on earlier research on outcomes-based funding and campus decision making, we identified a framework that included three a priori codes: (1) campus factors, such as organizational structure, culture, and goals; (2) state factors, such as higher education governance and the influence of political, economic, and demographic characteristics; and, (3) the alignment between campus and state factors, especially as related to the new funding formula. Using this framework and the series of campus initiatives, we utilized the Dedoose qualitative software to code the interview transcripts, field notes, and archival documents. In addition to the deductive approaches outlined above, we also induced emergent themes using the pattern-matching technique (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To enhance the trustworthiness of our analysis, our three-member research team employed inter-coder reliability techniques of multiple researchers coding transcripts from each campus. Finally, we conducted member checking to garner participants' reactions to interview transcripts and initial analysis.

Section 3:
Case Narratives

This section includes the narrative analysis of each ethnographic case study. We begin each case with an overview of the campus context to highlight how institutional mission and various characteristics may inform the response to state completion efforts. The narratives then summarize the campus completion initiatives and discuss a few specific activities in greater detail. Finally, each narrative includes a discussion of the campus culture or morale in wake of the CCTA and outcomes-based funding model, including students' perceptions of the campus completion efforts.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Factors influencing UT, Knoxville's response

As the flagship and the largest public institution in the State of Tennessee, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT, Knoxville) is uniquely positioned as a target of the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA). Various factors, including its history of leadership, its geographic location, and its political power, play a significant role in this institution's response to the CCTA. First, members of the UT, Knoxville community have experienced spells of volatility in leadership within the institution and have seen fluctuations in relationships with UT System officials. Since 2000, six different presidents have led the UT System and four different chancellors have led the university. This instability appears to have subsided with the selection of UT, Knoxville Chancellor, Jimmy Cheek, in 2009 followed by the appointment of UT System President, Joe DiPietro, in 2011. Multiple respondents commented on the healthy relationship between Chancellor Cheek and President DiPietro, who had worked together previously at the University of Florida. While Chancellor Cheek is widely viewed as a highly competent leader, President DiPietro's non-intrusive yet supportive style is appreciated by the Knoxville campus community. These perceptions of campus and system leaders and their relationships appear to be a refreshing departure from previous years.

In addition to leadership dynamics, UT, Knoxville's geographic location plays a role in the campus's response to the CCTA. The university is located in East Tennessee in the third largest city in the state. Knoxville is in close proximity to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), which is a large national energy and science laboratory managed by UT-Battelle for the United States Department of Energy. As part of the CCTA, UT, Knoxville and ORNL formed a formal partnership: the collaborative Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Education (CIRE). Furthermore, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) approved a new Ph.D. program in Energy Science and Engineering as a result of this collaboration.

Another one of UT, Knoxville's neighbors, Pellissippi State Community College also took part in a formal partnership with the university at around the same time as the passage of the CCTA. Pellissippi is a large community college (serving over 10,000 students in 2013) and is the largest "sender" school for transfers to UT, Knoxville (THEC, 2014). Indeed, in 2013, 67 percent of students transferring to UT, Knoxville from any of the 21 public institutions in the state (other than UT, Knoxville) came from Pellissippi (THEC, 2014).

The two campuses formalized this relationship by creating the UT-Pellissippi Bridge Program, which allows some students who are waitlisted for admission to UT, Knoxville to be dually enrolled at Pellissippi and the flagship campus. Contingent upon the completion of a number of hours and maintenance of a certain GPA, the program affords a smooth transfer to UT, Knoxville.

Finally, UT, Knoxville is located in a city that is home to strong political influences, particularly with regard to educational policy. Most notably, the current Governor of Tennessee, Bill Haslam, also served as Mayor of Knoxville. Furthermore, Knoxville is in the legislative district represented by the current chair of the House Education Committee, Chairman Harry Brooks. In addition, Randy Boyd, a well-known Tennessee businessman and founder of Radio Systems Corporation with strong ties to educational initiatives in the state, is from this city. Illustrative of his influence over higher education policy, Mr. Boyd was Governor Haslam's special adviser for higher education and was appointed by the governor to serve as a member on the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. In addition to his formal influence over education policy in the state, he founded the Knox Achieves scholarship program in the mayor's office when Governor Haslam served in that role. This program served as a model for the new statewide scholarship program, Tennessee Promise, which provides two years of free technical or community college to Tennessee high school graduates. Boyd also led the "Drive to 55" initiative in the state, which is a statewide goal to raise the percentage of Tennesseans with postsecondary credentials to 55 percent. Given these connections, UT, Knoxville has strong political power in the state, in part because of its flagship status and in part because of its geographic location and shared roots with influential leaders in educational policy in Tennessee.

Indicative of the uniqueness of UT, Knoxville's standing in the state higher education context, in 2010, around the time when the CCTA was passed, Governor Bredesen challenged UT, Knoxville to become a Top 25 research university. The university fully embraced the challenge. This pronouncement legitimized UT, Knoxville's aspirations and set the stage for the significant amount of college completion and retention-related activity within the institution, which is largely attributed by members of the UT community to the university's goal to become a Top 25 university. [1]

General reaction to the CCTA

Most respondents perceived the CCTA and the Top 25 goal (henceforth, Top 25), to be intertwined. In fact, some participants viewed them as one and the same. Others thought Top 25 was embedded within the language of the Act, while some distinguished between the timing of the two initiatives. Although students were not familiar with the CCTA, they were very well-aware of the Top 25 initiative, which was merged with the university's Vol Vision strategic plan. Most students mentioned mass e-mail communications they receive from Chancellor Cheek regarding Top 25. The chancellor even met with a group of 12 to 15 student leaders to discuss Top 25 and, in this session, urged them to spread the

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[1] UT, Knoxville is ranked 50th according to the 2015 U.S. News and World Report rankings of Top Public National Universities. http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/top-public?int=a8f209

word about the university's goal to their friends. Regardless of knowledge of the specific components of the Act, in general, participants agreed that state goals and their manifestation via the CCTA and the governor's challenge for UT, Knoxville aligned perfectly with what the institution was trying to accomplish. A quote from a senior Academic Affairs administrator, an active and visible force in strategic initiatives on campus, illustrates this general view regarding campus and state goal alignment:

> The Completion Act and the performance funding in terms of, you know, retention and completion just fit and dove-tailed right into the Vol Vision, and the Chancellor's strategic plan...I guess is what I'm trying to say, is that this is where we were going. We were focusing on retention and graduation. That was priority one of the Vol Vision, and then the Tennessee Act, Completion Act came through, and you know, the formula for the performance funding based on retention and graduation, and it just folded right in. So, the initiatives were really just marching along together.

Similarly, with respect to the new funding formula and UT, Knoxville's outcomes under the new model, we sensed a generally positive response, which aligns with the reality of UT, Knoxville's relatively favorable funding trends in the past few years since the formula's implementation. Some respondents acknowledged that this model works well for the flagship institution, whose goals are consistent with those of the formula but that may not be the case for other campuses. One senior academic administrator, for instance, expressed satisfaction with the model:

> And so from our point of view, that – we've always had a pretty high level of comfort with the overall philosophy of this because it aligned so well with what our institutional strategic plan is. So it not only represented a tremendous improvement over what happened before, but also was perfectly consistent with everything we're trying to do. So I think from our point of view, you know, broad brush, it certainly has represented a tremendous improvement.

Indeed the university has fared well under the new model, which contributes to a generally positive morale about the new funding formula by those who are aware of it. A department head described the surprisingly stable financial position in which his department and the university are, particularly given the broader economic context:

> So, you asked for example about state funding - yeah, I see things in other places that my colleagues are facing. Many of them have received much more severe budget cuts than we've had to deal with here. The way we've been able to deal with this. For one thing the state was better able financially to deal with the recession than others, but also we've managed to build to get tuition increases pretty regularly – which have kept us insulated – but I'm really well aware of how badly lots of other departments have been, lots of other universities have been, and we've been really, we've come through this pretty well. Remarkably well. I wouldn't have predicted that we would have come through such a major recession in such good shape.

One small caveat to the generally positive reaction to the CCTA and the new formula is the recognition by a few UT, Knoxville officials that, although the campus has benefited from the new model, a failure by the state to fully fund the formula could be detrimental to the morale on campus. After expressing strong support for the formula and indicating the ways in which campus and state goals are aligned, one senior administrator articulated this nuance to the campus's reaction:

> I think you get into the political dimension then and if that is true, we could all be very demoralized, you know, if the Governor's not able to fund the formula and you're doing what you're supposed to be doing that could be demoralizing to more than just the institutions that aren't having so much success.

"Top 25- That is UT"

The campus response to the CCTA and the completion-related activities on the UT, Knoxville campus is best understood through the lens of the institution's goal to become a Top 25 research university. The Top 25 goal is coupled with Vol Vision, the institution's official strategic plan, which was in place before Governor Bredesen's challenge for UT, Knoxville to become a Top 25 institution. In fact, the two initiatives appear to have merged as the strategic plan is presented on UT, Knoxville's Top 25 website as: "Vol Vision: The Pursuit of Top 25". The plan consists of five major parts: (1) undergraduate education; (2) graduate education; (3) research and engagement; (4) faculty; and, (5) infrastructure and resources. The plan also includes 12 specific measurable metrics, including raising the retention rate from the first to the second year from 84% to 90% by 2015 and increasing the six-year graduation rate by 1.5% each year.

While a number of respondents attributed the myriad completion-related efforts on campus to the CCTA, overwhelmingly, students, staff members, administrators, and faculty members noted that the goal to become a Top 25 research university directly drives most completion activity on campus. In fact, knowledge of the CCTA and of the formula is rather limited on campus; beyond senior administrators, few individuals knew the specifics of the policy, and others, including students, had virtually no knowledge of the CCTA. While the Act is hardly on anyone's "radar," Top 25 appears to play a central role in the institution's identity and permeates everything that UT, Knoxville does, as described by a financial aid administrator:

> But the Top 25 is just – I mean, that's been engrained in us from day one. It's like everything we do from a budgetary standpoint, from an office policy standpoint, it really encompasses who we are and what we're doing. So if it's not Top 25 basically, we don't do it, or we're not going to get funding to do it, you know, basically, which means we don't do it.

Also as a testament to the goal's pervasiveness, campus officials have implemented a robust strategic planning structure to lead the Top 25 initiatives. A Top 25 Task Force oversees all Top 25 initiatives and is headed by the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Life. In addition to the Top 25 Task Force, a subcommittee is in place for each of the five elements of the Top 25 plan. As part of our study, we had

the opportunity to observe a number of planning committee meetings, including the Top 25 Task Force meeting, which was attended by a handful of vice provosts and vice chancellors and appears to dominate strategic planning on campus. During this meeting, the leader of each element of the Top 25 plan gave updates on the initiatives within their section. For instance, the Chief Financial Officer reported on the deployment of the Strategic Instruction Fund. These funds provide resources to hire more instructors to address the problem of bottleneck courses, or insufficient course offerings, which could deter students from graduating "on time." They also discussed the expansion of online courses and of recruitment practices and diversity enhancement in graduate education.

Perhaps due to the nature of our study, which focuses on completions, we learned mostly about completion-related aspects of the Top 25 goal, particularly for undergraduates. In fact, graduate education and research-related initiatives appeared limited with the most significant activity in this area surrounding the Bredesen Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Education, the partnership between UT, Knoxville and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory institutionalized through the CCTA. According to senior finance administrators, increases in the research metric in the outcomes-based formula stand to yield the largest gains in funding for the university, assuming values for all other metrics and all other institutions remain unchanged. This may signal increases in attention to graduate education and research in the future.

College completion-related activity

Within undergraduate education, we found abundant evidence of college completion-related activity, more than in any other campus in our study. Campus officials noted that while UT, Knoxville's "inputs" are of Top 25 caliber, the campus's retention rates need to improve significantly to reach Top 25 levels. As such, the "buzz words" on campus are both completion and retention and these two related efforts are the driving force behind many programs. Interestingly, only the student affairs administrator and students themselves emphasized the non-academic factors that influence student retention. For instance, one student mentioned that it may be difficult for some students to feel a sense of belonging, which could encourage students to head back home and fail to complete their degrees at UT, Knoxville.

College completion and retention-related initiatives range from symbolic or cultural changes to encourage timely graduation (e.g., emphasizing "Class of 2017" in orientation or giving students a tassel with that insignia during Welcome Week) to the implementation of new student tracking software. A list of activities related to retention and completion at UT, Knoxville is presented in Appendix B. Students appeared to appreciate many of the completion-related initiatives on campus, especially the more visible ones like the One-Stop, a space intended to centralize student services, including financial aid, account services, registration, and records, and to save students the hassle of contacting different offices.

Of particular note in UT, Knoxville's repertoire of completion- and retention-related efforts are the initiatives that emphasize timely completion, defined as graduation within four years, which seems to

be a prevalent message at UT, Knoxville. In his meeting with student leaders, Chancellor Cheek told the dozen or so students sitting around a boardroom: "How can you support Top 25? First of all, graduate in four years." A UT System administrator described the clarity of the "timely completion message":

> [the] Knoxville campus just changed the way they price their tuition to a 15 in 4, so I mean, there's just – it's all – you know, if the student misses it, they're not really sharp because there's just – there's not a mixed message in any of this stuff.

Beyond the messaging, a number of programs are in place to promote timely completion, including pre-enrollment activities and through the university's new pricing policy. In the following sections, we describe in more detail the pre-enrollment activities that are intended to encourage timely completion and the new tuition policy, Take 15, Graduate in 4.

Pre-enrollment initiatives

A number of pre-enrollment activities, especially in orientation, have been implemented or significantly revamped to encourage timely completion and completion and retention more broadly. First, an advisor mentioned that while advising used to be a minor part of orientation, it now constitutes the greater part of it. As part of our study, we had the opportunity to observe an orientation session. On Day 2 of orientation, students attended a session titled "Aim for Graduation: Your Future, Your Success." Illustrative of the focus on timely completion, an energetic and engaging academic affairs administrator stood on the stage in a lecture hall full of about 200 orientation participants in one of the sessions and talked about three types of first-year students, including those that graduate. He then proceeded to impel attendees to respond "Four years!" to the prompt "Graduate in_____?" This exercise was repeated three times.

A few respondents noted that subtle messages such as these were intentional and aimed at enhancing timely completions. For instance, one advisor told us:

> We had a larger focus in the past couple of years about how we don't say 5 years for graduation, we say 4 years for graduation. There is that kind of subtle language that just kind of works its way all the way through that I think also goes along with graduation rates and getting the students engaged during welcome week and hopefully getting them more involved for kind of that retention model.

In addition to orientation, pre-enrollment initiatives that are intended to increase completion and retention rates include Welcome Week and the Ignite program. Consistent with the subtle messaging at orientation, during Welcome Week, leaders distribute a tassel to all new students. The tassel contains the students' graduation year (four years after enrollment), which was mentioned as another effort to encourage graduation within four years:

> The welcome leaders are assigned to those students for the entire first year students for the entire week to help them navigate their first week of classes from attending an event called Torch night which is sort of the kick-off event,

the commence program, if you will, for first year students. They receive a tassel that has class of 2017 so they are forced to graduate in 4 years.

In addition, the Ignite program, a retreat before the start of the school year for incoming freshmen, was also mentioned a number of times due to evidence of a correlation between student participation in this program and student retention. The program received a significant increase in funding from the administration in recent years due to its perceived success.

Take 15, Graduate in 4

As another mechanism to encourage timely completion, UT, Knoxville recently changed its tuition policy. Under the new model, all students will pay for 15 credit hours each semester, regardless of the number of hours for which they enroll. This change is intended to encourage students to enroll for 15 credit hours each semester so as not to pay for classes they did not take. One participant described its dual rewarding and punishing nature:

> And I still haven't decided that 15 to 4 is a carrot or a stick. It's really some of both. The carrot is the prospect of limited tuition hikes, to a limit at 3% during your four years. The 15, I think is half carrot half stick. I think that is you know, from the university good kind of publicly say, look folks, 12 hours is a full load, but you will not graduate in four years if you are only taking 12 hours.

The program is in early stages and thus the effects of it have not yet been gauged. In general though, participants supported the initiative. As noted above, some mentioned that without 15 credit hours per semester, graduation in four years is unlikely. Others expressed their optimism about this program's potential to increase graduation rates. On the other hand, some voiced concerns about 15 in 4 in particular and about the strict timely graduation focus more broadly. For example, some staff members and one senior administrator on campus noted that this focus, if too strict, might discourage extracurricular activities, including internships, co-ops, or study abroad that might keep students from graduating in four years. One other potential problem with the model, according to one advisor, is that students with a large number of college credits earned in high school might be placed in courses "too soon." In a focus group, some students expressed their perception of the formula's indifference toward academic achievement, which they attributed to the policy's emphasis on timely completion:

> As a note towards the law that was passed, it does feel like I'm not appreciated by the university because of the four-year plan. It feels like I'm a statistic...They want me out in four years, they don't want me to get an education. They want me to pass and get out. To my knowledge, it doesn't matter my GPA as long as it's high enough to graduate. They don't get a point for that, do they? If I went like straight...Then that really in that respect, if I manage to get straight Ds my senior year and didn't really benefit whatsoever and they still hand me my degree, I'm entering into a work space that I might not be prepared for but they still get their point.

Along a similar vein, a couple of participants cautioned about the unintended consequences of a push for increased summer school enrollment, codified through changes in the HOPE scholarship, which enable its usage in the summer. Some students, for instance, might have to work in the summer to make additional money for the school year or to help their families. For these students, summer school might not be their best choice.

Planning

To advance the Top 25 goal and design and implement completion and retention-related initiatives, a robust strategic planning structure is in place at UT, Knoxville. In addition to the Top 25 Task Force, which oversees some of the most significant programs to support the five elements of the institution's strategic plan, an enrollment management group meets to "discuss, develop, monitor, and evaluate all aspects relating to the recruitment, retention, graduation, and support of UT, Knoxville students. This committee is advisory to the provost and is charged with achieving our institution's desired enrollment (in quantity and quality) and improving student life and learning to ensure student success" (Office of the Provost, 2014). A few prominent groups report to the undergraduate enrollment committee, including the transfer committee, the Undergraduate Tactics Team (formerly known as SWAT) and the academic advising leadership group. We briefly describe these groups and some of their most significant efforts in the next sections.

Transfer Committee

In addition to the transfer-related programs formally created through the Tennessee Transfer Pathways, part of the CCTA, and through the UT-Pellissippi Bridge Program, institutional leaders at UT, Knoxville appear to be expanding their efforts relating to transfer students. A few participants mentioned a perception among non-UT, Knoxville affiliates that the university is not supportive of transfer students. One respondent noted that the Pellissippi Bridge Program helps alleviate some of those perceptions but the institution also has other initiatives in place, including this standing committee exclusively in charge of transfer-related programs. Furthermore, campus leaders are in the process of hiring a transfer guide. A couple of respondents also noted that there will be a modified version of uTrack, the tracking software, which can be utilized by transfer students. Transfer students were also discussed at the Undergraduate Tactics meeting, particularly with respect to data collection relating to this population.

UG Tactics (formerly SWAT)

In a meeting that we had the opportunity to attend, one participant in the room noted that the "crisis called for SWAT." This group appears to be much more focused on the execution of programs relating to completion and retention, as evidenced by the extensive talk of data and IT. For instance, one item discussed was sending an automated message via DARS, an electronic advising software program, to signal to students that they are close to graduation and should apply to graduate. The language of this message was briefly debated. Furthermore, in this meeting, in which not all agenda items were covered, participants discussed how to most effectively communicate with "leavers" to learn about their reasons

for departure prior to graduation. Other items were largely focused on data collection and IT services, including texting students to let them know they're next in line at the "One-Stop."

Advising.

Advising seems to be a major mechanism for encouraging completion. An advising group is credited for spearheading the implementation of the new tracking software, UTrack, which enhances communications among different institutional actors that engage with students and has an early intervention component that warns students and their advisors if the students are "off track." This new technology also assists in encouraging students who do not meet certain degree milestones created by individual departments to change majors. Furthermore, the advising community has been involved with more first-year studies programs that are intended to improve retention rates. To revamp advising, institutional leaders have decided to professionalize advising by hiring a number of new staff advisors to replace faculty advisors. Students in our focus groups had mixed feelings about professional versus faculty advisors. For example, one student expressed his concerns with his experiences with advisors encouraging timely graduation at the expense of pursuits beyond his major. When we asked students in the focus group whether there were other mediums through which they were hearing the message to graduate in four years, one student replied:

> My advisor. I don't know if you two have encountered that, but my advisor really pushed me, why are you getting these two minors, it'll take you a whole 'nother year, but I want to get the most out of my education and even the minors – or the advisors push graduating in four years. And that's very frustrating because that's supposed to be someone that you go to for help,
>
> unbiased help.

"This feels different."

Almost all participants agreed that although strategic plans are common at higher education institutions and they've seen many come and go, this one, the goal to become a Top 25 research university, "feels different." The provost, for instance, noted that this plan, Top 25, with its extensive planning structure, has measurable goals, which allow campus actors to track progress toward each metric. Another campus leader described the distinction between this plan and others and the ubiquity of the message:

> ...it is different you know, because everything we do maps to this plan. I mean you know, it's almost to the point where an advertiser will say, you know, when you get tired of hearing that jingle, then you know you're successful. Well, I'm not saying I'm tired of hearing about [Top] 25 and the Vol Vision, but I'm close to it... But, that's the message we're getting and it is so, and it's really filtered down to everybody so we're all pulling together in the same direction. And I do think we're going to see the dividends I really do – I think we're going to move up in our quest to be a Top 25 [public university].

These perceptions speak to the broad positive morale on this campus as it relates to Top 25, on virtually everyone's mind, and to the more obscure CCTA and outcomes-based funding formula. We also heard some dissent and criticisms, particularly with respect to unintended consequences of the campus's ultimate goals. Some students, for example, expressed their view that UT, Knoxville's goal to become Top 25 public research university has increased faculty's focus on research at the expense of attention to students. Two students commented on faculty members cancelling classes and not making themselves available outside of class. Other concerns were previously noted, and include insufficient focus on non-academic factors that affect retention (e.g., student engagement); a strict emphasis on four-year graduation; and encouraging summer school attendance, which may not be the best option for students who have to work. Furthermore, initial concerns about decreased quality of education due to an emphasis on outcomes were mentioned but usually accompanied by a comment about how fears have not been substantiated. In addition, we sensed some skepticism among the interviewees about reaching Top 25 status (at least in the near future), though not cynicism. Overall, respondents, including the Chancellor, felt that what mattered most was the "journey". One administrator noted, "If we get to Top 25 – that's awesome! If we don't, we are in a much better place because we tried."

Middle Tennessee State University

Context & perspectives on the formula

Established in 1911 as a teacher preparatory school, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) is now classified as a Carnegie Doctoral Research Intensive University, offering more than 140 undergraduate degree programs and more than 100 graduate degree programs. Located in the geographic center of Tennessee in the town of Murfreesboro, MTSU is the oldest and largest institution in the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) system, currently enrolling about 24,000 students. Led by President Sidney McPhee since 2001, MTSU is the top producer of graduates in the TBR system, the top producer of adult and low-income graduates in the state, and the most efficient producer of graduates among the state's public institutions, leading more students to achieve their educational goals with fewer tax dollars (MTSU, 2014a). According to President McPhee's online greeting to students, MTSU is "committed to building a community that is devoted to student success and values individual learning, growth and service" (MTSU, 2014b).

Considering such a genuine public commitment to student success, it may be surprising that a senior academic administrator described President McPhee as the "voice in the wilderness" with regard to his lobbying against the new outcomes-based formula and its adverse effects on MTSU. Multiple respondents, including President McPhee, agree with the CCTA's focus on completion, but not the specifics of the formula. As President McPhee put it, his issue is "not the what, but not the how" and he expressed concern with that "cookie-cutter isn't an effective [strategy for] policy." In a related

perspective, another senior administrator said, "we didn't mind a new modeling of how resources were going to be allocated, as long as you start with a level playing field."

Resistance to the formula seemed to be a part of a broader view that MTSU has long not gotten its fair share. This view extends back to concerns that the previous enrollment-based funding model did not adequately fund MTSU. Respondents perceived the new formula as stacked against MTSU and some pointed to earlier examples of the state not equitably funding the institution, especially as compared to the UT, Knoxville. As said by a senior administrator, "we're the lowest funded, we're sort of the bastard stepchild of the UT system." Although respondents at UT, Knoxville do not feel they get special treatment, MTSU faculty and staff widely attribute the new funding formula to state policymakers in Nashville wanting to help make UT, Knoxville a Top 25 institution. "The game is rigged, there's no way to win," a senior administrator said. The administrator continued:

> You know, Knoxville will come out on top, the rest of us will fight for the scraps. Scraps are so infinitesimal that the scraps don't make that big of a difference anyway. We're sort of defeated before we begin… I think that, you know, the biggest outcome of all that is just sort of this general sense of hostility and animosity towards Knoxville, the favored child.

Effects of state politics, whether real or perceived, have certainly affected campus responses and morale at MTSU.

Completion-related initiatives & unintended consequences

Despite initial resistance, respondents agree that MTSU has embraced the CCTA and the new funding formula's focus on completion, effectively aligning state and campus goals. In fact, one academic administrator said, "good policy, good practice, that's nice, but unless it coincides with or correlates to CCTA, we're not doing it." Although all respondents identified completion and retention as the primary campus commitments, they were mixed in their attribution of this focus (and the resulting initiatives) solely to the CCTA and the new funding model. As mentioned in the previous section, UT, Knoxville respondents overwhelmingly attributed a focus on completion-related activities to Governor Bredesen's 2010 challenge and UT, Knoxville's subsequent goal to become a Top 25 research university. Similarly, respondents at MTSU indicated that Governor Haslam's "Drive to 55" exerted comparable levels of influence on campus activity as the CCTA, sometimes using the terms synonymously. President McPhee did, however, credit the CCTA, specifically, with providing him some power to promote the completion agenda and giving the issue a sense of urgency.

Respondents identified many programs and initiatives related to a campus commitment to student success: the "Quest for Success" strategic planning initiative, a new "One-Stop shop," enhanced advising, "retention hearings" for Deans, course redesign for those with high fail/drop rates, analysis of "bottleneck" and "gateway" courses, "academic map project" for 4-year graduation, a new student alert system aimed at early intervention, and a Connection Point program geared to get new students involved

on campus, to name a few. Although students are generally unaware of the CCTA and its goals, some voiced their appreciation of new completion-related initiatives on campus, especially more visible ones like the One-Stop shop and programs geared at increasing students' connection to campus. Several students indicated, for example, that Connection Point was well received by the student body in its inaugural year (academic year 2012-2013).

Appendix C outlines the completion-related initiatives at MTSU. Leading initiatives, such as the Quest for Success document and several academic affairs-related programs, along with several unintended consequences are discussed in more detail below.

Quest for Success

During our November 2013 visit to Murfreesboro, a new internal document called the "Quest for Student Success" lodged a good amount of interview time. The plan, "a comprehensive, strategic initiative designed to improve retention and completion rates" is quite robust and aligns closely with state goals for the CCTA (MTSU, 2013). The Quest for Success, as it is typically called by respondents, includes three primary goals for the individual success of each student:

> Goal I - Middle Tennessee State University will recruit students who value student success and have the potential to achieve in a student-centered culture;

> Goal II - Middle Tennessee State University will enhance the academic experience of students to better ensure their success; and

> Goal III - Middle Tennessee State University will facilitate student success through innovation and the use of data-informed best practices.

The strategic document further includes an implementation plan, complete with charts detailing specific objectives, with action items, responsible office, and completion date, and a technology plan "to streamline and better integrate recruiting, enrollment, advising, retention, and graduation support–related functions" (MTSU, 2013). In the words of a business administrator at MTSU, "this is all about student success, and student success translates into better outcomes, so it's tied directly to the formula. I mean, it's obviously done for -- that's a byproduct, but this -- this is a very impressive document." Indeed, of all the internal documents collected for this report, MTSU's Quest for Success was the most comprehensive. The planning committee also considered a wide range of data and resources in crafting the plan, including each of the more than 80 planning team members receiving a copy of the book Completing College written by national student success expert, Dr. Vincent Tinto, who also delivered the keynote address at the Best Practices for Student Success, Inclusion, and Retention Summit in February 2014.

The administration is proud of this document and the praise they have received for its creation, made clear by comments in interviews with multiple respondents during our November 2013 visit and also evidenced by the decision to include a section dedicated to "Media Coverage of Plan Introduction,"

accounting for the last third of the 40-page document. This signature campus completion plan was released shortly after our first visit in August 2013 after being in the planning stages with the University Leadership Council for three years.

Classroom initiatives

Although, as mentioned above, MTSU certainly maintains multiple initiatives aimed to increase student success through enhanced student engagement outside the classroom, for the most part interview respondents indicated that the majority of key initiatives are academic affairs-related. The most comprehensive of these is the course redesign initiative. The course redesign team, a group of 14 faculty members led by the Vice President of Information Technology and funded by the Provost's office, is working to redesign seven courses with high failure rates. "We talked with deans of two colleges and we picked courses based on those high failure rates and large enrollments," explained a senior technology administrator, "and then those deans went to the chairs and the chairs selected [the faculty that would participate.]" He continued:

> Universities typically have done things very – in very small, little silos, so
> a professor might develop a really good course, but what that means is
> a couple sections will be really good, not necessarily the whole course.
> So the idea is then how do you scale that out? How do you take that to
> departments so that the whole department gets it and then the whole course
> is really that high quality, not two sections out of 70, but the whole thing.
> And that's part of the objectives of the course redesign.

This pilot program working with the sciences redesigned seven courses in the summer and fall of 2013 with the goal of offering the new classes in the spring 2014 semester. According to a senior administrator, moving forward, Provost Bartel's goal is " to follow it up within another group of these faculty who'd be doing course redesigns in the social sciences and the humanities, also with these high failure rate type of situations."

As expected, the project encountered some faculty pushback initially, according to a business administrator, "but the deans and the department heads, by and large, have buy in, and of course the president and his cabinet are obviously all on board with it." Ultimately, this is not about giving away grades, but changing the culture around student learning. As said by a senior administrator working in student affairs:

> We have a learning problem, the kids aren't learning. You may be teaching
> your brains out. You can teach all day long, but if the students aren't learning
> it, your teaching is not effective. But that's the shift from a teaching culture
> to a learning culture. Our focus is on teaching and how I like to teach and
> my freedom to teach what I want to with no accountability, but the students
> walking out having learned what we agreed were the learning outcomes
> that needed to come out of these courses … Well, you can teach all day but
> if they're not learning, you're not an effective teacher, and that's what we're
> going to have to dig into.

Put similarly, another senior administrator said the course redesign team is "working to eliminate what we call the boot camp mentality, you know, sink or swim in the courses. We feel that this new generation of students learns differently, and we want to make sure that we align our courses with that."

Another development on the academic affairs side of the aisle is a new undergraduate major in "University Studies," created to serve students who are unable to gain candidacy into especially competitive majors. As explained by an academic administrator familiar with the new major, it is:

> A degree program that allows a student, for example, who has declared a major, but for whatever reason cannot gain candidacy into that major. Rather than declare another major, start all over again from square one basically, a major in which they may or may not be able to use already successfully completed courses, they can move into this new re-conceptualized Bachelor of University Studies, utilize all of their work previously, supplement that with some additional courses in areas that they like, all geared towards a career path that they have chosen.

While university administrators refer to this new degree program as "particularly exciting," students may not be convinced. A senior student government leader told a story about his friend who was recently pushed into this new major:

> One of my friends actually just met with his advisor and changed his major to University Studies. He has like 150 hours because he's been here forever, so they're trying to get him out. So, he couldn't get into the recording industry major so that's what the alternative was. So, I feel like that's just kind of pushing students under the rug and saying thank you and it's time to leave. But it's -- he's even told me, he's like, I don't know what I'm going to do with that. So it's not going to actually benefit him in the long run.

Similarly, others were somewhat critical of the emphasis on four-year graduation, which might not be appropriate for some students. Speaking of concerns regarding experiential education and co-op opportunities, a senior development administrator said:

> We push our students in experiential education as much as possible. We try and tie it into our classroom learning, ... But that doesn't fit the CCTA or the -- it fits with Drive to 55, because Drive to 55 doesn't tell you how fast you've got to get there to 55. It hurts with CCTA, because that student doesn't make those milestones as quickly... Great for the student: I come back with a learning experience, you know, that really furthers my education. But guess what? It costs the university money. And so I think if there's any place where [CCTA] starts putting pressure on us, it's to design our experiential education programs in line with the milestones and getting them out in four years rather than serving the best needs of that student and ensuring that they get a really solid work experience.

Some faculty, staff, and students also expressed concerns about what these classroom initiatives and a focus on completion may mean for quality. While most students are unaware of the CCTA and the new outcomes-based funding formula, an astute junior, majoring in electronic media journalism asked:

> Do you not feel like that would be a little bit of a problem, the outcome formula, because wouldn't that persuade different colleges to maybe lower their standards of, like, in the classroom? Teachers like kind of giving a little bit away or slacking off on their grading so that they could get more money for the university?

And indeed, other students told stories of just this. A junior math major commented:

> I had a professor this morning talk about how the new -- the thing that they're making the professors do outside of the classroom, like log visits to their office, and check up with mid-term people are persuading the professors to be like, well, if you want me to give Cs, I'll give Cs, and we can just not worry about any of this.

One of his contemporaries in the room followed up, "it happens quite often." And another said, "Yeah. More than people think, because one of my teachers from last year, he gave us answers to the test, because he didn't feel like grading, I guess. So we all got As."

These concerns about quality are shared by some of the faculty, as well. A faculty leader said, "We need to educate as many students as we can, but we need to make sure that we're not doing it, you know, 'get a loaf of bread and a degree with every full tank of gas,' and I think that's a concern as well." A senior administrator agrees, "One word you never hear about in terms of the Complete College Act or this Drive to 55, you never hear the Q word [quality]. You never hear it out of the mouth of anybody, and that worries me profoundly, and it worries the faculty profoundly." Others disagree about the validity of these concerns, and argue that thinking increased completion necessarily means decreased quality is lazy and short-sighted. In the words of a senior student affairs administrator:

> You'll hear that from faculty as a consistent theme, that retention and graduation emphasis is just sort of code words for giving out easy As and lowering standards, that that's what the expectation is, that we simply lower our standards. You know, I think that displays a tremendous lack of imagination on the part of the faculty that they believe there's no way to improve their teaching to result in better learning other than just giving easier As. I think that's a tremendous lack of knowledge and imagination.

"The Country Club and the College"

In addition to the programmatic institutional changes mentioned above, findings suggest that campus cultures and morale may have shifted somewhat at MTSU in response to the CCTA and the new outcomes-based funding formula, as well, affecting how campuses serve students and how students experience the institution. Although findings certainly indicate that campus leadership plays a large role in determining the campus response, across the board respondents did agree that focusing on student success "is the right thing to do." Respondents varied, however, in their take on strategies for obtaining better outcomes, some choosing to focus on the classroom experience and others emphasizing non-academic factors that influence retention. At MTSU, interview respondents all indicated that even

though they were moving forward with initiatives in a variety of areas, the primary focus was on the classroom experience.

In this instance, there also seems to be an "us versus them" mentality between the senior administration and the faculty, leading to a sense of competition within the institution. Perhaps the most significant theme, discussed by many respondents to varying degrees, is what one professor termed the "jockeying for glory" between the "country club and the college." Indeed, tension undoubtedly exists between the student affairs administrators (the country club) and the academic affairs professionals (the college), with each group blaming the other for the institution's completion problems. The student affairs team claims the problem with completion is in the classroom, while the faculty argues there's not much they can do with "the dead, the dying, and the diseased," as low-performing students were described by one respondent. A frustrated academic administrator lamented, "There is blame. There is competition for resources. There is a perception on this campus that student affairs gets everything they want." President McPhee, who began his career as an academic advisor, is generally perceived to side with the student affairs group. During the President's Liaison meeting with members of the faculty senate, he asked rhetorically: "Why hasn't the retention needle moved much? It's because there hasn't been enough focus in the classroom between the students and the faculty… With that in mind, when you look at the Quest for Success plan, the emphasis is [in the classroom.]"

Consistent with this focus on academic—as opposed to student affairs—related initiatives to increase retention and completion rates, President McPhee instituted "retention hearings" as a student success initiative. In these hearings, deans of the eight undergraduate colleges and the Dean of Graduate Studies had individual meetings with President McPhee and others in key leadership positions to present their respective college's plan to increase student retention and completion. According to one respondent familiar with the process, the hearings were "not pleasant." Some respondents indicated that the retention hearings were pointed with threats to being fired for poor performance if retention rates did not improve quickly. At the Dean's Council meeting that we observed, however, Provost Bartel said that he "found the hearings very positive." At the hearings, he said, the conversations centered on advising and curriculum, and almost all of the deans requested additional funds for new advising positions.

Most respondents praised the senior leadership for their early action regarding enacting completion-related initiatives and for the transparency and inclusiveness of the process. One professor, for example, applauded the President and his leadership team:

> I think that the response has been a very inclusive one, in general. I think that Cope administration building, Dr. McPhee, Dr. Bartel, and what not, I think they've gone out of their way to be very faculty-involved, making sure that faculty have had a voice in the proceedings.

A sizable minority of respondents, however, expressed frustration with top-down leadership approaches and expressed concern that the senior administration, on the whole, does not seem to have a deep

understanding of the funding formula. In one particularly candid interview, an academic administrator expressed frustrations that the senior-most leaders do not understand the formula. He said that President McPhee has surrounded himself with "yes, sir" people without academic experience, and that is part of the problem:

> The fact is, with the exception of [Provost] Brad [Bartel], there's nobody in the president's cabinet who comes from the faculty… None of those people can say, 'Boss, you want to fire me, fire me. I'll go back to my faculty line, but here's the truth.' That isn't there.

This likely fuels the student affairs versus academic affairs tensions.

Thus, two competing narratives seem to emerge from the MTSU response. First, a positive narrative of inclusive leadership, productive working relationships, commitment to an access mission, and a thriving campus is described by senior administrators and those who seem most supportive of the president's agenda. This narrative highlights the many successful completion-related initiatives and points out the ways in which the new funding model is stacked against MTSU. A second, "not pretty," narrative, as described by a few dissidents and alluded to by other respondents, points to ineffective leadership and declining morale among faculty and staff. On the one hand, MTSU has achieved great success in completion, producing the most graduates in the TBR system and the most adult and low-income graduates in the state. They have developed the Quest for Success, perhaps the most comprehensive plan for student success in Tennessee. But, on the other, perhaps by managing these initiatives in such a forceful fashion, with retention hearings and internal blame-games, the declining morale may be compromising the plan unnecessarily.

Pellissippi State Community College

Campus context

In many ways, Pellissippi State Community College, is not like most community colleges in the state or the nation. Various characteristics, including the location of its main campus, set near a lake in the suburbs of Knoxville, and student characteristics, such as the highest average incoming student ACT score among Tennessee community colleges, contribute to its uniqueness relative to other two-year institutions. Pellissippi State also has the largest number of students studying abroad of any community college in the nation (Institute of International Education, 2011). According to many respondents, the campus does not look or feel like many other community colleges, and the culture on campus reflects a generally positive regard for the institution from members of the Pellissippi community. Students, in particular, described the Pellissippi campus as an outlier of sorts. One such student, illustrated widespread pride in the institution, stating:

> We're told, like when we're preparing to do new student orientation, to brace yourself because these students picture a community college in an old, like – in an old grocery store that closed down, that's been renovated and they

have this stereotype of what we're supposed to be. And then they come here and it's this big campus and there's life everywhere and all of that...they think oh, I'm coming to this grocery store and I'm going to have to learn for a year and then I'm going to be out of there. And a lot of people don't realize that that's not what we are. We are a school.

The large five-campus institution serves more than 10,000 students (THEC, 2014) in diverse parts of Knox and Blount counties. Hardin Valley, Pellissippi State's main campus, is located in a suburban area in Knox County, roughly 15 miles from UT, Knoxville. This proximity has helped foster a special relationship between the two institutions. This connection led to the creation of the Bridge Program, which the two institutions created to allow students who are waitlisted at UT, Knoxville to be dually enrolled at Pellissippi State and the flagship. The program, created in 2011, allows for a seamless transition into UT, Knoxville provided that students meet certain requirements. Pellissippi State is overwhelmingly the major "sender" institution for transfers to UT, Knoxville. Furthermore, the two campuses' geographic proximity as well as Pellissippi State's suburban location more broadly influence the student body of at the community college, which includes a high percentage of students preparing to transfer to a four-year institution. This context is central to understanding how Pellissippi State was situated to react to the CCTA and how it has fared under the Act. Appendix D reports the completion related initiatives at Pellissippi State.

Inputs matter

Describing Pellissippi State's culture broadly, one respondent asserted, "I mean we really do have high standards, I mean, I'm sure you've seen that...And you know, that's hard for, you know, the rest of the world to live up to."

The high standards mentioned by this participant can aptly describe Pellissippi State's admissions criteria, relative to other community colleges in the state and beyond. Indeed, Pellissippi State's enrollees are distinct from students attending other community colleges for a number of reasons, including higher admissions standards and the enrollment of UT, Knoxville prospects who are seeking a more affordable option than starting at the flagship. First, Pellissippi State has the highest average entrance exam scores in the state. This is likely due in part to their higher admission standards, which are currently are a minimum of 19 on the ACT for each of the Reading and Math sections and a minimum of 460 on the SAT. According to one respondent from the Records office, admission is not denied to any student, but students with scores below the minimum are admitted on a provisional basis and referred to an adult services program for tutoring until the successful completion of exams.

In addition to its criteria for admission, Pellissippi State's location provides for a unique relationship with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, which also has an effect on the community college's enrollments. Due to its proximity, many students from the region who consider enrolling in and meet the academic standards for admission to UT, Knoxville start their education at Pellissippi State because of

the significantly lower tuition cost: $3,827 annual tuition at Pellissippi State compared to $10,062 at UT, Knoxville (THEC, 2014). This trend appears to have been especially evident during the recent recession.

Like UT, Knoxville, Pellissippi State's location similarly affords it political influence, due to shared geographic origins with influential figures involved in education policymaking in the state (i.e., Governor Bill Haslam; House Education Chairman Harry Brooks; and Randy Boyd, a business leader and influential higher education policy advocate). Further illustrating Pellissippi State's political power, the community college's president, Anthony Wise had a formal role in the development of the CCTA through his membership in the Master Plan Steering Committee. This 33-member group, formed in 2010, is comprised of the deputy governor, legislators, consultants, system officials, other elected officials, and a handful of campus leaders. The group was charged with developing the 2010-2015 Higher Education Master Plan in response to the CCTA. Pellissippi State's political influence is an important factor in understanding this campus's context and response to the CCTA.

President Wise's involvement with the formulation of the CCTA allowed him to anticipate the policy and to start planning Pellissippi State's response to the Act in 2009, prior to the adoption of the CCTA. At that time, Pellissippi State leaders formed the Strategic Graduation Task Force. A number of initiatives came out of that task force, which continues to meet to discuss ways to increase funding outcomes through the new model. The college completion-related initiatives at Pellissippi State, including those that stem from the task force, are robust and few respondents deny its direct connections to the CCTA.

Clear alignment with the CCTA

At Pellissippi State, there is a general acceptance and support for the CCTA and various efforts are being implemented to improve completion rates. It is evident that most of the initiatives are not only aligned with, but also in direct response to the new funding formula. Respondents noted that there had been a cultural change on campus, manifested in the form of greater emphasis on completion both in discourse and in programming throughout the institution. In fact, one senior administrator discussed the fate of a hot air balloon festival in describing this significant cultural shift, signaling the beginning of an increased focus on completions as a result of the CCTA:

> You know, one interesting thing, we used to have this balloon festival every fall, every September, we'd have this balloon festival. It would take, you know, a year to plan, it would take – I don't even know how many man hours to get it done, but it was a huge effort. And we quit having it and we quit having it when this happened and we actually said we can't focus our staff time on that kind of thing and I don't know if that was just an excuse –But you know, the president at the time, and it was the former president, but the new president hasn't said bringing it back, you know, we really need our – everyone to be focused on completion.

As further evidence of the pervasiveness of the CCTA in campus life, one respondent said: "an awareness of the importance of students graduating has created kind of an overall effect, whether it's in advising,

telling students you really should graduate, you really should complete this degree to faculty talking about it in the classrooms…" In addition, staff members and administrators whom we interviewed were virtually all aware of the Act and the formula and many respondents were knowledgeable of the specific details of the new funding model. Certainly, President Wise demonstrated thorough knowledge of the various elements of the outcomes-based funding model.

In general, respondents on campus were not hesitant to indicate that activity on campus was driven by the outcomes-based funding formula because, as they stated, the formula's goals and campus values are aligned. We heard on numerous occasions, particularly in interviews with mid-level administrators and faculty members, individuals who most frequently interact with students, that the efforts on campus that are in response to the formula indeed help students. Some respondents acknowledge that in many cases resources partly drives changes, but money is simply a means to an end: serving students. As one faculty leader put it:

> Of course our goal is always going to be to get more funding because the more funding we have, the more we can do for the students. And so whenever we – whenever the state says okay, if you have more graduates, if you have more certificate completions, we're obviously going to do whatever we can to achieve that. And not just for us, but because it's important for the students to complete as well. It's ultimately going to be better for them to get some degree or even a certificate rather than to come through and dabble around and get nothing.

Providing a different (though not necessarily critical) perspective, a couple of respondents indicated that perhaps completion is not a student's ultimate goal, and that in that sense, the formula may not be perfectly aligned with all campus efforts. For example, one staff member noted that as campus representatives, their job is to support students to achieve "whatever goal they want": "You know, the biggest thing is to graduate them or whatever goal that they want. You know, if that person, let's say they want to transfer because they don't need these two or three hours, that we're there to do what's the best for the student."

In general, Pellissippi State has fared relatively well under the new funding formula. The awareness of this reality by members of the campus community contributes to the overall positive attitudes toward the CCTA. President Wise articulated his perception of the reasons for the college's success under the new formula:

> I think part of that's we tried to approach it strategically – part of it's because we were one of the institutions underfunded under the old enrollment formula, so part of it's that adjustment taking place and then part of it's us, I think, finally getting close to achieving what our potential should be in terms of, you know, graduating students from the institution. We've gone from, you know, five year – you know, five years ago, six years ago, graduating 670 students to I think the official number this year is 1,253 associate's degree completers from the college, so we've taken step – made step over step gains for the last five or six years.

As expressed by President Wise, the campus's response has been partly *strategic*, through the creation of new initiatives like stackable certificates. Beyond purely strategic efforts, however, there are other initiatives that can be characterized not only as strategic, but also as *substantive* and aimed at what the president described as achieving the institution's potential. In general, campus programs to increase college completion rates range from getting rid of a $25 graduation fee and streamlining the graduation process to expanding their highly touted and successful cohort-based programs. In the following section, we outline some of the primary *strategic* and *substantive* initiatives on campus aimed at increasing college completions and maximizing funding under the new formula.

"Low-Hanging Fruit"

One senior institutional leader described the initial response to the CCTA as targeting the "low-hanging fruit" to increase completions. For instance, one of the first reactions to the prospect of the CCTA involved mechanizing the degree and certificate-granting process, so that a software program now automatically grants credentials when degree requirements are met. Furthermore, the number of Prior Learning Assessment credits, some of which are awarded for workforce training, including McDonald's "Hamburger University," quadrupled between 2010 and 2011. This had an impact on progression rates, also rewarded through the formula.

Another element of the formula that was immediately beneficial to the institution's funding outcomes was the change to transfer and articulation policies implemented via the CCTA's Tennessee Transfer Pathways (TTP) component. As President Wise noted, the previous policies did not create any incentives for students to complete their associate's degree prior to transferring to a four-year institution. In fact, students at Pellissippi State were encouraged to transfer without completing their associate's so as to minimize the total amount of credit hours they had to take to earn their bachelor's degree (since there was still a set number of hours required at UT, Knoxville). Under the new model, however, the prescribed TTP makes an associate's degree a requirement for transfer, thereby providing a motivating factor for completion of the associate's degree. Pellissippi State is rewarded for these additional completions under the new formula.

Perhaps most controversial among the strategic efforts in response to the CCTA was the conferring of embedded or stackable certificates, particularly those for general education, which arguably have little value in the labor market. Notably, the State of Tennessee decided not to recognize these general education certificates in the outcomes-based funding formula. Nonetheless, this campus response to the formula generated some skepticism among our participants. Some respondents believed the new certificates were only offered to maximize funding. Some were also concerned about negative unintended consequences, including the possibility that students might stop pursuing their associate's degree after receiving a certificate. One respondent indicated that some students were confused and thought that the receipt of a certificate signaled completion of the degree. On the other hand, some respondents could see the benefit for students because the certificate indicates that the student has

reached a milestone and might serve as motivation to persist. Moreover, some noted that this credential could be useful for getting a job or a promotion.

Finally, an initiative that might be considered "low-hanging fruit" is the expansion in recruitment of adult students, which was framed by some participants as a strategic mechanism for maximizing funding through the formula. Respondents indicated that directly in response to the CCTA, there is an effort to recruit students who may have accumulated some credits elsewhere. Not only is the success of adult students is weighted more heavily through the outcomes-based funding formula (i.e., 1.4 "points" per student for each metric), but also, as a number of participants noted, adult students tend to be more motivated, enhancing their probability of progression and completion.

Regarding "low-hanging fruit" efforts, it is important to note that from most respondents, we sensed a genuine commitment to doing what is best for the students. With respect to the changes in transfer policies, for instance, a number of respondents indicated the value of completing an associate's degree, noting that the new policy truly benefits students as well as the institution's outcomes through the new formula. For example, in addition to the labor market value of an associate's degree, transfer students with an associate's degree receive additional financial aid after transferring.

From students' perspectives, personal circumstances (including, in one student's case, going through divorce) might deter students from finishing a four-year degree (at least in the short term), so an associate's degree provides a credential they might not otherwise have. Similarly, with respect to Prior Learning Assessments, granting credits for work and life experience were justified as rewarding students for something they already know, which other students might learn in a classroom. In another telling example, the Director for Quality Enhancement Programs (QEP) enthusiastically described new credits for apprenticeship programs (e.g., construction and electrical plumbing). Through these programs, students are able to finish their technology degrees in two semesters. The QEP director told us:

> What was funny was when we were talking about setting it up, some of our deans couldn't understand, well what's the worth of that program? You know, really. And it's – it's not going to get them a job or – they just didn't understand and it's like no, you're not understanding. Here are working – most of them working men where they're out there, they've done an apprenticeship program, I mean, they went two nights a week for four years, okay, to do these apprenticeship programs. We're giving them hours. These guys want to finish their degrees. It's not to get a new job because they're making tons of money, but it's for them. Do you understand? It's for them if they want to retire and maybe go do something, so that's some of the – that's another neat thing we're doing. And let me tell you, we had a meeting here last fall, we got a grant. We had close to 200, mostly men, three women, that came in to hear about it. They had their boots on.

As this example illustrates, despite criticisms, in many respondents' views, the initiatives that are considered the "low-hanging fruit" response, genuinely appear to be in place not only to help the institution, but also with students in mind.

Achieving Pellissippi State's Potential

Virtually all interview participants, including President Wise, mentioned the cohort program initiative as one of the most successful efforts for fostering student success at Pellissippi State. These programs entail offering degrees in cohort-style, with students in a given group following a set schedule and advancing through a program together. Some of these cohorts are accelerated, meaning that they can be completed in less than two years (e.g., 16 months for the Management program). Although the first program of this type started over six years ago, this model has been adopted for numerous degrees based on its success in graduating students. One faculty member who teaches in a cohort program described the success of this model:

> One of the things – the other things that happens is that they – probably about 30%, 40% of them go on to get their bachelor's and they typically go to schools that also have an accelerated model because they're used to it now. And so this last cohort, eight or nine of the 17 of them that graduated are going to King College…Together, because they – you know, this one guy was like oh, I need a break, I need to see my family. They're like no, you've got to come with us, come on. And sure enough, he enrolled.

Other efforts intended to help students complete their degrees include an electronic advising software program (i.e., Degree Works) and the rolling out of Project Making Graduation Attainable in 2012 with support from a Tennessee Board of Regents grant. This program is aimed at helping non-traditional students who have attempted at least 45 credit hours achieve graduation by increasing contact between advisors and students. We had the opportunity to meet with some of these students and to hear their testimonies of the success of the program. In the most recent cohort, 81 out of 84 students in the program graduated.

Similar to the efforts to increase contact with students implemented through Project Making Graduation Attainable, throughout the campus, institutional leaders are engaged in activities to inform students of their proximity to graduation and to encourage them to complete. For instance, one campus leader sends out postcards to each student who is getting close to graduation to make them aware of their progress and motivate them to persist. To enhance completion rates, there is also a focus on the enrollment management committee to try to offer more classes across campuses and to give students more options to get their degree completed at all sites.

Finally some QEP-related efforts are not directly geared toward completion, but enhance student success and ensure quality. As a result of QEP initiatives, for instance, officials instituted a bi-weekly brown bag lunch to showcase teaching strategies and a New Faculty Academy. The director of the program described the depth of their academic efforts, which stands in stark contrast to some "low-hanging fruit" initiatives:

> And so what we decided was to be strong to the core, that's our little motto, and so the core courses that we're emphasizing on the QEP are improving the success rates in college algebra, Math 1130, which is primarily for

business, nursing, miscellaneous liberal arts majors, okay. And – not – non-STEM majors there. And then English 1010, which everybody has to take, and then Speech 2100 for the oral communications. And so we're strengthening those courses in – with active learning strategies to improve critical thinking in both of those courses and then oral communications, in the speech.

Collaboration and potential for competition

Respondents indicated a highly collaborative environment within Pellissippi State and across institutions. Administrators from student affairs to student success to President Wise gave examples of collaboration and of sharing effective practices with other institutions. Furthermore, the president expressed his satisfaction with the collaboration with UT, Knoxville institutionalized through the Tennessee Transfer Pathways and the UT-Pellissippi Bridge Program. While we found no evidence of competition, we did hear some concerns that the state higher education landscape may become more competitive with funding cuts. President Wise summed upped the collaborative attitude with an acknowledgment of the potential for "tension":

> I think there's still a good sense of collegiality among the institutions and trying to move forward, because it is an overall state goal we're trying to accomplish. I think one of the benefits of this year was the full funding of the formula by the governor and the legislature. You know, I think it gets trickier when it's not fully funded and then really you see institutions who are taking dollars from other institutions through performance. You know, I think if that happens year after year, you have – it could create some potential tension and real issues.

Campus culture

The culture on campus seems to play a significant role in Pellissippi State's response to the CCTA and the outcomes-based funding formula. President Wise, who was the Vice President of the Learning Division prior to assuming the presidency is generally well-regarded and viewed as an effective leader across campus. His leadership may partly explain the positive attitude in general toward the increased focus on student success, even with the acknowledgment that the formula drives most changes relating to completion. Representative of this culture, one strategic planning meeting led by President Wise and attended by approximately 50 campus leaders had a very festive tone: cake and coffee were served and breakout sessions accompanied presentations. Everyone seemed engaged.

The findings also point to a perception among students that people at Pellissippi care about them and want them to succeed. For example, one current employee and graduate of Pellissippi said, "Some colleges are -- don't show you that they care. It's just more of a money thing. We need you here, because we need this money. Pellissippi didn't feel that way. They help you with advising, studying habits." In a focus group, another student noted:

> People say hi, people talk to you… I'll see my professors at the grocery store, they'll stop and they know my name and they'll talk to me. And so it's that personal connection that I think gets people to come back and to really work on getting their degree here.

The Pellissippi community also demonstrated a proclivity toward pursuing any opportunity that is available, particularly as it relates to funding. For example, Pellissippi officials have applied for numerous grants, some of which they've received and engaged in the cohort program development. One participant described this attitude as "adventuresome":

> If you say, well, I've been to Pellissippi State, you know, they might say oh yeah, they're always doing something, you know, if there's a pilot, you know, that somebody wants to do, then you know, we're one of the first ones that are doing it… because we are, you know, adventuresome like that. And so we – the cohort strategy of, you know, presenting a curriculum, you know, has been an extremely challenging one as far as the – getting the details, you know, all lined up and it's – you know, I'm sure that it's taken the faculty, and I know them, you know, a lot more time than they even anticipated. But it's because they wanted to do it right, you know, and sometimes that does take more time.

As previously noted, many respondents highlighted that with more resources they are better able to serve students.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive attitude on campus in response to the CCTA and the outcomes-based funding formula, we found some evidence of dissent or skepticism, particularly as it relates to the embedded certificates, as previously noted and to an emphasis on "timely" graduation, which may not be appropriate for some students. Finally, one respondent expressed her feelings of the perhaps overpowering nature of the completion focus at Pellissippi State (i.e., "initiative fatigue"):

> So I think it's TBR wanting to drive the bus and wanting to – oh, we did this and – and I – I can't blame them for that but I feel like we're doing this stuff anyway, we're going to – you know, so some of that has been a little overwhelming and we've used the term initiative fatigue. Like I said, it was so nice to be in a webinar a few minutes ago that was not about completion. It was just kind of a nice diversion.

This sentiment appears to be marginal, however, based on our interviews and observations. In general, Pellissippi State is committed to the CCTA and to completion, pleased with the funding results, but overall focused on student success, which generally aligns with what the outcomes-based funding formula incentivizes.

Southwest Tennessee Community College

Context & external dynamics

Southwest Tennessee Community College and Pellissippi State Community College are strikingly different institutions. As an example, at Pellissippi State, the UT, Knoxville-Pellissippi Bridge program is a seamless transition for students to start at Pellissippi State and graduate from the state's flagship institution, located just across town. At Southwest, the administration hosted a "Bridges out of Poverty" seminar to enhance employee understanding of fundamental challenges faced by many Southwest students. This "bridges" metaphor serves as a quick illustration of the vast differences in the types of students served by these two institutions.

Located in Memphis and predominately serving Fayette and Shelby counties, Southwest Tennessee Community College (Southwest) is a comprehensive, open-access community college governed by the Tennessee Board of Regents. Southwest is Tennessee's largest community college, enrolling close to 11,000 students and serving a diverse population with a wide variety of backgrounds, education levels, and economic circumstances. Southwest students are over 70% non-White, 56% part-time, and 26.2 is the average age (STCC, 2014; TBR, 2013; Tennessee's Community College, 2014). With its main campus set just outside the I-240 beltway adjacent to a medium-security federal correctional institute, Southwest has the highest proportion of Pell-eligible students and the lowest average ACT scores for incoming students. It also ranks first in the state for proportion of students enrolled in remedial and developmental courses (THEC, 2014).

Evidence suggests that state dynamics and other external factors affected the campus response to the CCTA and the new funding formula. The findings also reveal that characteristics of the local community undoubtedly influenced Southwest's response. As alluded to above and discussed in more detail later in this section, area demographics and the unique challenges they present absolutely play a role in Southwest's response to the CCTA and the outcomes formula. Furthermore, the Memphis area is saturated with various types of postsecondary education institutions, many proprietary, that compete with Southwest for students. A senior student services administrator explained the problem:

> I don't think there's another institution with the exception of Nashville State that has as much competition as we have. Think about it. We've got several universities here. We've got a ton of proprietary schools here, and so we're in competition with all of that... No one has the competition that we have, and that's the reality, whether it's Victory, University of Memphis, and then if you just look up the street, we've got Northwest that's here, we've got the University of Mississippi has a Desoto campus here, Strayer University is here, ITT Tech, all those folks are here... So the competition is enormous here for us.

In recent years, this competition has been particularly threatening as Southwest's enrollment numbers are down. Indeed, many respondents mentioned that, despite the outcomes-based formula attention on retention and persistence, enrollment is a significant factor in the overall institutional budget.

Another local factor, it is important to note that Southwest is the result of the institutional merger between Shelby State Community College, a predominately Black institution, and State Technical Institute at Memphis, a predominately White institution, in July 2000 and therefore the culture at Southwest is influenced somewhat by the legacies of those two institutions. As explained by a corporate training administrator, resulting racial tensions have stifled cooperation on campus:

> State Tech was a technical institution that was a powerhouse in the area for being able to teach classes that didn't articulate to a four-year degree, because what it did is it got you a job. It was a two-year technical school that had AAS degrees that allowed you to go out and get a job afterwards. The military -- this is back in the day -- you had a bunch of old fat White guys that retired from the Navy and came out here and they were the instructors, and they had all the latest technology, phenomenal instructors, but it was mostly a White college. The Union campus was called Shelby State and it was a college that was a preparatory school for a four-year degree, and it was mostly for the inner city schools, and it was mostly run by -- it was a Black college, considered a Black college. TBR, in its wisdom, said, shouldn't have two colleges, so they combined them. There has always been a Black population here that resented the Whites and the Whites that resented -- You've always had a racial overtone at this college, and to this day there's not as bad as it started off. It was very, very vocal, and very hard when it started off. Today, you still have a little bit of that undercurrent. Memphis is probably the most prejudiced city in the nation, and you know, both sides just have not gotten over disliking each other and feeling that the other side somehow has hurt them... It's strictly a racial thing. And that has always hurt cooperation. It has always hurt the attitude.

Other respondents echoed this sentiment, particularly one senior member of the recruitment staff who remembered the contentious consolidation: "I don't know who did the study or the research for the area to see what the constituents wanted, but they kind of like forced the merger and we lost a base of people."

Similar to findings at MTSU, there is also evidence that political factors, whether real or perceived, affected Southwest's response to the CCTA and the new funding formula. As a bit of political history, the Democratic Party controlled both houses of the legislature for decades leading up to the mid-2000s often with leadership from western Tennessee. For example, John Wilder, a Memphis Democrat, served as Speaker of the Senate (and therefore Lieutenant Governor) for almost half a century, from 1971 until a Republican, from east Tennessee, was finally elected in 2007. For many years, the Democrats and the House Black Caucus maintained legislative power, and represented Memphis' interests. In the mid-2000s, however, and certainly by the time the CCTA was passed, political power had shifted away from western Tennessee. A senior administrator at Southwest reflected on this political power shift:

> Our Shelby [county] delegation is probably not as strong as it once was. We don't have as many leaders on this side of the state as we did. And I shouldn't -- it's kind of unfair to say, because we have Senator Mark Norris, who is like number two or number three in Nashville, so he's here from west

Tennessee, and we have Senator Gresham out of Fayette County, so she's Senate Education Chair. So we do have some high people, but we got two or three where we had almost the entire Shelby delegation at one point were go-to people, and now that's all changed.

Today, the legislature is solidly Republican-controlled, now representing about three-quarters of both houses. Respondents at Southwest often point to these political dynamics to explain their perception of the genesis of the new outcomes-based funding formula. For example, a senior recruitment official questioned, "We took an astronomical hit, and what are you saying? Is it not important that the people on this end of the state be educated? Because that's what the formula did."

Completion-related initiatives & unintended consequences

Frustrations aside, the overwhelming majority of interviews at Southwest indicated that the CCTA and new outcomes-based formula are clearly influencing campus activities and initiatives.   Administrators all discussed a focus on retention and completion and a culture change that now focuses on student success as opposed to just bringing students in the door; they attribute this shift, at least indirectly, to the CCTA. Some of the resulting new initiatives at Southwest have included: mandatory advising, new advising software (AdvisorTrac), faculty training on advising, mandatory orientation, feedback surveys, Southwest Mentors Advancing Retention, Teamwork, and Success [SMARTS] faculty-student mentoring program, math initiatives for high school students, cohorts and block scheduling, an adult lounge on campus, weekend sequences for adults and early-bird classes before work, and new and more exciting classroom dynamics. A couple respondents also mentioned that there have been discussions of adjusting offerings to reflect the most successful programs (named as "nursing", "first responders training", and "culinary arts"). In general, and as expected, the aforementioned new initiatives are aimed at making persistence easier for students, and at making them feel more connected to campus. Appendix E outlines the completion-related initiatives at Southwest. Four of the campus's leading initiatives, along with several unintended consequences, are discussed in more detail below.

A New Office of Retention and Graduation.

Organizationally, the administration created a new position in 2010 for Executive Director of Retention and Graduation to focus on student success initiatives. Originally a one-person operation, the office now has four staff members and offers a range of student support services, including the Academic Support Center, SMARTS mentoring program, Student Welcome Centers, and Students Navigating their Academic Progress [SNAP], an early alert intervention to provide resources to student when they begin to struggle in courses. With regard to the CCTA, the Executive Director said, "This particular Act, I feel, helped me to gain a purpose around the college, but the most pressing thing was gaining credibility and I really charged forward with the idea of transforming the college's thinking about its responsibilities [regarding student success]." This notion of the CCTA providing credibility and acting as an accelerating force around completion-related activities was a common response from interview participants.

Campus Responses to Outcomes-Based Funding in Tennessee: Robust, aligned, and contested

Mandatory Advising

Southwest has also focused on enhanced advising practices as a completion-related initiative, including incorporating new advising software, training the faculty on the software and better advising techniques, and also the switch to mandatory advising for all students. "We've required advising our students," President Essex explained. "At one time, [students] could self-advise, that is not the case now. They must see an advisor before they can register… I think, structurally [this] will assist our students in terms of making sure they're staying on track." An academic affairs administrator agreed, saying "what we were finding is that if students self-advised, they many times went in directions that did not lead to college completion." According to a senior member of the advising staff, the decision to move to mandatory advising was made in "the fall of 2011. We piloted it in the spring of 2012. It became mandatory [for all students] in the fall of '12 for spring [2013] registration." The new mandatory advising not only puts the students on a path toward graduation academically, but also helps them avoid common mistakes associated with various financial aid rules.

Along with additional required training seminars, an added consequence of mandatory advising for faculty has been a significant increase in workload and time spent advising students. Responses to this have been mixed; according to a senior member of the advising team:

> From a faculty perspective, mixed reviews. I would say as they've given me feedback, some faculty are very open and honest, and say, 'I didn't buy into this. I didn't believe it, but when we tell you how many students that now have to come see me, they were on the wrong path. … but now we're catching them early, getting them on the right path,' … And I get that feedback from a lot of faculty . There are a few faculty that just think that it's too much work. 'You've hired me to teach' and they've not bought into the idea.

Student responses have also been mixed. The additional step has frustrated some students, especially those "students who wait until the last minute and you know, want to be advised right now, and their advisor isn't available, or another advisor isn't available, that has impacted them," according to a career studies administrator. Other students see the positive aspects of mandatory advising. A long-time Southwest student and student government leader, said, "I think that that is the right move because you need advising as the semesters go by, because you may take a class that you really don't need and that'll make you be in college longer, you know? And a waste of money." On the other hand, he said:

> It can work, but sometimes it can be somewhat confusing, because a lot of times they'll tell you what -- This person over here is your advisor, but he's not in your department. That advisor is not in the department that you're in. Like I'm in behavioral sciences, but then they're going to give me somebody that's in human services or something over here, you see, so then you've got an advisor who does not know anything about your major or how to assist or to advise you about certain things.

Since its implementation in 2012, Southwest administrators have already made changes to the program. Originally, the mandatory advising program required that students meet with their faculty advisor to discuss the following semester's classes, and obtain a PIN to enter subsequently during online registration. According to many respondents, this procedure gave students the wrong message. One said:

> Students saw that screen and it said the word PIN... So when they couldn't register when they were ready to register, what they did is they -- It said contact your faculty advisor. They'd call their faculty advisor and go 'I just need my PIN. I'm ready to register. It says you have my PIN.' I had a young man cuss me out on the phone because I wouldn't just give him the PIN and so some students have been -- They heard not the wrong message, but a skewed message, and we've changed it. That form doesn't say that word PIN on it anywhere anymore. It says advising alert.

Southwest administrators are hopeful that this change will help alleviate the negative feelings that both students and faculty had about the mandatory advising program. And this may be crucial since, according to a faculty leader:

> We had a giant enrollment drop when we instituted [mandatory advising]... We don't know what it was, but the semester we instituted it we went from 12,000 to 9,000... Well, see, it's too early to tell, because we implemented it spring. So January 1st, 2013, so in the fall of 2012, enrollment was 12,000. In spring, it was 9,000. But this fall it will be kind of interesting to see.

Customer Service

Despite the similar levels of knowledge of the formula on the campuses studied, it is interesting that interpretations about how to maximize results varied significantly across institutions. While MTSU chose to focus on classroom initiatives and Pellissippi State initiatives were described as "strategic" and geared at the "low-hanging fruit," at Southwest, the key initiative for improving outcomes involved enhancing "customer service" to students. Nearly every respondent mentioned President Essex's focus on customer service and during our campus visits we noticed that staff members were especially friendly with greetings and offers of assistance. A senior financial administrator explained the push:

> We have redoubled our efforts in trying to emphasize customer service, that students have – customers have another option. I mean, we aren't the only game in town and that we've got to do our part to make sure that they stay with us. And so we see a lot of training now with customer service that we didn't have before. I mean, we had a little but some people would take and some wouldn't, but now it's mandatory for everyone. I mean, everybody. We require it of everyone now to get involved in customer service. And the president emphasizes it, I think, every time he gets an opportunity to speak before a crowd or to a large gathering here at the college.

Indeed, President Essex organized multiple staff and faculty meetings dedicated to training employees on customer service techniques and reinforcing the idea that students are also customers who need to be

satisfied. As suggested in the quote above, this push is partially in response to competition from other local intuitions for students.   In general, the customer service effort is largely tailored toward improving the student experience, and less strategically aligned directly with the metrics to maximize funding under the new model, as seen to a degree at Pellissippi State.

Bridges Out of Poverty

While visiting in November 2013, we were able to attend and observe a four-hour seminar, "Bridges out of Poverty," related to the President's push for customer service and understanding who Southwest serves. Before the outside speaker began, President Essex addressed the room of 200 or so, saying how important it is for employees (all of whom were required to attend a session of this seminar) to understand Southwest students, to be able to communicate with them, and to build their trust. He said he wants Southwest to become the school of choice in the area, and that will happen if the students feel understood and respected. The seminar focused on understanding class struggles and breaking down stereotypes. In an interview, then-Provost Joanne Bassett explained the importance of the seminar:

> It's required for everybody at the college to go, and we want every single staff person and faculty members are required to go as well, to understand what it means to live in your car. What it means to live in a house with children with no beds. What it means to walk from -- start at 1:00 in the morning and not -- and again, this is not changing standards, it's helping students achieve those standards however, -- So many times I will see faculty be so hardnosed about a student, has an absence during a test time. Well, did you ever say maybe I need to really look into that? Bring me a doctor's note, or bring me something to substantiate that, and even if they can't, what is the problem with making another test and giving it to them at a different time? -- You're not changing your standards, you're simply saying, okay, well, I know you've got a tough life. I'm going to go ahead and accommodate. Let's see what we can do here... This is one of the things about Bridges Out of Poverty, it's about how you make that person feel. Do you make them feel like they're a bother, and worthless, and all their problems are just something you've got to handle if you're going to get here to school and do your work, you know, it's just so much bigger than that.

Overall, responses to this customer service-centered agenda varied. Most are on board: "Customer service people. You know, it's so important," a senior recruitment official commented. But others question its measurability, and, particularly among the faculty, we heard and sensed pockets of frustration. Like faculty at other institutions, they wonder if keeping students happy means lowering standards. "When a student gets a degree, it has to mean something," a corporate training administrator said. "When that quits meaning something, if our funding formula forces us to pump students through to get a degree regardless of what they know, then the Governor's [Drive to] 55 means nothing. It just means that we have a bunch of unemployed people with a piece of paper that means nothing."

There have also been other responses that may rank as unintended consequences of the CCTA. Those familiar with the formula lament that the premiums for particular sub-populations, like adult and low-

income students, are well-meaning but do not help to off-set the demographic challenges presented by the typical Southwest student. Although conscious of the institutional mission and deeply dedicated to the local community, discussions about changing "inputs" to produce better outcomes have still inevitably occurred. Though officially still committed to open access, a senior member of the advising staff said:

> People will talk. I've had some actual, genuine conversations about changing students that we try to get. We want to get more of the better-prepared student, because you get a better-prepared student, they're more likely to complete, but the students we have are the students we have and the students we're always going to have.

One respondent involved in recruitment mentioned his frustration with mixed messages he was now receiving about which students to bring in the door. He said he was "given a cheat sheet" about how the university is now funded, based on retention, graduation, credit hours, and so forth. "But we get conflicting information," he said, "about how to recruit and we're confused because we're asked to get those in who have higher ACT scores and are more likely to persist and also not to need more developmental work first… [but it's] confusing because we're also told that the university gets more money for 'at-risk' students – and those two aren't the same." Despite the talk, most faculty and staff at Southwest are staunchly dedicated to serving the local community, no matter their ACT scores. In fact, one respondent with a history of working in politics recounted the time he suggested changing Southwest's inputs:

> I'm the one person in the room that is not an educator. So I'm like, well, why are we dealing with 16 ACTs? Let's say 18 here. And I'm like, you're dealing with, you know, just any kind of GPA? I'm like, no, let's say 2.2. And everyone is looking at me like, 'there's something wrong with him.'

He quickly learned that these suggestions to raise admissions standards were not aligned with the other senior-level administrators who are steadfastly committed to open access for the local community and concerned that raising admissions standards might exacerbate the enrollment declines.

Other administrators predicted an additional unexpected consequence of the CCTA and the new outcomes-based funding formula. Expressing concerns over how badly the institution had fared under the new formula, and also how, more generally, state funding as a percentage of total revenues had been declining, one respondent raised the interesting idea that perhaps in the future Southwest will stop caring about satisfying the formula and continuing with retention and completion efforts if they are failing to bring in enough money to be effective. "You focus where you're funded," he said, and noted that he wouldn't be surprised if the institution went back to focusing on enrollment and tuition dollars at some point in the future. "Something's got to change," he said, "and the part that we can control as an institution is the enrollment." A senior member of the recruitment staff agreed: "Because of the formula, we won't be getting in the same amount of money that we were getting as an institution… enrollment is what will sustain us."

Culture, morale, and unique challenges

A discussion of Southwest's culture is very closely connected with their focus on customer service and the decision to hold a Bridges out of Poverty seminar to be better able to connect with students. Faculty and staff at Southwest are dedicated to the institutional mission and take much pride in their programs. They recognize the serious social, economic, and academic challenges that accompany the typical Southwest student and are deeply committed to them and to the local community. Perhaps this is why the most heavily touted completion-related initiatives at Southwest – customer service and programs geared at understanding poverty – are not representative of the usual programs at other institutions. Their deep personal commitment keeps them from focusing too much on just retention and completion alone, instead favoring initiatives that help the whole student in whatever means necessary.

Morale at Southwest is a mix of expressed optimism and acceptance that "it is what it is" for some, and fear and desperation for others. One respondent, arguing that the formula's dire consequences were "a downhill slide," described a conversation he had with Provost Bassett:

> She said, 'well, I would rather see the glass as half full instead of half empty.'
> I said, 'I don't see the glass as half full, half empty... what I see is the glass
> being drained, not filled.' And she just didn't -- You know, she wants to see
> the bright side.

This anecdote illustrates the positivity many Southwest faculty and administrators share that, in the end, everything will work out as it should. For others, the morale was much lower, and suggestive of losing hope. A science professor lamented, "it's like in essence the new formula is a sliding scale that once you fall down, there's no way for you to get back up." Multiple respondents know that Southwest has not fared well with the new formula and that this may lead to additional layoffs. President Essex lamented that he already had to lay off 161 people by the summer 2013, and at convocation a few months later several people reported that he had said he may have to lay off up to 150 more. Although respondents often attributed the dire circumstances to the CCTA and the new formula, in actuality it likely has less to do with the outcomes measures and much more to do with the broader changes in state funding policy such as the "hold harmless" policy ending and also with enrollment declines. Nevertheless, those in the upper administration know that the college would not be able to sustain another reduction in force of that magnitude. Indeed, a senior financial administrator's quote is representative of the ultimate fear— campus closure:

> Well, that's – it's a fear, there's no question that – because that's a reality. I
> mean, we – if you see the current trend, what has happened since Complete
> College Act went in force, if that continues, we're going to be one of these
> – we used to be an institution because we've cut and cut and cut until now,
> it's just – you know, it's not an institution anymore. And yeah, we fear that,
> because we're going to start losing better faculty, usually you tend to start
> seeing your physical plant deteriorate and start falling apart because you
> don't have dollars to keep it up. And until a point that it's not attractive, to be
> a part of the – you know, no one wants to come here and so yeah, I've seen it.
> I think because I've worked in the HBCU sector, that is the Historically Black

> College and University sector, I've seen where they've lost resources and as a result, the schools start – this goes over time, they just start falling, falling – because of lack of resources. Same thing can happen here unless we stop this and hopefully some people with vision and understanding will see that you're killing the institution with this formula. This formula is – because you know, those that are the better students will always get more and the weaker students will get less. And it ought to be just the opposite.

Southwest respondents all agreed that focusing on retention and completion is important and seemed genuinely appreciative that the model rewards these outcomes. No respondent at Southwest argued that focusing on retention and completion is wrong or unimportant. Findings overwhelmingly confirm, however, that "distinct regional differences" in Tennessee with regard to economic and demographic characteristics affected institutional responses to the CCTA and many expressed concerns that Southwest students differ dramatically from students at their sister institutions. Citing Southwest's low ACT average, the considerable low-income population, and the underperforming Memphis school systems, respondents argued that these characteristics make completion and retention initiatives all the more difficult. A senior administrator at Southwest articulated the concern:

> The formula assumes, I think, that everybody's equal and everyone is not equal by any stretch… I suspect that it hurts the university sector as well when you look at just what's at the University of Memphis as opposed to UT, Knoxville. We've got some good students but at the same time, the bulk of the students or a significant number of those students just didn't get it. And we're stuck with them. We're getting graded how we get them through when in fact, you ought to have more resources to help those students… I think that's our concern with the formula, that it just assumes a level playing field and it's not.

Indeed, it is doubtful that any other institution in the state is holding seminars geared at understanding poverty as a retention effort, or that any other Student Government Association's largest goal of the year is to bring in mannequins dressed appropriately to place on campus to lessen students dressing "like they're going to a club." Student respondents at Southwest indicated that the largest barriers to completion for their classmates are probably transportation and childcare, but that drug abuse and arrest were also high on the list, especially for the African American males. In fact, even system-level respondents agreed that Southwest has not fared well and that their contextual situation may account for poor performance.

On the whole, however, it is surprising that there hasn't been more resistance and criticism from Southwest. As with the other schools, many respondents mentioned that emphasizing completion "is just the right thing to do." The institution's setting in Memphis and the low preparation level of their students undoubtedly pose significant challenges to retention and completion. Though Southwest's state appropriation and enrollment decreases make it difficult to identify the exact effect of the new funding model, the consequences have been severe with significant lay-offs and expectations that more are to come. Yet, in the face of these significant challenges, Southwest remains committed to improving student success.

Section 4:
Overarching and Thematic Findings

This section discusses one overarching and three thematic findings drawn across the four cases. As the case narratives illustrate, the context of each campus factors greatly into the institution's response to the Complete College Tennessee Act and outcomes-based funding model. Despite these differences, however, we did find similarities across the campuses, including the overarching finding that campuses responded with a robust array of completion-related activity and initiatives. The three thematic findings account for perceptions related to the motivations for campus completion activity and to the possible consequences of the outcomes-based funding model.

Overarching Finding: Robust campus completion activity

The overwhelming conclusion of our four-campus study is that significant completion-related programs, initiatives, and activities are occurring at these institutions. In terms of the programmatic responses, for instance, the lists of campus completion initiatives (Appendices B-E) show that all four institutions undertook significant planning efforts, enhanced their advising approaches, and implemented many new student services and academic affairs policies, which account for the majority of each campus's list of responses. Moreover, our interview respondents referred to campus completion initiatives 660 times. Among these references, respondents from all four campuses mentioned programs related to advising, course redesign, and transfer students more than 100 times for each type of initiative. Additionally, respondents from all four campuses mentioned programs related to tutoring, orientation, student engagement, adult and low-income students, and data analytics. As illustrated in the case narratives, these completion initiatives range from campus-wide strategic plans to enhanced mentoring programs to constructing one-stop shops to implementing new advising software and strategies to eliminating a $25 graduation fee. Taken together, these campus initiatives constitute a robust response to the Complete College Tennessee Act and outcomes-based funding model.

Campus commitment to improving college completion is clear. Less clear, however, is the extent to which the new outcomes funding model is responsible. Many respondents indicated that their campus initiatives seemed in direct response to the new funding model. As one MTSU administrator summarized, "good policy, good practice, that's nice. But, unless it coincides with or correlates to CCTA, we really— we're not doing it." Other respondents, especially those at UT, Knoxville as represented by the following statement, viewed their campus completion initiatives as responses to both the state and campus plans:

> The Completion Act and the performance funding in terms of, you know, retention and completion just fit and dove tailed right into the Vol Vision, and the chancellor's strategic plan. So I felt as though our thinking really focused on -- They weren't competing priorities, I guess is what I'm trying to say, is that this is where we were going.

The respondent continued to discuss in more detail what these aligned state and campus plans meant for emphasis on student success:

> I was thrilled, you know, that the two came together, because -- not saying
> that we weren't concerned about retention and graduation before, but
> the model -- the funding model was not based on that. It was based on
> headcount. So once some of that shifted, the priorities that I've been
> engaged with in my career at the university easily became number one and
> two on agendas, that they no longer were -- Well, we'll get to it next week, or
> we just can't deal with that right now. We're focused on this. But rather no,
> what can you tell us about this?

Other respondents perceived their campus completion initiatives as not at all driven by the CCTA. Instead, respondents claim that initiatives such as dual enrollment, career academies, online programs, and various student services as in response to campus plans and to broader workforce demands.

Regardless of whether campus completion activities are direct, indirect, or independent responses to the CCTA and outcomes-based funding model, the overarching finding of our analysis remains that robust completion efforts are underway at these four campuses. An official at UT, Knoxville summarizes the broader influence of state completion initiatives on campus activity:

> I feel like the Complete College Act has really raised awareness of these
> issues with the upper level administration, which has really caused the focus
> to be much greater all the way throughout the campus. And I don't think
> it's a negative thing that people don't necessarily associate it with that Act…
> I think it's probably more important that students see it as – and faculty and
> staff see it as we're doing this because it's the right thing to do.

Thematic Finding One: "It's the right thing to do."

The first thematic finding deals with the underlying motivation behind campus-level completion initiatives. This perspective suggests that the outcomes-based funding model served to provide external support for completion initiatives on campus and to focus campus priorities on this broader goal. Respondents from all institutions agree that focusing on student success "is the right thing to do" as illustrated in the following comment by a respondent from UT, Knoxville:

> I think the state policy has put -- has made it perhaps easier for our campus
> leaders to say this is something we need to get done. One of the reasons.
> The primary reason is, it's the right thing to do. Do we always have the
> motivation or the backing to do the right thing? Not all the time, and lots of
> times it comes down to resources, or it comes down to competing priorities.
> I think -- I think what the law has done is to provide, say, an additional
> framework, or an additional construct to support the direction that the Vol
> Vision was taking us and the Top 25 journey was taking us anyway, but then
> this sort of came behind it and… shored it up.

Indeed, "it's the right thing to do" was repeated by multiple respondents across the campuses and it could be reasonably inferred from other responses highlighting campus initiatives. Many student services administrations, for example, commented on the long-standing mission of their programs to prepare students for success. One such administrator at UT, Knoxville attributed the adoption of the outcomes-

model with an increase in resources provided by the campus and the UT system, but was also quick to point out that these efforts have always been aligned with the core mission of the university. Similar to perspectives from UT, Knoxville respondents that these completion strategic plans, "just felt different," another UT, Knoxville leader commented on the swelling support for a wide range of new initiatives:

> We have launched and completed in a relatively very quick fashion, I would say in the two-year window of time, we've launched the U-Track system and we've opened up the One-Stop student services center. All about 25 initiatives which all map to retention and completion and success. So we're putting the resources where they need to be so we are aligned with the funding formula and this notion of graduating in four years... I think everybody gets it now. And so I do think, yeah, I don't think the institution is misaligned or out of alignment with that at all, and I do think we're going to see increases very soon, I think. We've already seen a slight spike in our six year graduation rate. Our retention rate, I think next year or this next reporting cycle, we're going to see another increase in the graduation rate and the retention rate. Yeah, I think we're headed in the right direction.

There was a similar response at Pellissippi State that included quite a bit of energy behind adopting new completion policies. The campus culture, as discussed in Pellissippi case narrative, includes an eagerness to try new programs. One Pellissippi State administrator reflected:

> Compared to other places I've worked, I have said this so many times, Pellissippi State does everything. We do everything. You know, things that I've seen, bits and pieces of it other place – oh, well we're going to do it all. We're like Type A, you know, we – there's an initiative? Yep, bring it, you know, we're going to do it all... I know that's – that might – sounds kind of silly, but it's made us even more aggressive towards taking on new things.

Even at institutions that have expressed concerns with certain elements of the outcomes model, there is a strong commitment to completion-related policies. As mentioned in the MTSU case narrative, President McPhee and other campus leaders expressed strong support for completion-related emphasis even if they did not always agree with the specific measures. A senior administrator from Southwest Tennessee Community College commented on their similar approach to improving student and campus outcomes:

> We're not going to complain, you know, I've made the most compelling case I could make. Nothing's going to be done – this is what we've got, we're not going to complain, we're going to make it work. And that's the mindset we have here. The outcomes based, you know, I think it's wonderful. I don't think we ought to be looking at inputs. Inputs don't really tell you anything. The output formula is what it ought to be... We're really working diligently to create the best environment we can for our students to succeed and I think we're making some progress, but we won't be able to compete with the other institutions whose profiles are very different from ours.

Other respondents from MTSU and Southwest commented on the access missions of their institutions and the importance of providing all students with the resources and opportunities to succeed. In interviews with faculty members, for example, respondents reflected on faculty commitment to retention

and completion through their efforts and those of their colleagues to meet with students outside of class for tutoring and advising. Yet, an academic leader at MTSU worried that faculty efforts and improved student success will not be sufficiently rewarded through the new formula:

> We have wonderful faculty here, really Hall of Fame faculty. They're great. Some of the best faculty I've ever had in my life at any institution, and I worry that we will be doing all these really wonderful experiments and we will improve our retention and graduation rates, but still money will be taken away from us.

Thematic Finding Two: "We're competitors of a sort, but we're also colleagues."

The second thematic finding deals with the common tension between collaboration and competition that we heard from campus respondents. Most respondents reported a highly collaborative environment across campuses, though even among these some worried that the state higher education landscape may become more competitive with funding cuts. The majority of respondents from the four campuses indicated that they shared information, including promising initiatives, with their counterparts at other Tennessee campuses and that they viewed public colleges as part of the same larger system working toward common goals. One UT, Knoxville faculty member, for example, mentioned the collaboration that occurred first among the UT system campuses and then with other 2-year and 4-year institutions in the TBR system to design a common transfer program that would ultimately become a Tennessee Transfer Pathway, which the CCTA authorized. Campus administrators often provided examples of sharing ideas even for smaller changes, such as a warning alert system in student management software that one community college respondent learned about from another institution.

Despite this shared collaborative approach, many expressed concerns similar to those below by a Pellissippi State respondent that this might change if the formula leads to drastic shifts in institutional funding:

> If the governor fully funds the formula every year and we increase our graduation 3.5% next year and the formula reflects that and Roane State, who's just west of us, increases theirs 5% and the formula reflects that, I think that's good. The problem comes when you get to the year where that doesn't happen… I mean, my preference is to work in a system where we understand that this is the state objective, we're in this system together. Yes, we're competitors of a sort but we're also colleagues and we're also working towards the same goal.

Another Pellissippi State leader shared a similar perspective that currently there is a collaborative approach among campus leaders, but that could change as the stakes rise:

> I think we all feel like we're sort of in the same sort of circumstances and situation. I think there's still a good sense of collegiality among the institutions and trying to move forward, because it is an overall state goal we're trying to accomplish. I think one of the benefits of this year was the full funding of the formula by the governor and the legislature. You know, I think

> it gets trickier when it's not fully funded and then really you see institutions who are taking dollars from other institutions through performance. You know, I think if that happens year after year, you have – it could create some potential tension and real issues.

Here again though, these comments reflect concerns about competition increasing in the future. At present, most respondents agreed with yet another Pellissippi State administrator who commented that, "I really have not heard anything from anybody that has said – indicating any kind of a concern, of sort of a cut-throat competitive environment with other community colleges or any other schools that we work with closely." Similarly, a Southwest leader reflected on resisting initial competitive instincts to ultimately take a more collaborative approach:

> Initially, that was the first thing I said, [why are we] going to share all these great ideas and best practices? Who is going to do that when they know that I might make -- Southwest might make better goals -- achieve more than they? Nobody is going to do that. But I think -- I guess people don't think down to that granular level, so we're still pretty collegial and doing things together. [Competition] really hasn't materialized, but then again, maybe they are doing something and they're just not telling me and I don't know.

The MTSU case, by contrast, illustrates that an "us versus them" mentality has taken hold. This campus also exhibited a much more competitive view toward interaction with other campuses than at the other institutions we studied. For example, respondents at MTSU shared certain planning documents with us, but asked that we keep them private as to not reveal any internal strategies. And, multiple respondents mentioned that MTSU had been dropped as a co-grantee on a large project, which they perceived to be motivated by the outcomes formula so that the other institution alone could reap all the benefits through the research measure. As one senior leader summarized, "so, people are starting to play these little monetary games with this formula." Yet, even within this context, many other MTSU respondents indicated that competitive motivations have not affected their collaboration with other institutions, especially those within the TBR system:

> My experience with the admissions and enrollment folks within the TBR system has been – that's a pretty open group that talks – we talk multiple times every week as a group about what do your numbers look like, how's enrollment looking, what are you doing?... you know, how can we all help each other out.

Respondents from the two governing board systems also had some concerns about the implications of reduced funding on competition. As one UT system representative hypothesized, "some of our campuses, you could have really good results, improve outcomes, but if you don't improve them as much as somebody else and there's no new money, guess what? You lose." A TBR system representative speculated on the effect of the outcomes formula on the systems' efforts to foster collaboration among campuses:

So in this world where people are nervous, and if they begin to think it's a zero sum game, then it certainly makes the systems' role much more difficult to fulfill in that we're all about collaboration, exchange of best practice, being able to transfer best practices, trying to create the consistency across campuses and so forth. If that's perceived as somehow being potentially harmful to an institution, then you begin to lose enthusiasm.

Thematic Finding Three: "The formula assumes a level playing field and it's not."

The third thematic finding is drawn primarily from the MTSU and Southwest cases. Based on respondents from these campuses, it seems clear that state politics, whether real or perceived, influenced campus responses and morale. Among the community colleges, the contrast between Southwest and Pellissippi State is striking. Southwest is urban and in the state's most populous and commercially vibrant city; Pellissippi's campus is suburban and in the backyard of the flagship campus and Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Southwest has the highest proportion of Pell eligible students (56.1%); Pellissippi State has the third lowest proportion (43.9%). Pellissippi has the highest average ACT scores for incoming students (19.8); Southwest has the lowest (16.6). Pellissippi has the third lowest percentage of incoming students enrolled in learning support courses (61.2%); Southwest has the highest (75.0%) (THEC, 2014). These differences make clear that neither Southwest not Pellissippi State represent the polls of Tennessee community colleges. Yet these stark differences highlight an underlying criticism that one Southwest administrator expressed as "the formula assumes a level playing field and it's not."

Similar tensions emerged between respondents at the two universities. MTSU respondents, for example, attribute the new funding formula to policymakers in Nashville wanting to make UT, Knoxville a Top 25 university. One MTSU respondent commented, "I don't think it takes a genius to see who the winners are set up to be and it's the UT system, it's specifically Knoxville." As one MTSU respondent outlines below, these perceived funding inequities precede the outcomes-based funding model:

We didn't mind a new modeling of how resources were going to be allocated, as long as you start with a level playing field, and that is not the way the [Tennessee] Higher Education Commission and the Tennessee Board of Regents started, and the most glaring example of that is the per student allocations to each of the institutions. Our allocation of state monies prior to the 2010 Act is roughly half per student of a UT-Knoxville student... So we objected from the beginning saying, you know, make us whole first, and make everybody kind of the same in per capita spending per student, and then we can go on with performance funding. But it didn't happen, and it will never happen, and that's the way it is, so that's the biggest glaring problem in my opinion.

Although the previous funding formula in Tennessee was enrollment-based, it did not allocate funding on a pure per capita basis, which has long been the preference of many at MTSU. The enrollment model included different funding rates based on students' major fields of study, degree types, and credit hours accumulated in undergraduate programs. Multiple MTSU respondents perceived both the previous

enrollment-based funding model and the current outcomes-based funding model to under-fund their campus.

Across all four cases, however, the uneven playing field that respondents mentioned most deals with campus and student differences. The outcomes formula accounts for student-level differences by awarding 40 percent premiums for adult and Pell-eligible students on the measures related to their success, such as year-to-year retention and graduation. Those respondents familiar with the formula lament that the premiums are well-meaning, but do not off-set the challenges faced by low-income and first-generation students. One Pellissippi State respondent commented on the difficulty of these students to graduate within the three-year graduation window:

> We keep pushing to get people through, which is important, but we have this huge population of low income, first generation, terribly under prepared student and if we're pushing to get everybody out to match the three year metric of getting them out, we're kind of turning them – we're setting this huge group of students up for failure because they can't do it in three years. They have a whole host of other things that they're dealing with. And I think that's a national push, you know, everybody – we know full-time students graduate quicker. That's great, so the push is well, everybody should be a full-time student. Well, that's not possible when you're working two minimum wage jobs and have three kids at home.

Although the outcomes-based formula does not include a graduation rate measure for graduation within a three-year window, respondents perceived the outcomes formula as incentivizing full-time enrollment perhaps as a way to maximize funding through the student progression measures (see Appendix A for more information about outcomes formula measures). Respondents from Southwest commented on the perceived disconnect between their perception that the outcomes-based funding model favors full-time students and the high proportion of students who are eligible for financial aid and require remedial and developmental courses. According to one Southwest respondent, "when you have 40 percent of your students coming to school not prepared for college, it's virtually impossible for those students to matriculate through a program in three years. It just isn't going to happen." In fact, as mentioned above, 75 percent of incoming students at Southwest require remedial and developmental coursework (the average for all Tennessee community colleges is 63.8 percent). Indeed, the perception among Southwest respondents was that their institution faced a unique set of challenges. Following is another statement by a Southwest administrator that reflects this concern with the funding model:

> This is what's unfair, Nashville, us [Southwest], and other schools in large metropolitan areas, the funding was not meant to help us. Because anytime you have inner city, and any time you have Pell grants, and any time you tell students go to college and you're going to get all this money, and when you're not providing the extra help for coaching and mentoring and stuff like that, inner cities -- most of our students are students who are the first in their family that have gone to school. They're students that are close to 13 to 20 on the ACT score list, and there are students that came from a very, very

poor K-12 system, and have almost zero study habits that have been passed through K-12 because they came to school. And we're expected with less and less resources all the time to get them to the two-year college.

This statement reveals a consistent tension between student access and success that was expressed by many respondents at Southwest and the other three campuses. Many respondents agreed that enhanced student services are essential, especially for first-generation college students. As one senior official at UT, Knoxville commented, "some of those populations that we know that sometimes struggle, and certainly I think that's the easy way, out because the funding model is not taking into consideration, you know, the kind of support services and additional staffing to really help institutions to improve when it comes to graduation and retention rates." Again, the outcomes-based funding model provides 40 percent premiums for Pell-eligible students with the intent to off-set these costs for additional support services. Yet, many respondents indicated that as the share of under-represented students in an institution grows, the premium cannot keep pace with the necessary support services. A senior administrator from MTSU comments below on how these student-level differences, when aggregated, can lead to significant challenges at the campus-level.

It's recognized, but the weight is not there... And so if the weight was there, you look at schools like Southwest, and you look at schools like us... We have a lower socioeconomic group... it works just the opposite, because the more of these students we bring in, the weight is not significant. The longer they're going to typically take to graduate. The longer they take to graduate, it's a negative for the institution.

Section 5: Recommendations

Findings from this study examining four institutions' responses to the CCTA and the new outcomes-based formula have many policy implications. Given this study's salience for the public institutions operating under the funding formula, from a practical perspective this study may help institutions learn from these four campus responses and help states learn from the benefits of outcomes-based funding models and some possible unintended consequences.

Recommendations for campuses

Align strategic planning efforts with state formula.

Campus leaders should first become fully familiar with the outcomes-based funding model's broad objectives and specific measures, then they should seek to align their planning efforts and goals with the formula. This does not mean that campuses should create a campus plan that is a mirror image of the state formula measures. Instead, campuses should identify elements of the formula or broader state completion policies that align best with campus goals. All four campuses have identified connections between their planning initiatives and the outcomes-based funding model. Even campuses that contested certain elements of the formula benefited from framing the campuses' student success and completion goals as connected to statewide funding and policy goals. This has served both to build campus support for broader statewide objectives and to dedicate campus resources to these high-priority initiatives. As respondents indicated in all four cases, the alignment of campus and state policies builds even stronger support for completion priorities.

Prioritize student learning.

Campuses should be careful to avoid over-reaching in their completion efforts that might strain students' learning experience and lead to an overly prescribed course-taking experience. Campus responses to the retention and completion elements of the outcomes-based formula included broader systematic changes, such as course redesigns, new advising software, and one-stop shops, and direct services for students, such as more advisors and mentoring programs. Yet, despite this balanced approach, students on all four campuses expressed concern that campus completion goals trump their individual learning objectives.

Seek additional resources.

Campuses should identify additional funding sources and collaborate with other institutions and organizations to craft their response to outcome-based funding models. The four campuses in our study used their networks with other Tennessee institutions and systems and with out-of-state institutions, consultants, and policy organizations to design various completion initiatives. The UTrack advising software, for example, was designed specifically for UT, Knoxville based on a similar program at the University of Florida. And, Pellissippi State received funding to develop and implement their cohort-based accelerated degree programs through a multi-institution grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education. Resources such as these help build support on campus for completion initiatives and help build more effective programs and initiatives.

Recommendations for states

Promote a public agenda for higher education.

States should use the implementation of outcomes-based funding models as an opportunity to build support for higher education. Although performance funding initiatives are often created to change the allocation of resources rather than increase the funding base, promoting a public agenda for statewide higher education can not only lead to campus initiatives more aligned with state goals, but also generate broader public and political support for higher education. Indeed, this is the experience in Tennessee. Funding for higher education has increased every year since the adoption of the CCTA and the Tennessee Promise program, which provides two years of community college tuition-free to recent high school graduates, serves as another signature statewide policy focused on college completion.

Communicate clearly the formula's measures and objectives.

State higher education leaders should clearly articulate both the funding formula's broader statewide policy objectives and the formula's specific measures, metrics, and definitions. Campuses in our study had varying perceptions of the outcomes-based formula's broader aims and specific measures. For example, many respondents from community colleges perceived the formula to incentivize full-time study and graduation within three years, which could be due to the different formula measures for universities and community colleges. State leaders should seek to balance their efforts to promote the broad objectives of outcomes-based funding with transparent and consistent communication with campuses on the specifics of the model.

Account for campus context in formula.

State outcomes-based formulas should include elements that account for differences in institutional mission and in student demographics. The Tennessee model accounts for this variation through different weights attached to the outcome measures for public universities and through 40 percent premiums for low-income and adult students at all campuses. Respondents from all campuses perceived these premiums to be insufficient to influence campus responses and to offset the resources necessary for these underrepresented students to persist at the rates of other students. This perspective was most pronounced at Southwest Tennessee Community College, an MSI with 56 percent of student eligible for Pell Grants. In addition to offering premiums for low-income and adult students to all campuses, states should also consider offering institutional-level premiums to campuses that have significant proportions of their student body from these populations. As Jones (2014) report on performance funding and MSIs suggests, states might also consider measures to address racial and ethnic equity. Such a policy could help to enhance the resource capacity on these campuses to offer support systems and programs to enhance student success in retention and ultimately degree attainment.

Accentuate collaboration among campuses.

States should foster collaboration between campuses and systems as much as possible. Although most campus leaders indicated that they continue to share ideas with colleagues from other Tennessee institutions, nearly all respondents indicated that this collaboration could fade as the funding stakes rise based on the outcomes formula. Respondents from the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents systems also expressed support for an outcomes-based formula approach that prioritizes campus-level improvements and sharing effective initiatives and programs. If the zero-sum nature of the outcomes formula remains, then perhaps other funding incentives could be provided to facilitate inter-campus collaboration among public colleges and universities. Indeed, accentuating collaboration among campuses in the implementation of institution-level initiatives is consistent with the collaborative process among campus and state actors to create the outcomes-based funding model.

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Appendix A:
Outcomes-Based Formula Model Data Definitions
Revised 10-23-12

Data Definition	
University and Community College	
Student Progression	The number of full-time and part-time students whose cumulative credits earned at the beginning of a semester are less than the established credit hour threshold benchmarks of 24, 48, or 72 student credit hours for Universities or 12, 24, or 36 student credit hours for Community Colleges and whose cumulative credit hours earned at the end of the semester are equal to or greater than the credit hour threshold benchmarks during the academic year. For the academic years prior to Fall 2011, the outcomes are identified by adding a student's attempted semester credit hours (sum of hours by credit type) to the cumulative credits earned using THEC 14th Day Enrollment Files. Beginning with Fall 2011, outcomes are identified by subtracting a student's undergraduate term institution combined earned hours from their cumulative credits earned using the THEC End of Term Enrollment File.
Transfers Out with 12 Hours	The number of undergraduate students who transferred out to any in-state public – and some private –institution in an academic year who accumulated at least 12 earned student credit hours from the originating institution. The student must have been enrolled at the originating institution at any time one academic year prior to transferring (i.e. "continuously enrolled"). Students transferring to an institution in the fall after being enrolled at a separate institution the previous spring, but not the previous summer, are included in this outcome.
Degrees and Certificates per 100 FTE	The combined total of associate's and bachelor's degrees (associate's and long-term certificates for community colleges) conferred during an academic year for every 100 year-round, end-of-term undergraduate full-time enrollment (FTE) generated during the same academic year. Non-degree seeking students are included in undergraduate FTE. Full-time enrollment is 30 semester credit hours.
University Only	
Bachelor's and Associate's	The combined total of bachelor's and associate's degrees conferred to undergraduate students during an academic year. APSU and TSU are the only universities that grant associate's degrees. Students earning multiple degrees in an academic year have each earned degree count as a separate outcome. Double majors do not count as two outcomes. The intent is that this outcome will be based on award year, not completion year data.
Master's / Ed Specialist Degrees	The combined total of master's and education specialist's degrees and certificates conferred to v students during an academic year. Students earning multiple degrees in an academic year will have each earned degree count as a separate outcome. Double majors with same degree (e.g., MA) do not count as two outcomes.
Doctoral / Law Degrees	The combined total of doctoral and Law degrees conferred to students during an academic year. Does not include medical or pharmacy degrees. Students earning multiple degrees in an academic year will have each earned degree count as a separate outcome. Double majors with same degree (e.g., Ph.D.) do not count as two outcomes.
Research and Service	Expenditures on activities eligible for indirect cost allocation, primarily but not exclusively externally generated funding for research, service or instruction. The data should exclude financial aid, capital funding, state appropriations, donations from foundations, and practice income.
Six-Year Graduation Rate	First-time, full-time, fall freshmen and summer first-time freshmen who continued in the fall, attempting 12 credit hours at the census date, who were awarded a bachelor's or associate's degree as of the summer semester following their sixth year. Prior to the 2013-14 formula, the graduation rate outcome did not include degrees awarded in the summer semester following the students' sixth year. Beginning in the 2013-14, the two oldest years of data will include the trailing summer in the graduation rate calculation. Currently, THEC tracks students who transferred from their host institution and graduated from any public Tennessee institution and some private Tennessee institutions (based on TELS information).
Data Definition	
Community College Only	
Dual Enrollment	The unduplicated headcount of high school students taking degree-credit courses in an academic year. Headcounts from the THEC 14th Day Enrollment Files used prior to Fall 2010. THEC End of Term Files used for headcount beginning with Fall 2010. This outcome includes -- but is not limited to -- the metric used by the TELS Dual Enrollment grant.
Associate's	The total associate's degrees conferred during an academic year. Students earning multiple degrees in an academic year will have each earned degree count as a separate outcome. The intent is that this outcome will be based on award year, not completion year data.

1 to 2 Year Certificates	The total number of certificates requiring 24 or more credit hours granted during an academic year. Students earning multiple certificates in an academic year will have each earned certificate count as a separate outcome. The intent is that this outcome will be based on award year, not completion year data. General education certificates are excluded from this metric.
Less Than 1 Year Certificates	The total number of certificates requiring less than 24 credit hours granted during a calendar year. Only certificates of less than 24 hours that represent the highest award earned at stopout will be counted.
Job Placements	The number of placeable graduates from the spring, summer, and fall terms within a calendar year who obtain employment in a related field through June 30 of the following year. This is the same definition that has been used, and is currently used, for Performance Funding: Quality Assurance.
Remedial & Developmental Success	The number of full-time and part-time students who were enrolled in any remedial or developmental course or instruction who then successfully completed a college level course in a subsequent semester within three academic years of their initial cohort year. Census date information is used instead of end-of-term data because THEC's inability to collect course level data makes it impossible to know if a student completed a R&D course they were enrolled in at the census date. For example, if a student is enrolled for 15 credit hours at the census date and finishes the semester with 12 credit hours, THEC is unable to determine which class the student dropped.
Workforce Training	The total number of contact hours from an academic year. Contact hours are defined as a minimum of 50 minutes of learning activity for courses or activities that provide individuals with soft skills or technical skill-sets for the workplace but carry no institutional credit applicable toward a degree, diploma, or certificate.
Sub-populations	
Adults	Students 25 years or older at the time the outcome is achieved. Used only for progression and undergraduate degrees and certificates. Age is calculated at the end of the month for each outcome (e.g., if commencement is in May, age would be determined based on age as of the last day in May).
Low-Income	Pell eligible students at any time during their college career. Used only for progression and undergraduate degrees and certificates.
Fixed Costs	
M&O	Maintenance and operations. Represented by a dollar rate per E&G square foot. Also includes lease costs less any non- state lease funding. Same as the now defunct enrollment based formula.
Utilities	A dollar rate per E&G square foot. Same as the now defunct enrollment based formula.
Equipment Replacement	Ten percent of current equipment inventory value. Same as the now defunct enrollment based formula.
E&G Space	Education and General space. Space used for academic support, institutional administration, instruction, physical plant operations, research, or student services.
Other	
Performance Funding: Quality Assurance	Previously known only as Performance Funding, the Performance Funding: Quality Assurance program allows for institutions to receive up to an additional 5.45 percent of their formula recommendation by meeting annual targets related to learning engagement, access, and success.
Academic Year	Summer, fall, and spring semesters. For example, summer 2009, fall 2009, and spring 2010 represent the 2009-10 academic year.
FTE	Full Time Equivalent student. The combined total undergraduate credit hours taken by all full-time and part-time students over an academic year divided by a full-time course load. Only undergraduate FTE is used in the funding formula. Beginning with fall 2010, this is the total end-of-term attempted credit hours divided by 30. The total census date credit hours divided by 30 was used prior to fall 2010.
Cumulative Credit Hours Earned	Hours from dual enrollment programs, AP courses, hours transferred in from other institutions, and all other sources from where hours can be tracked.
Earned Credit Hours	Credit hours received after completing a class with a passing grade.
Attempted Credit Hours	All end-of-term hours attempted by students. Does include failed courses.
Census Date Enrollment	Students enrolled at the fourteenth day of the semester.

Retrieved on December 10, 2014 from
http://www.tn.gov/thec/Divisions/Fiscal/funding_formula/Detailed%20Outcomes%20Formula%20Definitions%2005-2013.pdf

Appendix B: University of Tennessee, Knoxville Completion Initiatives

Academic Affairs
Align financial aid policies to encourage students to graduate in 4 years
Change from "undecided" majors to "exploratory"
Changes to drop and waitlist policies to address bottleneck courses
Discussion about graduation options in 3 years
Encourage earlier major selection
Encourage enrollment during summer
First-year studies requirements
Increased online course offerings
Increased focus on transfer students
Increased funding for faculty raises, graduate education, infrastructure, and research
Strategic Instruction Fund to hire additional instructors to address bottleneck courses
Take 15, Graduate in 4 initiative

Advising
Implementation of UTrack advising software
More advising-related sessions in orientation
Professionalized advising in some programs

Planning
Enrollment Management Committee
Platinum Analytics scheduling software
Standing transfer committee
Top 25 Planning Committee
Undergraduate Tactics Team (formerly SWAT)

Student Services
Academic success workshops for students on probation
AIM academic coaching
Discussions about more living learning communities
Hiring transfer transition guide
Ignite program, student retreat
One-stop shop in library
Orientation emphasis on 4-year completion
Sophomore boot camp
Torch Night (students are given tassel that says 2017)
UT LEAD program, mentoring and services

Appendix C: Middle Tennessee State University Completion Initiatives

Academic Affairs
Analysis of bottleneck and gateway courses
Course redesign on those with high fail/drop rates
Increased use of Prior Learning Assessments
New major in University Studies
Retention hearings

Advising
Academic Map Project to encourage 4-year graduation
Assign academic counselor upon admission
Professional & Faculty advisers
Student alert system for early intervention

Planning
Dean's Council
Distribution of Dr. Vincent Tinto's book, Completing College
Quest for Student Success strategic initiative
Student Success, Inclusion, and Retention Summit
University Leadership Council

Student Services
Connection Point program to engage first-year students
One-stop shop new building
Orientation emphasis on 4-year completion

Appendix D: Pellissippi State Community College Completion Initiatives

Academic Affairs
Cohort-based accelerated degree programs
Discussions about reverse articulation
More class offerings at different site campuses
Shortening of time students spend in learning support
Tennessee Transfer Pathways
UTK- Pellissippi partnership, bridge program

Advising
Consideration of implementing Degree Compass
Faculty Academy, workshop on advising
Implementation of DegreeWorks advising software

Planning
Enrollment management committee
Learning Council
Student Graduation Initiatives Taskforce

Policy Changes
Identifying students who have a lot of credits so that they are not given excess financial aid
Stricter deadlines for financial aid and registration
Streamlining of the graduation process, eliminate $25 graduation fee

Recruitment
Efforts to enhance dual enrollment
More direct communications with students (e.g., postcard)
New magnet high school
Revamped application

Student Services
Creation of One-stop shop at the Magnolia campus
QEP focus on student engagement and active learning activities
Orientation, increased emphasis on completion
Project Making Graduation Attainable
RFP for customer relations management software

Appendix E: Southwest Tennessee Community College Completion Initiatives

Academic Affairs
Addition of weekend sequences for adults and early-bird classes before work
Discussions increasing offerings in most successful programs (nursing, EMT training, culinary arts, etc).
Efforts to enhance classroom dynamics
Increased use of cohorts and block scheduling

Advising
AdvisorTrac, new advising software
Faculty training on advising
Mandatory advising to register for courses

Planning
Customer service surveys
Series of senior staff retreats

Recruitment
Math initiatives for high school students

Student Services
Bridges out of Poverty seminar for all faculty and staff
Created an adult lounge on campus
Customer service initiative
Mandatory orientation for all students
New retention position- Executive Director, Retention & Graduation
SMARTS mentoring program