

Avenues to Completion for Some College No Degree Population: A Toolbox Approach

Strategic Plan Theme: Student Success

Funding Level: Between \$1-5 million

Facility Needs: Adjustments to existing facilities will be needed

Submitting Unit: Institutional Research

Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.

The Some College No Degree (SCND) proposal will be coordinated by an advisory board that will work closely with key collaborators to initially enact each of the identified strategies. Each of the strategies will have key members who work to realize the activities and then report back to the board. This structure will support collaboration across units and within MSU and out to regional business partners. While each activity may be implemented in isolation, its success is dependent on the success of the others. Thus communication, collaboration, and transparency is key for this proposal. At the outset, we have identified partners and collaborators as: The colleges, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation, Admissions, Government Relations, Institutional Research, Office of Financial Aid, Outreach and Engagement, the Registrar Office, Student Life and Engagement, and Student-Athlete Support Services. The Advisory Board will work closely with each partner and it may be necessary to add collaborators as each strategy is developed and then implemented.

What is the proposal's big theme or idea?

The population of individuals completing high school is projected to decrease in Michigan, requiring MSU to recruit a new population of college students beyond our current base. One such group aligned with our land grant mission is the 1.9 million Michigan residents who have Some College, but No Degree (SCND). Developing MSU as a SCND welcoming institution will also connect the institution with Governor Whitmer's goal of 60% of Michigan residents having a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030. Relatedly, regional businesses are seeking opportunities to retool their workforce through educational assistant programs to meet changing needs, and regrettably are not finding these opportunities within Michigan.

We propose creating a unit focused on recruiting SCND students, partnering with local businesses to create educational assistance programs, and ensuring the successful completion of degrees for SCND students. SCND students leave higher education for a variety of reasons and MSU will need various and diverse strategies to be agile enough to meet SCND student needs and circumstances. These strategies include curricular innovation to meet the learning needs of SCND students, staff and peer support targeted to SCND students unique needs and circumstances, and financial support. An individualized toolbox approach draws on MSU resources, knowledge, and skills found in academic departments, admissions, advising, athletics, and more to provide specific support each SCND student needs to be successful.

What is the proposal's goal?

MSU will be a destination institution for SCND students to complete their degree and will establish partnerships with local businesses to provide opportunities for their workforce to complete certificates and degrees. The following strategies are an initial start for MSU's Toolbox for SCND students.

1. Review Policies and Procedures: Data analysis of SCND students at MSU highlights policies and

practices that contribute to students leaving and MSU and barriers to their return. Revision of policies benefit SCND students and will decrease future Spartans from becoming SCND.

2. Flexible Course Modality and Scheduling: Strategic courses must be offered online and have flexible scheduling options such as evening and weekend courses. Additionally, self-paced asynchronous courses outside of the traditional semester format will allow students to accelerate their degree.
3. Credit for Experiential Learning: Experiential learning credits recognize the knowledge students have obtained through a broad range of experiences outside of the classroom including military service, professional work experience, technical training, or life experiences. Credits for experiential learning would be vetted by the university and could entail students creating portfolios of their experience identifying key learning concepts connected to learning outcomes of related courses.
4. New Degree Programs/Expanded Certificates: A bachelor's in general studies degree allows students already on a career path to create a unique curriculum aligned with their skills, knowledge, and career hopes. Expanded certificate programs allow students to demonstrate skill proficiency in specific subjects.
5. Recruitment and Orientation: SCND students have differing needs and barriers when deciding to return to complete their degrees. Therefore, MSU would need to create an intentional recruitment and orientation strategy geared towards the specific needs and concerns of SCND students. Credit transfer policies would also need to be rethought from a SCND centered framework.
6. SCND Focused Completion Advisors: Returning students need an institutional navigator who is a single point of contact from recruitment through graduation. SCND completion advisors would have expertise in admissions, financial aid, academic advising, career advising, wellbeing support, and retention support.
7. Financial Support: Supporting students to complete their degrees requires the elimination of financial barriers to re-enrollment including payment of unpaid balances. Small progression grants may also incentivize students to remain enrolled and progress towards their degree.
8. Wellbeing support: Wellbeing support must be an essential strategy for assisting the SCND student population. Support could include services for childcare and adjusting mental health and wellbeing services to meet the needs of the SCND student population.

Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.

Intentionally recruiting, supporting, and graduating SCND students will actualize MSU's land grant mission to serve the state of Michigan and support the public good. As a leader in serving SCND students MSU will help the state of Michigan meet Governor Whitmer's goal of 60% of Michigan residents having a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030. Completing a degree offers the opportunity to change their lives, increase the state's tax revenues by increasing workers' salaries, and improving the physical and financial health of the state's citizens. By partnering with local, regional, and national businesses to provide educational assistance programs, MSU can educate residents for a changed work environment, thus helping meet labor demands locally and regionally. MSU can make central Michigan a destination for revamping the workforce. Finally, serving the SCND student population will increase our degree completion rates, while also providing a new source of tuition revenue.

Who will be impacted?

The proposal will most directly impact the SCND students who return to MSU to complete their degree or to improve their skills set with a certificate. By reaching this population we can increase completion rates but also decrease the opportunity gaps in our completion rates. Knowing students leave for various reasons and have differing needs and barriers impacting their return, it will be imperative that strategies focus on the learning needs of SCND students. Students who are near completers (15 credits or less) or those who simply didn't apply to graduate have distinct needs from those who left for financial reasons or those who struggled academically earlier in their studies. Specific population identified with unique needs include students whose original degree program no longer exists or students wishing to pursue a different program than when they

last attended and students who left their studies to work or to cover family responsibilities; this group may be more sizeable in the short run due to the last two years and COVID. Within the latter group, there is a unique subset of former student-athletes who left to play professionally but would like to finish their degree in the off-season or after their professional career.

For MSU the impact will be increased enrollment and increased tuition revenue. As MSU becomes known as an SCND welcoming institution, it is likely to attract SCND students from other schools, further increasing the revenue base. It will also diversify course offerings and programs, which could generate new positions for staff and faculty. The diversity in course offering and modalities will also support current students who have requested greater variety in curricular offerings and modalities. Current students will also benefit as we identify key barriers in understanding why students leave and why they choose to return.

What does sustainability for your proposal look like?

An SCND advisory board will oversee the creation of these strategies by working collaboratively with key MSU partners. An end goal will be the development of an SCND unit which oversees the successful implementation and maintenance of MSU's goal of recruiting and graduating the SCND student population. The SCND unit will meet and discuss with the SCND advisory board as needed.

Sustainability is achieved when the SCND unit is managing and monitoring the proposed activities and MSU is serving both the SCND and traditional student population seamlessly. Modifications and additional issues may arise as the unit grows and as MSU learns more about the population. The unit and activities will be sustained via the revenue generated by SCND enrollment and business partnerships.

Lessons learned from the SCND population can meet the needs of current students, programs, and faculty/staff. Better understanding what skills the workforce demands and the reasons why students leave school can assist in aiding our current student population. It can also help MSU programs be agile in reacting to and anticipating ever-changing workforce needs.