

Dr. Martina Harris

“Tennessee Promise First Year Review: Recommendations to identify consistent practices among TBR institutions for handling unofficial withdrawal”.



By
Dr. Martina Harris, Director of Nursing/Associate Professor
Chattanooga State Community College
2016 Maxine Smith Fellow

Mentors

Dr. Nate Essex, President Emeritus, Southwest Tennessee Community College

It was a great honor to have the opportunity to participate in the 2016 Maxine Smith Fellows Program. Thank you Dr. Flora Tydings for seeing the capacity in me and nominating me for this prestigious fellowship. Dr. Essex, I am privileged to have you as my mentor and forever grateful to you for requiring me to step out of my comfort zone- I learned so much. Also, thanks for all the many phone calls and timely advice on so many levels. I would also like to thank Dr. Kenyatta Lovett for affording me the opportunity to work along side him on such a crucially important project and always being there to help me see the big picture. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Mark Knutsen, Dean of Nursing & Allied Health for his unwavering support of my ongoing professional development opportunities and for always encouraging me.

Dr. Martina Harris

Abstract

The purpose of the project was to identify current practices as well as identify any consistencies among all 13 Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) community colleges, along with two TBR universities (Tennessee State University and Austin Peay University) on their process and procedures of handling “unofficial” withdrawal of students from a course. Recommendations will be developed for possible system wide implementation on ways to address the issue for handling “unofficial” withdrawal for TN Promise students.

Dr. Martina Harris

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TN Promise is made up of three partners (tnAchieve, Ayers Foundation, and Regional Economic Development Initiative (REDI) serving students throughout the state. TN Promise provides a last dollar scholarship to all Tennessee high school seniors. This program is one of Governor Haslam’s Drive to 55 campaign. All 13 Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) community colleges, along with 27 Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) and two TBR universities (Tennessee State University and Austin Peay University) are participating in the TN Promise Program. In 2015-2016 there were a total of 16,291 TN Promise students enrolled, with 85% of those being enrolled at a community college or Austin Peay and 13% at TCATs. Current information for 2016 shows there are currently 15,483 students enrolled as TN Promise students. In order to be eligible for TN Promise students must complete the following:

- Apply for the program by November 1
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by January of each year
- Attend two mandatory meetings led by the local partnering organization. Failure to attend the mandatory meeting will result in loss of the Tennessee Promise
- Complete and submit 8 hours of community service for each semester
- Apply to and enroll in an eligible institution
- Maintain fulltime enrollment status

Initially, ~~my~~ the purpose of this project was to conduct a systematic review of TN Promise data to identify trends of student enrollment and retention among the community colleges. However, after an initial meeting with Dr. Kenyatta Lovett, (who at the time was serving as Assistant Vice Chancellor of Community Colleges for the Tennessee Board of Regents) it was discovered there was a more pressing project at hand. ~~The A~~ meeting was convened in Nashville on July 20, 2016, with Dr. Lovett, TN Promise partners, ~~as well as~~ and Financial Aid and Records Directors from across the state of Tennessee ~~with the.~~ The goal of the meeting was simply to gain a better understanding of what ~~other~~ institutions within the TBR system ~~were~~ doing relative to unofficial withdrawal, ~~and to~~ developing common definitions for withdrawal, and the processes for handling “unofficial withdrawal”. During the meeting, it was apparent institutions within the TBR system varied across-the-board on how they interpreted student’s attendance and ultimately reported the information to Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC). As an outcome of this meeting a *General Recommendation* document was created to allow for ongoing discussion and submission to the various sub-councils in TBR for consideration of such worthy and timely topic (Appendix 1).

Dr. Martina Harris

One of the key issues verbalized during of the meeting was how TN Promise students were not remaining eligible due to “unofficial” withdrawal and falling to part-time status. ~~And what could we as a system do to decrease the number of students who would remain eligible if we assigned fewer FA’s. It was also apparent that some institutions had a process in place for assigning FA’s as others did not. The system office should coordinate the varying definitions and uses of failing on attendance (“FA”), as some institutions have a process for this designation while others do not. Assigning fewer FA’s would increase the number of TN Promise eligible students.~~

Commented [JK1]: What is FA?

A few examples of the comments being shared during the meeting:

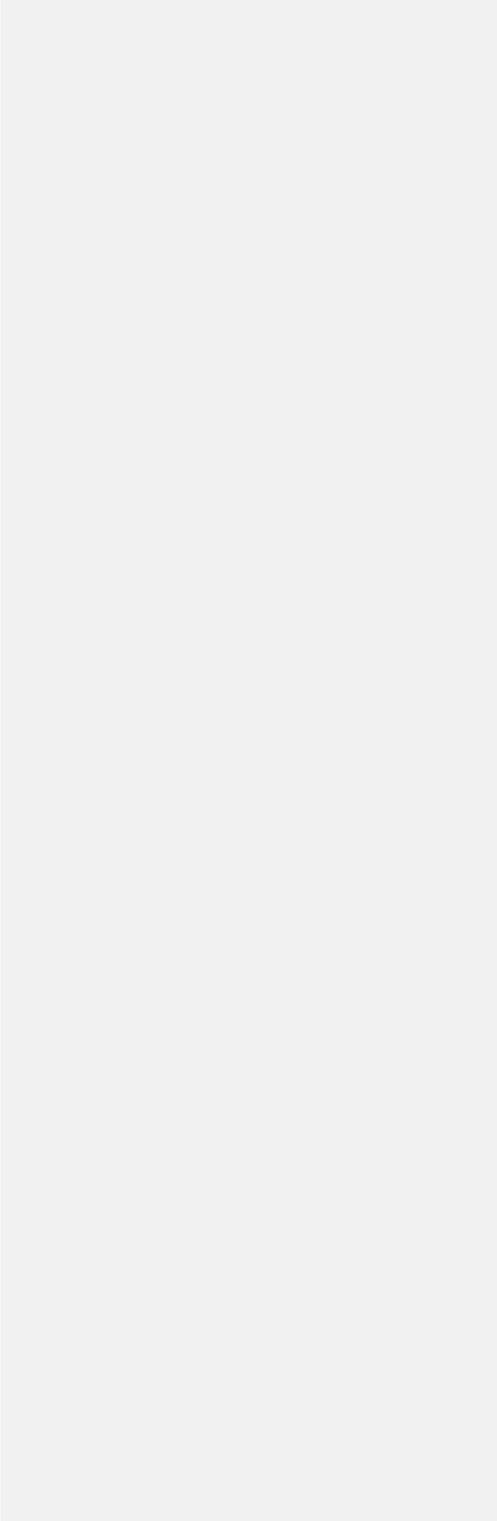
- Students being “unofficially” withdrawn from a course due to not completing enough of the work. What is considered enough? How is enough measured?
- No consistency among the TBR Institutions as to how long the students must attend the course in order to “earn the F”
- Faculty advising the students to stop attending class as there is no way they could possibly pass.
- What happens if a student completes everything but the final?
- How does the co-requisite model impact this problem? What happens if a student is registered for 15 hours and passes Comp I with a B and fails learning support and is assigned an FA in the other class?

~~As Director of Nursing, I had no first hand knowledge of this problem that was causing students to loose funding. Initially, I did not see how, “unofficial withdrawal” could affect me or my faculty, however, as I This meeting provided an opportunity to gain a better understand of the issues related to faulty assigning grades for failure to attend. During this meeting, it was mentioned that quickly learned during this meeting, some colleges allow faculty to make this administration designation and thus the need for me to learn and understand the role faculty plays. Again, there was no one answer to the above questions and no consistency throughout the colleges.~~

Commented [JK2]: Not a fan of personal language

So as a result of the wide-ranging processes currently in place across the system the group spent several hours and many emails discussing ways to improve the process. The group shared genuine concern as to the need to develop some type of comprehensive model that could be implemented system wide and hopefully resolve some of the concerns about assigning FA’s arbitrarily. This General Recommendation Draft is the first step in trying to unify the campuses surrounding the “unofficial withdrawal” issue. There is still discussion to be had, regarding how RODP and others handle “unofficial withdrawal.” This document, will hopefully provide initial opportunities for the many campus leaders and stakeholders to continue to work together to implement processes to ensure students are not being negatively impacted. Further meetings are needed to discuss how this project can become a comprehensive model for unifying our system on “unofficial withdrawal.” Next steps for this project would be to submit general recommendations draft to finical aid sub council for input.

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References

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