

Impacting Retention and Graduation Rates Through the Realignment of Institutional Policies, Procedures and Operations with National Compliance Metrics

A Report to the President of Kentucky State University
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Introduction

With the increased focus on accountability by state and federal policy makers, Kentucky State University has limited choice when examining student outcomes as a measure of quality and standards compliance. With President Obama's edict that America will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020, KSU's graduation rates will continue to assume increased importance and scrutiny. Maguire Associates (2010) found that among 23 criteria of institutional quality, high school seniors chose graduation rates as the fifth most important indicator of institutional quality, ahead of factors such as graduate school placement, a rigorous core curriculum, existence of an honors program, and college rankings in U.S. News & World Report and other college guides.

Pursuant to the various analyses, task force recommendations, external consultations, and internal speculations that have focused on Kentucky State University's retention and graduation productivity, the rational assumption has evolved that KSU's pursuit of improvements may be mitigated by more complex and interrelated factors. For the purposes of this inquiry, the Office of Enrollment Management (OEM) has identified those factors within the context of KSU's institutional policies, procedures, and operational practices, especially as each regards both the current and anticipated compliance metrics associated with institutional quality.

Environmental Scan of Current KSU Practices

Over the past forty plus years, various KSU policies have been created and operationalized either in response to perceived problems or directives, or most often, in response to both internal and external forces. The present initiative focuses on how KSU's current policies and operational procedures promote, interfere with, or even delay the satisfaction of graduation requirements.

While there are various national reports detailing the disparity in graduation rates by race,

income, and institutional type, generally speaking, KSU's retention and graduation rates are impacted by a variety of factors, both (1) external to the University, and (2) internal, or institutional. Students' economic circumstances, number of hours of off-campus work per week, academic preparation prior to admission to the University, etc., are certainly important external factors, and Kentucky State University's previous retention and graduation efforts have narrowly focused on such factors, as they do impact academic progress and time-to-degree. However, missing in all previous initiatives has been any focused examination and analysis of internal or institutional policies and procedures. Such an analysis is critical because operational policies and procedures must be effectively aligned and synchronized with KSU's Mission and Values set, i.e., they must emerge from that Mission and Values set.

Recent history indicates that KSU's continued efforts to improve retention and graduation rates will never represent a simple task. Past OEM analyses have yielded various external "causes" for the low graduation rates of our students, such as "financial need," the necessity of "working long hours", "family responsibilities." Many on our campus would also attribute the rates to the "inadequate preparation" of many students for college level work which, in turn, results in large numbers of our students requiring remediation. Moreover, some have posited and inquired that "better prepared" students would graduate more quickly. "Why don't we just admit better prepared students?"

OEM's and the institution's responses to these complex issues of retention, graduation rates and time-to-degree are not so simply derived. Kentucky State University follows and fully adheres to the admission practices set forth in *KENTUCKY PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY PUBLIC ADMISSION REGULATION 13:KAR:2:020*. The College Admissions policy contains the minimum qualifications for institutional admission as first-time freshmen, precollege curriculum assessment, and guidelines for the assessment and placement of students. KSU's students are additionally required to meet a more stringent Index Score, which factors in the High School Grade Point Average with ACT/SAT score results. While a large component of our students are typically in the top one-third of their high school graduating classes, their ACT/SAT scores are typically in the 16-21 range. All of our Transfer students are qualified for admission if they have G.P.A.s of 2.0 or higher in attempted transferable units, are in good standing at the last college or university attended, and meet qualifying standards such as completion of General Education requirements. National and regional trends in high school graduates' subsequent developmental requirements clearly portend that Kentucky State University will continue to enroll eligible students, many of whom will continue to need remediation.

While many of these external reasons for low retention and graduation rates, such as those cited above, may be beyond the ability of the University to control, we can and must:

- (1) Examine University practices and policies over which we must exercise informed control; and
- (2) Identify barriers to timely graduation, and implement changes to improve graduation rates.

Unintended conflict and inefficacy are most likely assured when an institution's mission and values are not the primary source of its applicable policies and procedures. Moreover, while previous KSU initiatives have assumed the consistent relationship of KSU's Mission, values set, and its operational policies and procedures, the present inquiry seeks to better assess this association, as it affects any efforts to control those external factors that are associated with retention and graduation (productivity). It is our belief that various policies and operational procedures designed to smooth progress through the academic system may, in fact, create an internal culture that alters student, faculty, and staff behavior, and results in decreased retention, Transfer-out, and prolonging rather than accelerating time to graduation.

Purpose

Unlike similar and recent institutional initiatives, the focus of this report is not on special at-risk populations, nor how to facilitate their access and ultimate success within the institution. The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed, data-informed, comparative analysis of the institution's policies, procedures and operational practices, as they are commonly associated with retention and graduation. The inferences resulting from this comparative analysis will be articulated in the form of direct recommendations for their alignment with Kentucky State University's Mission, Values set, and compliance metrics regarding retention and graduation.

The primary focus of the present inquiry was on those internal factors affecting retention and graduation rates, those which **can be impacted by the institution**. Those factors were identified within the institutional dimensions of (1) Policies, (2) Procedures, and (3) Operational Practices.

The report is divided into three sections: (1) Comparative Analyses of Current Policies and Operational Procedures, (2) An Analysis of Relevant Internal Data, and (3) Recommendations, with discussion about the problems addressed and the rationales for the specific recommendations.

Methodology

Six Historically Black Colleges and Universities were selected and surveyed to identify their specific policies, procedures and operational practices and to better inform a comparative analysis of KSU's current policies, procedures and operational practices. The institutions were selected based on (1) their diversity of mission, size and geographical location, (2) the socio-economic similarities of their students with those of KSU, (3) the historical similarities that those institutions share with KSU, and (4) their demonstrated Retention and/or Graduation Rates, which are consistent with KSU's compliance metrics. Those comparative institutions appear below in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative HBCU Characteristics

| Institution | Undergrad Enrollment | % Receiving Financial Aid | % Pell Eligible | % Receiving Loans | % Receiving Grants or Scholarships | Graduation Rate | Retention Rate | Transfer-out Rate |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| KSU | 2,606 | 81% | 51% | 65% | 73% | 25% | 54% | 43% |
| Elizabeth City State University | 3,240 | 96% | 75% | 56% | 93% | 42% | 74% | 14% |
| Miles College | 1,668 | 98% | 83% | 91% | 89% | 24% | 55% | N/A |
| North Carolina Central University | 6,520 | 97% | 72% | 86% | 89% | 38% | 69% | 15% |
| Winston-Salem State University | 6,333 | 95% | 65% | 69% | 69% | 36% | 77% | 18% |
| Spellman College | N/A | | | | | | | |
| Hampton University | 4,361 | 90% | 37% | 73% | 63% | 54% | 74% | 6% |

NCES Data for 2009-10

The databases used to inform this analysis are associated with (1) the Kentucky State University Office of Institutional Research, (2) The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), (3) OEM’s Institutional Survey on Academic Policies and Practices, and (4) the catalogues and academic bulletins of the selected comparative HBCUs.

The specific policies, procedures and operational practices encompass those for:

1. Admission
2. General Education
3. Satisfactory Academic Progress
4. Course Repeats
5. Academic Sanctions
6. Financial Aid Sanctions

Assumptions

To facilitate this purpose, the following assumptions are active:

1. The fluidity of graduation rate data, as none of the existing national databases provides a graduation rate that accounts for all students.
2. This policy analysis exclusively focuses on undergraduate graduation rates, and does not include graduate education.
3. Alternative measures are utilized, when and where necessary, to facilitate a multi-dimensional comparative analysis.
4. The six-year graduation rate is the standard for all internal comparisons.

Comparative Data on Admission Policies

- Comparative data indicate that no other institution utilizes an Index in qualifying students for admission.
- While all institutions require completion of some pre-college curriculum framework, only KSU utilizes the categorization of Conditional admission as an admissions standard.

Table 2: Selective Admission Characteristics

| <i>Institution</i> | <i>Selective Admission</i> | <i>Conditional Admission</i> | <i>Retention Rate</i> | <i>Graduation Rate</i> | <i>Transfer-out Rate</i> |
|---------------------------|---|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>KSU</i> | Attain a minimum Admission Index of 430 | Index of 320-429 or evidence of PCC deficiencies | 54% | 25% | 43% |
| <i>ECSU</i> | Satisfactory combination of GPA and SAT/ACT score | No Category | 74% | 42% | 14% |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|---|-------------|-----|-----|-----|
| MC | Submission of ACT or SAT scores is strongly encouraged | No Category | 55% | 24% | N/A |
| NCCU | Satisfactory class rank with a grade point average of at least 2.0; Submission of ACT or SAT Scores | No Category | 69% | 38% | 15% |
| WSSU | Submission of ACT or SAT scores | No Category | 77% | 36% | 18% |
| SC | Submission of ACT or SAT Scores | No Category | | | |
| HU | Submission of ACT or SAT Scores | No Category | 74% | 54% | 6% |

Comparative Data on General Education Policies

- Comparative data indicate only one institution, Miles College, with General Education (GE) Requirements similar to KSU's 53 three hour requirement.
- Coincidentally, Miles College has similar retention and graduation rates as KSU, 55% and 24%, respectfully.
- Winston Salem State University has the fewest GE requirements at 41 hours, and the highest retention rate at 77%.
- Comparative institutions with GE requirements ranging from 41 to 46 hours document retention rates ranging from 69% to 77%.
- Comparative institutions with GE requirements ranging from 41 to 46 hours document Graduation rates ranging from 36% to 56%.
- Comparative institutions with GE requirements ranging from 41 to 46 hours document Transfer-out rates ranging from only 6% to 18%.
- KSU's Transfer-out rate of 43% far exceeds those of all comparative institutions.

Table 3: General Education Requirements

| <i>Institution</i> | <i>General</i> | <i>Retention</i> | <i>Graduation</i> | <i>Transfer-out Rate</i> |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|

| | Education Requirements | Rate | Rate | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----|
| KSU | 53 | 54% | 25% | 43% |
| ECSU | 46 | 74% | 42% | 14% |
| MC | 55 | 55% | 24% | N/A |
| NCCU | 42 | 69% | 38% | 15% |
| WSSU | 41 | 77% | 36% | 18% |
| SC | 44 | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| HU | 44 | 74% | 54% | 6% |

Comparative Data on Structured 1st to 2nd Year

- Only two institutions utilize formalized and institutionalized first-to-second year structures, Miles College and North Carolina Central University.
- Two other institutions, Elizabeth City State University and Winston-Salem State University, have clear policies and processes for monitoring the first year matriculation and completion of the gateway curricular requirements.

Table 4: Structured 1st to 2nd Year

| Institution | Structured 1st to 2nd Year Experience | Retention Rate | Graduation Rate | Transfer-out Rate |
|--------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| KSU | No | 54% | 25% | 43% |
| ECSU | No | 74% | 42% | 14% |
| MC | Yes; The Freshman Studies Program | 55% | 24% | N/A |
| NCCU | Yes; The University College | 69% | 38% | 15% |
| WSSU | No | 77% | 36% | 18% |

| | | | | |
|-----------|----|-----|-----|----|
| SC | No | | | |
| HU | No | 74% | 54% | 6% |

Comparative Data on Satisfactory Academic Progress

Satisfactory academic progress (SAP) is used to define successful completion of coursework to maintain eligibility for student financial aid. Federal regulations require Kentucky State University to establish, publish and apply standards to monitor students' progress towards completion of their certificate or degree programs. If students fail to meet these standards, they will be placed on financial aid probation or suspension. The components considered in establishing SAP are generally the Grade Point Average, the Credit Completion Ratio, and the Maximum Timeframe.

Table 5: Satisfactory Academic Progress

- All of the comparative institutions utilize graduated SAP standards which are correlated with accumulated attempted hours.
- Spellman College and KSU have the highest 1st to 2nd Year Differential SAP, at .18 and .23, respectively.
- ECSU and NCCU have the lowest 1st to 2nd Year Differential SAP, at -.12 and -.27, respectively.
- Spellman College and KSU have the highest Maximum Plateau Differential SAP, at 2.0 and 4.0, respectively.
- Hampton University, Miles College, ECSU, and NCCU have the lowest Maximum Plateau Differential SAP, ranging from at 1.1 to 1.3.

| Institution | Satisfactory Academic Progress | 1st to 2nd Year Differential SAP * | Maximum Plateau Differential SAP ** | Retention Rate | Graduation Rate | Transfer-out Rate | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------|---------|------|---------|---------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|
| KSU | <table border="1"> <tr> <td><u>At.Hrs</u></td> <td><u>CumGPA</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>1 – 29</td> <td>1.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>30 – 59</td> <td>1.80</td> </tr> <tr> <td>60 – 89</td> <td>2.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>90 +</td> <td>2.0</td> </tr> </table> | <u>At.Hrs</u> | <u>CumGPA</u> | 1 – 29 | 1.75 | 30 – 59 | 1.80 | 60 – 89 | 2.0 | 90 + | 2.0 | .18 | 2.0 | 54% | 25% | 43% | | |
| <u>At.Hrs</u> | <u>CumGPA</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 – 29 | 1.75 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 30 – 59 | 1.80 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 60 – 89 | 2.0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 90 + | 2.0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ECSU | <table border="1"> <tr> <td><u>At.Hrs</u></td> <td><u>CumGPA</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>0-24hrs</td> <td>1.45</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25-48</td> <td>1.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>49-72</td> <td>1.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>96+</td> <td>2.0 GPA</td> </tr> </table> | <u>At.Hrs</u> | <u>CumGPA</u> | 0-24hrs | 1.45 | 25-48 | 1.6 | 49-72 | 1.75 | 96+ | 2.0 GPA | -.12 | 1.3 | 74% | 42% | 14% | | |
| <u>At.Hrs</u> | <u>CumGPA</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0-24hrs | 1.45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25-48 | 1.6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 49-72 | 1.75 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 96+ | 2.0 GPA | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| MC | <table border="1"> <tr> <td><u>At.Hrs</u></td> <td><u>CumGPA</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>0 – 24</td> <td>1.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25 – 48</td> <td>1.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>49 – 72</td> <td>1.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>73 – 96</td> <td>1.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>97 – 108</td> <td>1.85</td> </tr> </table> | <u>At.Hrs</u> | <u>CumGPA</u> | 0 – 24 | 1.50 | 25 – 48 | 1.50 | 49 – 72 | 1.75 | 73 – 96 | 1.75 | 97 – 108 | 1.85 | -.07 | 1.2 | 55% | 24% | N/A |
| <u>At.Hrs</u> | <u>CumGPA</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0 – 24 | 1.50 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25 – 48 | 1.50 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 49 – 72 | 1.75 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 73 – 96 | 1.75 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 97 – 108 | 1.85 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|---|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 109+ | 2.00 | | | | | |
| NCCU | <u>At.Hrs</u> 0-32 33-63 64-96 97+ | <u>CumGPA</u> 1.3 1.5 1.7 2.0 | -.27 | 1.3 | 69% | 38% | 15% |
| WSSU | <u>At.Hrs</u> 1 – 15 16 – 29 30 – 69 70 + | <u>CumGPA</u> 1.70 1.80 1.9 2.0 | .13 | 1.3 | 77% | 36% | 18% |
| SC | <u>At.Hrs</u> 0-30 30-60 60-90 90+ | <u>CumGPA</u> 1.8 2.0 2.0 2.0 | .23 | 4.0 | | | |
| HU | <u>At.Hrs</u> 0-8 9-17 18-26 27-35 36-44 45-53 54-62 63+ | <u>CumGPA</u> 0 1.0 1.5 1.6 1.7 1.8 1.9 2.0 | -.07 | 1.1 | 74% | 54% | 6% |

*Represents the difference between the individual institution's 1st to 2nd year SAP requirement and the average of all institutions. A negative number infers a less discriminating standard

** Represents the level of latitude provided to institutional students, in which the graduated SAP Standards reach maximum value. A lower value infers more latitude.

Comparative Data on Course Repeats

- Only WSSU and KSU limit the number of times a course may be repeated, at 2 repeats.
- All other comparative institutions permit unlimited repeats, until the desired grade is attained.

Table 5: Course Repeat Policy

| Institution | Course Repeats | Retention Rate | Graduation Rate | Transfer-out Rate |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| KSU | May repeat courses only twice | 54% | 25% | 43% |
| ECSU | May repeat courses until desired grade is earned, without limitations | 74% | 42% | 14% |
| MC | May repeat courses until desired grade is earned, without limitations | 55% | 24% | N/A |

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|-----|-----|-----|
| NCCU | May repeat courses until desired grade is earned, without limitations | 69% | 38% | 15% |
| WSSU | May repeat courses only twice | 77% | 36% | 18% |
| SC | May repeat courses until desired grade is earned, without limitations | | | |
| HU | May repeat courses until desired grade is earned, without limitations | 74% | 54% | 6% |

Internal Data on Academic Sanctions

General speaking, an academic sanction results from the failure to meet only the Grade Point Average component of Satisfactory academic progress (SAP).

Academic Probation

| Cohort | Number | Maj 1 | UND | Hours 15-24 | Hours 25-29 | Hours 30 + | Advisor | CUM GPA 0-1.49 | CUM GPA 1.50-1.99 | CUM GPA 2.0+ |
|---------------|---------------|--|------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 2010 | 223 | Business 39 Nursing 29 Psycho 15 | 65 | 117 | 65 | 41 | Olinger (29) Graham-Hill (24) Bowers (18) | 145 | 68 | 9 |
| 2009 | 191 | Business 36 Mass Com/Psych10 Crim Jus 20 | 50 | 45 | 24 | 122 | McNaught (18) Fritz-Cook (13) Olinger/Graham-Hill (11) | 81 | 74 | 36 |
| 2008 | 287 | Business 48 Music/Criminal Jus 20 Biology 18 | 85 | 46 | 34 | 207 | B. Fritz-Cook (26) Hayden (20) Olinger (19) | 130 | 99 | 58 |
| 2007 | 298 | Business 60 Music 24 Crim Jus 18 | 93 | 86 | 35 | 177 | Thomas (21) Bryant (15) None (16) | 141 | 122 | 39 |
| 2006 | 291 | Business 63 Music/Comp Sc. 14 | 89 | 78 | 30 | 183 | Rich (32) Foegen (18) Wallin (23) | 167 | 83 | 41 |
| 2005 | 168 | Criminal Jus/Physical Ed. 10 | 62 | 44 | 22 | 101 | Rich (22) Trammell/Unuak halu (11) | 75 | 50 | 43 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-------|---------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2004 | 121 | Business 31 Crim Jus/El. Ed. 11 | 43 | 40 | 15 | 66 | | 55 | 48 | 18 |
| Total | 1,579 | 523 | 487 | 456 | 225 | 897 | 358 | 794 | 550 | 244 |

Academic Suspension

| Cohort | Number | Major | UND | Hours 15-24 | Hours 25-29 | Hours 30+ | Advisor | CUM GPA 0- 1.49 | CUM GPA 1.50- 1.99 | CUM GPA 2.0+ |
|---------------|---------------|---|------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2010 | 78 | Business 13 Nursing 11 | 20 | 34 | 27 | 17 | Olinger (9) Graham-Hill (9) Bowers (9) | 61 | 17 | 0 |
| 2009 | 98 | Business 18 Music 7 Nursing 7 | 37 | 22 | 14 | 62 | McNaught (13) Fritz-Cook (11) Foege (10) | 59 | 34 | 5 |
| 2008 | 141 | Business 18 Music 11 | 55 | 10 | 16 | 115 | Hayden (12) Fritz-Cook (12) Olinger (9) | 72 | 45 | 24 |
| 2007 | 131 | Business 28 Music 15 Crim.Jus/Bio 8 | 46 | 21 | 17 | 93 | Thomas (9) Fritz-Cook (7) | 73 | 46 | 12 |
| 2006 | 146 | Business 26 Comp. Sci 8 Music 9 | 52 | 14 | 16 | 116 | Rich (14) Wallin (13) Foege (11) | 92 | 32 | 22 |
| 2005 | 67 | Business/Comme rce, General 12 | 22 | 1 | 15 | 51 | Foege (7) Fritz-Cook (7) Rich (7) | 35 | 18 | 14 |
| 2004 | 71 | Business 11 Crim.Jus 9 | 26 | 13 | 6 | 52 | Strickland (8) | 37 | 21 | 3 |
| Total | 732 | 231 | 258 | 115 | 111 | 506 | 177 | 429 | 213 | 80 |

Academic Dismissal

| Cohort | Number | Major | UND | Hours 15-24 | Hours 25-29 | Hours 30+ | Advisor | CUM GPA 0-1.49 | CUM GPA 1.50- 1.99 | CUM GPA 2.0+ |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2009 | 29 | Business 8 | 10 | | | 29 | Rich/ Wilhelm (3) | 10 | 12 | 7 |
| 2008 | 35 | Business 10 | 13 | | | 35 | Rich/ Wilhelm (3) | 12 | 17 | 6 |
| 2007 | 39 | Psychology 3 Music 6 | 11 | | | 39 | Rich/ Wilhelm (3) | 16 | 17 | 6 |
| 2006 | 34 | Business 7 | 9 | | | 34 | | 19 | 6 | 9 |
| 2005 | 21 | Business11 | 3 | | | 21 | Rich 6 | 7 | 4 | 10 |
| 2004 | 12 | Business 5 Music 2 | 3 | | | 12 | Rich 3 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Total | 170 | 52 | 38 | 0 | 0 | 170 | 18 | 65 | 61 | 44 |

Internal Data on Financial Aid Sanctions

| <i>Cohort</i> | <i>RAP 3</i> | <i>RAP 4</i> | <i>Total Financial Aid Actions</i> |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| 2011 | 594 | 190 | 784 |
| 2010 | 565 | 176 | 741 |
| 2009 | 598 | 195 | 793 |
| 2008 | 568 | 285 | 853 |
| 2007 | 460 | 187 | 647 |
| 2006 | 332 | 222 | 554 |
| 2005 | 456 | 199 | 655 |
| Total | 3,573 | 1,454 | 5,027 |

Recommendations

The attached list of institutional recommendations has been forwarded to the University Faculty Senate for their immediate examination and consideration. Those recommendations resulted from and are fully informed by the data analyses presented within this report.