

# Forum focuses on college retention

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Statistics show that not enough students who enter college leave with a degree, and even fewer Louisiana high school students make it to the college level.

Next week, state higher education system leaders and campus presidents will discuss what they're doing to attract and retain students until they earn a degree during a statewide education forum, *Student Access and Success: No Longer an Option*.

"Statistics are driving this," said Sally Clausen, president of the University of Louisiana System, which organized the forum.

"Forty percent of our ninth-graders don't ever get to the front door of our campuses," Clausen said. "That tells all of

us that our strategies to reach into that partnership of high schools is important."

Each of the state's higher education systems is working on its own strategies to produce more college graduates.

The forum is meant to focus those efforts, Clausen said.

"It's not uncommon in government for us to work in silos, and we're all doing the same thing," Clausen said. "It's an attempt to bring our state together and higher education leaders together to see how we can complement our efforts in ways that result in better access and student success for students to graduate."

Each system president was invited to the forum, and each university and college was encouraged to send a team that would represent the institution.

National higher education leaders will discuss ways to

redesign courses that are more effective for retention, including enhancing math courses.

"Mathematics is one discipline that seems to be a gateway course for students to be successful or not successful," Clausen said.

The forum is based on a National Association of System Heads initiative to improve student access and success. One of the recommendations is accountability to the public on how well systems are responding to their goals.

Clausen is vice chair of the association.

"In the past 100 years, (the United States has) led the world in the number and the quality of college graduates," Clausen said. "We've now dropped to the seventh place in the world in the number of 22- to 34-year-olds who have a degree. That's a change for us in terms of our place in world leadership."

During the forum, the state leaders will hear examples of what has worked in other states to improve student access and success — whether it's more need-based aid or programs that target retention and academic success from a national perspective — from speakers like Kati Haycock.

Haycock leads The Education Trust, a nonprofit that advocates for improvements in K-12 and postsecondary education. A few months ago, the organization released a report that showed the country's flagship universities serve fewer low-income and minority students. The report also revealed that flagships doled out more institutional aid to students from high-income families.

Joseph Savoie, the state's higher education commissioner, has said that a state need-based aid program is needed to help students who can't afford state tuition.

## Forum speakers

■ **Carol Twigg**, director of the National Center for Academic Transformation

■ **Topic:** *Improving Learning and Reducing Costs — The Case for Course Redesign*  
■ **Web site:** [www.center.rpi.edu](http://www.center.rpi.edu)

■ **Kati Haycock**, director of The Education Trust, a nonprofit organization that advocates higher academic achievement to close the achievement gap in K-12 and postsecondary education.

■ **Topic:** *Improving Access and Success in Higher Education: Lessons from Institutions on the Performance Frontier*  
■ **Web site:** [www2.edtrust.org](http://www2.edtrust.org)

■ **George Mehaffy**, vice president for Academic Leadership and Change at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

■ **Topic:** *Mathematics: A Case Study for Change*  
■ **Web site:** [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)

## On the Web

For more information about the statewide education forum, *Student Access and Success: No Longer an Option*, go to the University of Louisiana System Web site at [www.uls.state.la.us](http://www.uls.state.la.us).

The statewide scholarship program — TOPS — is a merit-based program, but Clausen noted that many TOPS recipients still have financial needs that are unmet while they're in college.

"There is a population that has affordability challenges," Clausen said. "So obviously, we're looking at people like first-generation college students, minorities. We're looking at students who have been underrepresented in education."