

## **Rationale for Acceptable Thresholds of Student Success at NOBTS**

### ***Student Success in Retention and Graduation Rates***

#### **Rationale for Student Success in Retention and Graduation Rates from the NOBTS**

Mission Statement – The Seminary Mission Statement is to “equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.” We are convinced that trained, well-equipped ministers are more effective than those who lack this training. Students who complete their degree requirements are better equipped than those who take just a few credit hours. Also, those with complete degrees become eligible to take advanced degrees, to, as the first Great Commandment says, love God with all their minds.

#### **Rationale for the Criteria/Threshold for Student Success in Retention and Graduation**

Rates -- Student retention and graduation rates are more complex at NOBTS than at a typical undergraduate or graduate institution. First of all, most degrees at NOBTS do not have high academic admission requirements. The main requirements are a statement of call to ministry and a church endorsement, along with the prerequisite academic degrees. We do not require ACT or SATS scores for undergraduate admission, or anything more than a minimal GPA for graduate admission. Particularly in Leavell College, we have a number of post-traditional students who felt a call to ministry later in life, and thus have not been in an academic institution for many years. Many of them are from oral culture traditions in which they are the first person in their family to go to college, including many of our undergraduates in prison programs. This lack of preparation obviously impacts their retention rate. However, we do have higher admission standards in a few more academically focused master’s and doctoral degrees, and the retention rate is higher for those degrees.

Second, the majority of our students are part-time students because they are already working at least one job. Unlike many church traditions, Baptist churches do not require an

academic degree for ordination. Therefore, the majority of our students are already serving in a ministry position and/or a secular work position. Time is their greatest challenge. This is particularly a challenge for bivocational ministers, who comprise at least 25 percent of all Southern Baptist pastors. These students serve in both a secular position and a ministry position. NOBTS's Caskey Center for Church Excellence specifically targets these students for scholarships. Even with a full scholarship, these students do not have time to take a full-time load. Also, each of our extension centers have a limited offering of courses each semester, typically just 9 hours per semester. Likewise, online students tend to take fewer credit hours due to the higher cost. Some students are delayed by life situations or financial limitations requiring them to sit out a semester or two occasionally. In the 2016-17 academic year, undergraduate students averaged about 14 credit hours for the year. The 129 hour B.A. degree, then, would take over 9 years to complete at that rate. Graduate students averaged taking just 11.5 credit hours per year. Since our standard Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree requires 84 credit hours, it would take the average graduate student over 7 years to complete the degree, long after full-time students would complete it. Some take as long as a dozen years to complete the degree.

Therefore, instead of the standard 150 percent figure used to figure IPEDS graduation rates, NOBTS is utilizing a 200 percent figure as more reasonable to our student population. NOBTS also takes into account those students who continue to be enrolled and seeking a degree, since they are persisting toward a degree at their own pace. NOBTS also anticipates higher retention among the more academically focused degrees with higher admissions standards than those not requiring standardized testing or high GPAs (especially the post-traditional students in Leavell College). Therefore, although our aspirational goals are higher, our realistic threshold for retention/graduation rate based on prior performance is 30 percent in the undergraduate program

and 40 percent in the graduate program. The threshold is higher for out doctoral programs, because admission is academically selective, unlike many of our degrees. Therefore, gauged by the pattern of previous years, the threshold for the graduation rate for the professional doctoral degrees is 70 percent, with a persistence rate of 75 percent, and for the Ph.D. degree the NOBTS graduation rate threshold is 65 percent, and for student persistence is 70 percent.

*Results in Student Achievement in Retention and Graduation Rates* – The undergraduate dropout rate is high, about 65 percent, while the graduate rate is about 56 percent. Including students still persisting toward their degrees, the NOBTS threshold is 33 percent in the undergraduate program and 42 percent in the graduate program. While this level of student achievement is far from ideal, it is reasonable for this makeup of students. In our doctoral programs, the graduation rate is at least 65 percent in each degree, and at least 70 percent in student persistence.

### ***Student Success in Employment***

*Rationale for Student Success in Employment from the NOBTS Mission Statement* – The purpose of Seminary training is to “equip leaders” to serve “in the local church and its ministries.” However, this is not limited to full-time vocational ministers. As was mentioned earlier, NOBTS has programs which attract bivocational ministers – those who are serving in both a ministry position and a secular job. Many of our students, particularly in certificate programs, are lay ministers in churches or ministries who have no interest in full-time vocational service. Therefore, our goals is for successful graduates to serve in some way in a local church or ministry.

*Rationale for the Criteria/Threshold for Student Success in Employment* -- Having theological training generally makes ministry candidates more attractive to churches. Because

NOBTS has numerous extension centers across the five Southeastern states, in addition to internet course accessibility wherever our students are, NOBTS students can already serve in ministry positions wherever they are without having to move to the main campus. Therefore, the majority of our students are already serving in some ministry position even before graduation. Many students (particularly certificate students) are serving in volunteer positions. They came to Seminary simply to improve their service in these lay minister positions. Therefore, both paid positions and volunteer positions are taken into account in measuring student success.

In addition to measuring employment of students at the time of graduation, we also survey their employment a year after graduation. This allows us to discover if they have continued in ministry. It is not unusual for graduates to be offered larger church opportunities after graduation, so this survey is a better gauge of their full-time employment after graduation. Of course, sometimes graduates find that ministry is not for them, and they go into a different vocation. Therefore, having examined the employment patterns of recent graduates, 75 percent of students serving in some ministry position, and 40 percent of our students serving in a full-time or part-time paying position, at graduation. A year after graduation, our threshold for student employment is 80 percent of students serving in some ministry position, and 50 percent serving in a full-time position.

*Results in Student Achievement in Employment* – Employment and church service of graduates is comparatively high. In recent graduation classes, about 54 percent of the graduates were already serving in a full-time or part-time ministry position, and over 80 percent were serving in some church leadership role. Over a year after graduation, about 73 percent of master's degree graduates and 87 percent of doctoral graduates are serving in full-time or part-time ministry positions, and over 94 percent are serving in some church leadership role. Among

Ph.D. graduates, 100 percent are employed, 96 percent of them in an academic or ministry position.

***Student Success in Licensure Track Counseling Students and Graduates***

***Rationale for Student Success in Counseling Licensure from the NOBTS Mission***

*Statement* -- In keeping with the NOBTS mission statement to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commandments (including love for others), and consistent with the NOBTS core value of Characteristic Excellence and NOBTS key competency of Interpersonal Skills, we desire our Counseling graduates to be well-equipped and effective. Therefore, since licensure is required for many ministry positions, we desire a high "pass" rate on licensure tests, i.e., above the regional or national average.

*Rationale for Criteria/Threshold for Student Success in Licensure* – NOBTS licensure track Counseling students take the CPCE (Counseling Preparation Comprehensive Examination), which is preparatory for licensing tests. The national mean was 85.6 percent in 2016, which is required for a "pass." In keeping with the NOBTS mission statement to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commandments (including love for others), and consistent with the NOBTS core value of Characteristic Excellence and NOBTS key competency of Interpersonal Skills, NOBTS seeks the threshold of our students to average scoring in the 90 percentile of those passing, since these Counseling programs are intended to lead to licensure.

The NCE (National Counselor's Exam) is required for LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) licensure. The national passing score rate has never been over 65 percent correct answers, with about 90 percent of the persons who take the NCE each year achieving a passing score. In keeping with the NOBTS mission statement to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commandments (including love for others), and consistent with the NOBTS core value of Characteristic Excellence and NOBTS key competency of Interpersonal Skills, the threshold

sought by NOBTS is 95 percent of graduates passing the NCE, since these Counseling programs are designed to lead to licensure.

*Results of NOBTS Student Success in Counseling Licensure* – Among recent NOBTS licensure track Counseling students, 100 percent of the students nearing graduation passed the CPCE exam their senior year, surpassing the national average by 14.4 percent, and the NOBTS threshold by 10 percent. Each year the Counseling faculty does an assessment after the tests are completed to discover and select at least one area for "focus in learning" in order to improve the scores. Among recent licensure track Counseling graduates who reported taking the NCE exam for licensure, 100 percent who attempted the NCE successfully passed the exam. This result is 10 percent above the national average and 5 percent above the NOBTS threshold.