

PENSACOLA — The University of West Florida ranks in the top three top-performing public universities in the state and will secure more than \$20 million in new funding for the 2017-18 academic year, the Florida Board of Governors announced.

UWF earned 82 points out of 100 on the board's performance-based funding model results from the 2015-16 academic year. It earned a top spot in the rankings alongside the University of Florida and the University of South Florida.

This is an improvement from 2014, the year the performance metrics were introduced, when UWF ranked No. 11, receiving 21 points out of the then-50-point scale.

UWF President Martha Saunders said the university's success could be attributed to a campus-wide effort to invest in long-term strategies that would not only increase the institution's performance in the selected metrics, but also enhance the overall quality of the education and experience provided.

Among the most successful initiatives developed by the university is an online graduation dashboard that empowers students, faculty and staff to closely monitor degree progression. Designed for undergraduate students, the dashboard features a color-coded "Time to Degree" progress bar, as well as excess hours, financial aid and academic status indicators that note when students need to seek assistance from an advisor. The graduation dashboard also celebrates the accomplishment when the degree is awarded.

Additionally, the university implemented several student completion strategies to enhance academic progress toward four-year graduation rates. These included creating University College to serve as a comprehensive, centralized unit dedicated to student support services and high-impact learning; allocating funding toward student grants and programs to support retention and graduation efforts; and developing tools that empower students, faculty and staff to monitor degree progression.

Under the performance funding model, the Board of Governors scores each of Florida's 12 public universities based on 10 metrics designed to incentivize university excellence and improvement. These metrics establish a minimum acceptable level of performance on issues such as graduation and retention rates. The board, with influence from the governor and Florida State Legislature, selects nine of the metrics, with the last one chosen by each institution's Board of Trustees.

Each university must reach a benchmark number set by the Board of Governors and not score in the bottom three of all State University System institutions in order not to lose their base funding and to be eligible for new state funding.

Highlights of UWF's metrics scores for 2015-2016 include:

- The percent of bachelor's graduates enrolled in postgraduate school or employed and earning \$25,000 or more increased by 6.5 percent, from 61 percent to 67.6 percent.

- The academic progress rate increased by 5.2 percent, reaching 70.1 percent overall.
- The number of students earning bachelor's degrees without excess hours increased by 4.7 percent, from 75.8 percent to 80.5 percent.
- All funds will be allocated in fiscal year 2017-2018, which begins July 1.