Transforming the University of Minnesota

Preliminary Recommendations of the
Task Force on Undergraduate Reform: Student Support

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December 12, 2005

Student Support Task Force Executive Summary

Mission of the Student Support Task Force (SSTF)

The mission of the SSTF is to examine approaches in undergraduate education that articulate high expectations and standards for all enrolled students, while providing integrated academic support that improves student outcomes (e.g., retention, learning, timely graduation, satisfaction) and enhances the total student experience. The result should be the timely graduation of bright, curious, motivated students who will be analytical, possess strong communication skills, and become leaders in a global society, consistent with the University's goal to become one of the top three public research universities in the world.

Deliverables

- Recommendations regarding providing appropriate support to students at all levels of achievement
- Recommendations regarding models of academic and career advising that ensure improved retention and graduation rates and better student outcomes
- Recommendations regarding enhancing the role of faculty as student mentors

Summary of Task Force Work

The Student Support Task Force solicited advice and perspectives of faculty, staff, students, and alumni through town hall meetings, focus groups, interviews of individuals at our weekly meetings, attendance at regularly scheduled meetings of stakeholder groups, informal meetings, and email. As a result, we obtained input from more than 250 individuals representing different stakeholders on the Twin Cities campus. (Appendix 1). A summary of these discussions is provided in Appendix 2. The short timeline under which the Task Force operated prevented development and administration of surveys, although we felt that such additional information would have been useful.

At the beginning of our work, we established the consensus that our group would have a foundational principle: **to put our students first.** Thus, while we realize that our recommendations have resource implications, our recommendations are those that we believe are central to developing and practicing an outcomes-driven approach in undergraduate education that focuses on objectives and outcomes while retaining the University's responsibility to challenge students.[1] Such approaches are commonly referred to as "student- or learner-centered."[2]

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[1] An article that highlights the outstanding medical services provided by the University of Minnesota's Cystic Fibrosis Clinic was important in helping us frame this principle. ("The Bell Curve" by Atul Gawande in *The New Yorker*, 2004.)

[2] See http://www.adt.umn.edu/rfaculty.html#student for a statement from Lou Pignolet (Chemistry) about his student-centered teaching practices; also http://www.colorado.edu/sacs/stu-affairs/centered/concept.html for a statement from the University of Colorado that provides their definition of a "student-centered culture."

Recommendations

    Recommendation 1: Establish an integrated, campus-wide approach to student support programs and resources, with both authority and accountability for student success.

    Recommendation 2: Develop a department and/or center for the scholarship of college teaching and learning.

    Recommendation 3: Invest in and strengthen academic and career advising and services across the campus.

    Recommendation 4: Develop campus-wide goals, communications plan, standards, and expectations for professional academic and career advising and services.

    Recommendation 5: Require every undergraduate to complete a scholarly, creative, professional, or research experience with a University of Minnesota faculty member.

    Recommendation 6: Develop a program for new faculty that promotes a focus on using learning outcomes, communicating high expectations, and mentoring undergraduates.

Broader themes outside scope of task force inquiry and recommended future areas of effort

The SSTF had difficulty locating and evaluating previous University of Minnesota reports that were relevant to our work. We were unable to be sure that all relevant work previously done by faculty, staff, and students was appropriately informing our current work. Thus, we were not confident that we were able to build as effectively as possible on the analysis, insights, and creativity had been completed before we began our own work. To help ensure the continued relevance of University studies and reports, we suggest that the University explores developing a centralized Web-based repository of reports from task forces and committees. In addition, data relating to the undergraduate experience was similarly difficult to locate and access. It was not possible even to determine what survey data existed or which new surveys were in the planning stages. The University would greatly benefit from a thorough coordination and transparency of data gathering, analysis, and dissemination.