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Student Learning Task Force Report on Retention Enhancement

I. Introduction

"We will keep more of the students we have by increasing, improving, and tailoring our student-support efforts. This is not the exclusive responsibility of a particular office or particular program. This is a shared responsibility."
Chancellor Mestas, Message To The Campus Community, Fall 2002.

Using Chancellor Mestas' statement above as a guiding principle, the Purpose Group on Retention Enhancement endeavored to recommend strategies that might be used by faculty and staff separately, as well as collaboratively as we assist students in realizing their goals and aspirations. With our excellent faculty, students attending the University of Michigan-Flint receive an outstanding education. An excellent education in a supportive environment will contribute to a healthy, growing and vibrant institution of higher learning.

Committee Members

Co-Chairs: Johnny Young, Cathy Miller (*replaced Krista Hansen*)

Committee

Members: Tracy Atkinson, Maryann Cardani, Krista Hansen, Gary Jones, Aimi Moss, Elizabeth Sholl, Rosemarie Sholl, Traki Taylor

Committee Charge

The specific charge to the Purpose Group on Retention Enhancement is to "identify and recommend specific policies, measures and initiatives aimed at the improvement of student retention and progress toward graduation."

Organization of Our Report

Given our charge, we identified the following areas concerning retention. We used these concerns as a guide to our research and as our organization for our report.

- A. Review current UM-FLINT retention data. This research was performed to quantify and qualify where UM-FLINT retention is now, and how retention has changed over recent years.
- B. Identify early assistance to students to promote retention and timely graduation. This area is concerned with new freshmen and transfer students and what can be done to retain these students early in their college careers.
- C. Identify early and provide assistance to students experiencing academic difficulties. This section concerns students who are struggling in their academic work. It includes admitted, at-risk freshmen as well as all students, freshmen to seniors, who struggle with academic material.
- D. Identify and assist students experiencing non-academic concerns that result in attrition. This area focuses on retaining sophomores and juniors who do not have academic difficulties.
- E. Encourage timely graduation of students. This area emphasizes helping students graduate in a timely manner, e.g. how students can choose a career early in their college education so as to graduate in 4 or 5 years.
- F. Develop ways to promote meaningful and consistent interactions between faculty and students, and staff and students. This area focuses on building personal relationships for students.
- G. Convey to students the importance and benefits of career and educational exploration and planning processes to the accomplishment of their aspirations and a positive overall college experience. This section concerns encouraging students to explore and think about career development and planning to help students graduate in a timely manner.
- H. Identified other important areas during the research process. This section contains ideas noted in our research that does not fit in one or more of the previous categories.

II. Research Approach

Our research approach started with a review of current UM-FLINT student retention and persistence data to help provide insights on why some students do not persist. These sources include:

1. Student Phone-A-Thon – At the end of each major early registration period (Spring/Summer/Fall and Winter), the Student Services and Enrollment Management Division contacts current students who did not register for the next semester. Students are asked if they intend to register for the next semester and if the response is no, they are asked to share why they do not plan to return.
2. Disenrolled Student Data – Students who elect to drop all of their classes prior to the end of a semester complete a form at the Office of the Registrar on which they indicate the reason(s) for dropping their classes. Students are also asked if they would like to be contacted by staff from the Academic Advising Center to discuss and address those issues that resulted in their not completing the semester. These forms were reviewed for the purpose of determining factors contributing to students decisions to leave the University prior to completing the semester for which they are enrolled.
3. Committee on Student Concerns – This committee, Chaired by Dr. Kirk Aamot was comprised of five faculty members, including at least one from each instructional unit, and two student members. The committee reviews and evaluates data and policies that impact recruitment and retention practices, and proposes matters of action to the faculty, faculty committees, or administrative units. This information was shared with the Purpose of Group on Student Retention in our information gathering process.
4. Students on Academic Probation – Students with cumulative grade point averages of less than 2.00 are placed on probation. If such a deficiency persists, students are eventually subject to academic dismissal. Some academic programs and/or schools require minimum grade point averages of greater than 2.00. Generally, approximately 12 to 14 % of the students attending the University of Michigan-Flint are on some level of probation ranging from “warning on transcript” to “academic dismissal”.

5. Early Assessment Program – At the fifth week of the fall and winter semesters, faculty with freshmen enrolled in their courses are asked to provide an assessment of students academic performance. This assessment is requested prior to the deadline to drop a class or classes without petitioning. Students who are encountering academic difficulties in one or more courses (less than a grade of C), are contacted by the Academic Advising Center for advisement and academic counseling.

Analysis of these data shows students leave the University of Michigan-Flint for a variety of reasons. Reasons include: change of job, academic struggles and/or dismissal, moving away, the birth of a child, lack of the program of choice, uncertainty about a program of study, financial concerns, feelings of disengagement, etc. Given that students leave the University for a number of reasons, it was decided that a broad and comprehensive approach to student retention is plausible and most appropriate. Detailed later in this report is an analysis and breakdown of the freshman to sophomore year continuation rate, from 1998 to 2001.

To expand our knowledge of retention policies and programs, we identified four areas of research for the committee to pursue. These four areas included student focus groups, survey of UM-Flint academic units about retention policies and programs, review and summary of best practices in student retention as identified by Noel-Levitz as award winning retention practices and programs, and review and summary of potential retention enhancing ideas obtained from Dr. Richard Light's best selling book, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds*.

Student focus groups: In conjunction with the Purpose Group on Community College Articulation, we planned to conduct 5 focus groups with 8 to 10 students each, comprised of 2nd semester freshmen, continuing students (sophomores through seniors) and transfer students. Students were to be asked to discuss their initial academic, personal and social transition at the University, as well as their ongoing experiences – positive or negative – in the context of their ability to continue their education at UM-Flint. Due to a lack of student participation, the focus groups did not take place.

In place of the focus groups, the following options and processes were instead used to gain the information and insights sought by the committee:

- Feedback from freshmen via an email survey and via insights from faculty and staff advisors in the Academic Advising Center. In late March Freshmen enrolled for the winter 2002 semester (N= 460)

were sent an email survey concerning their high school to college transition. Sixty (13%) responded to the survey. The survey was sent on March 31st. Students were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What have you found most surprising in your first year at the university?
 2. What has been your biggest adjustment?
 3. What have been your best experiences?
 4. What have been your worst experiences?
 5. What could the university have done to better assist you in the high school to college transition?
- Data from an email survey of transfer students by the Purpose Group on Community College Articulation. The survey placed an emphasis on obtaining student insights on the initial transfer process and the ways in which that process can be improved. Given that the information and insights sought by our group are concerned with factors affecting retention once students are enrolled, we were not able to draw any conclusions relevant to our charge.
 - An analysis of the freshman to sophomore year retention rate from 1998 – 2001. See Appendix A for the statistical details from this analysis.

Survey of UM-Flint academic units: We contacted each academic unit and department to survey current practices and strategies employed to promote student academic success, career and/or educational planning processes, and faculty/student contact and engagement. Specifically, the survey covered career counseling of undergraduate students, academic advising of undergraduate students, academic support of undergraduate students, and support for persistence of undergraduate students. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.

“Best Practices” as identified by Noel-Levitz: We examined various award winning programs as identified by Noel-Levitz to decide which practices could be incorporated at the University of Michigan-Flint to insure better success rates for all students. Noel-Levitz was established in 1973 and during that time span has partnered with over 1,600 universities and colleges public and private, four-year and two-year, as well as graduate and professional in the provision of enrollment and student retention services and strategies. They are currently working with more than 250 institutions, ranging from those with selective admissions policies to those with open door admissions policies.

We reviewed programs from the following universities, which we considered to be peer institutions: West Virginia State College, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Penn State, Shippensburg, University of Georgia, Hampton University, Jacksonville State University, Miami University, Ohio, Loyola University, New Orleans, Metropolitan State College of Denver, College of Charleston, UCLA, and Indiana University, Bloomington.

Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds by Dr. Richard Light:

This book is based on Dr. Light's "Harvard Assessment Project," in which he interviewed hundreds of students from several institutions – public/private, 2-year/4-year, city/urban, student housing/commuter, etc.

III. Research Findings and Recommendations

A. Initial Research of Retention and Persistence Data

Findings

From our UM-Flint freshmen-to-sophomore retention data:

- Our freshmen-to-sophomore continuation rate has declined steadily from 1995 to 2002, from a high of 85.2% in 1995-1996 to a low of 69.5% in 1999-2000. The most recent rate (2001-2002) is 71.8%.
- For 1998 – 2001:
 - i. 2,593 enrolled freshmen
 - ii. 779 (30%) did not return for their sophomore year
 - iii. 467 (60%) were in good academic standing; 296 (38%) were experiencing academic difficulties
 - iv. Top 3 majors not returning: Undecided 159, Business 91, Pre-education 90.
- Students transferring 1998 – 2001 (based on requests for transcripts):
 - i. 17% for 1998-1999 freshmen
 - ii. 14% for 1999-2000
 - iii. 10% for 2000-2001
 - iv. 17% for 2001-2002

From our review of data obtained from Student Phone-a-Thons, Disenrollment Surveys, and the above referenced analysis of the freshman to sophomore continuation rate from 1998 – 2001 (see Appendix B), we find students discontinue their education at the University of Michigan-Flint for a wide variety of reasons.

However, for some students the Student Phone-a-Thon serves as a reminder to register. For others, the phone calls inform them of registration holds or other procedural matters that are many times easily addressed, and they subsequently register.

Students completing the Disenrollment Survey generally do not request to be contacted by a University staff member, but those who do are in most cases able to return to school after their issues or concerns have been addressed. The majority of students who disenroll indicate an intention to return to the University within the next semester or two.

Recommendations

The SSEM Phone-A-Thons should be continued to students who have not yet declared a major or who have not yet been assigned to a department. Modification of the current disenrollment process might result in increased opportunities to assist students before they drop their courses. Current practice involves students' completing the disenrollment form at the Office of the Registrar, those forms are collected and sent to the Academic Advising Center for follow-up purposes. We recommend that students be directed to the Academic Advising Center to discuss their situations before they officially disenroll. Earlier intervention of this type may enable some students to avoid leaving the University.

- Academic departments should consider conducting phone-a-thons as a means of encouraging students enrolled in their respective programs to register. Unregistered could be contacted either by peer students enrolled in the same program of study, department faculty members, department administrative assistants or secretaries, or some combination of these groups of individuals.

Beyond the measurable result that some students register for classes as a result of being called, there are less tangible yet beneficial outcomes to be gained by conducting phone-a-thons. Such outcomes include a demonstration of concern, care and attention to students and their academic and career aspirations. With UM-Flint's relatively small size and its emphasis on teaching, positive relationships can be established among students, faculty and staff. Academic department phone-a-thons would serve to enhance and strengthen such relationships. The size of the departments varies, and for many the number of calls necessary may be only a few. Those that are larger generally have more faculty, staff, and students on whom they can call for assistance.

- Academic units or departments within those units should consider recognizing faculty, staff or students who participate in registration phone-a-thons and crediting faculty for university service.
- Academic Affairs and Student Services and Enrollment Management collaborative efforts to provide comprehensive and integrated services designed to improve the freshman to sophomore year continuation rate, and the transition experience of all students. This recommendation is more fully elaborated in the conclusion section of this report.

B. Providing Early Assistance to Students to Promote Retention and Timely Graduation

Findings

Success rates for freshman who attend mandatory orientation courses during their first semester are high.

Comprehensive transfer programs that address all aspects of college/ university transitions meet with high levels of transfer student persistence.

Students who are undecided about their academic major persist in higher numbers when they are required to participate in programs that intrusively help in the process of self-exploration.

Involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g., student clubs, co-ops and internships, community service, etc.) leads to greater satisfaction with the college experience, offers leadership opportunities, and fosters closer relationships with students, faculty, and the university. On the other hand, no significant relationships are found between employment and grades, extracurricular activities and grades, or volunteering and grades.

Students are not always prepared for the large amounts of course material covered at a fast pace. Students don't always come to college with good time management skills. Most high school students' study skills are based on doing homework, papers, and projects, the day or two before they are due.

Freshmen students, faculty advisors and advising staff from UM-FLINT agree that the top three most difficult adjustments to college are

- Adjusting to varying teaching styles,
- Adjusting to the academic course load and time management requirements, and
- Increasing areas of personal responsibility.

Recommendations

- Create an orientation class for new students having completed twelve hours or fewer. This full semester, one credit hour class will be required during their first term. This orientation class will emphasize the seventeen goals of our University's general education program. It will provide students with academic and personal counseling, introduce students to faculty and administrators, involve them in campus and

community events, provide campus tours, provide peer mentors, and teach them to read and write critically. Basic topics and activities would include the following:

- Representatives from various campus units can speak to students about their services and expectations.
 - Upper class students can talk about time management skills. Dr. Light's book points out that students can provide advice to new students, such as, "Do a little bit of homework and studying for each course each day."
 - Sophomores and juniors can talk about student clubs/activities and why they joined clubs/activities. Such activities could include the student newspaper, music groups, drama groups, student government, etc.
 - Appropriate University personnel can talk about relevant topics such as careers, money, marriage, family, sex, race and sexual orientation.
 - Faculty may read papers and share their research.
 - Faculty may lead intellectual discussions.
- Include the following transition strategies in University procedures with transfer students.
 - Implement accurate transfer course inventories.
 - Host "open houses" both on our campus and on the campuses of our feeder schools that would encourage students to attend this university.
 - Conduct advising sessions that include a "plan for degree completion" considering all variables (course prerequisites, placement tests, timing of course offerings, degree requirements, etc.).
 - Hold a "Transfer Counselor Day" to advise transfer students only.
 - Formalize articulation agreements with other postsecondary schools in the area, and carefully tracking student performance and success rates.
 - Implement a mandatory annual "front line" customer service session for all staff, at which time they can be provided information on all student services.
 - Assign students who are undecided about a career or a major to be advised in the Academic Advising Center until a major is declared. Students would be strongly encouraged to meet with the advisor two times during their first and second semesters. The personal advisor will recommend varied actions that will promote a thoughtful method of selecting a major. This advising process will be promoted by letters to freshmen and e-mail reminders to sophomores.

- To promote student success, advisors should take a more active role in advising students. Possible active roles might include these strategies:
 - Discussing the student's current study habits and providing the appropriate advice based on that discussion.
 - Discussing time management skills along with study skills and recommending workshops or courses to improve these skills.
 - Discussing the student's personal interests to appropriately suggest student groups and activities in which the student might participate.
 - Promoting the benefits of getting a co-op or internship position in the field of choice.
- Suggesting a student log of time usage to serve at least three purposes: the log will make the student more aware of how he/she spends time, give better insight to time management skills, provide a basis for student meetings with advisors, provide an opportunity for advisors to know students more personally, and create a more comfortable atmosphere for advising.

C. Providing Early Assistance to Students Experiencing Academic Difficulties

Findings

Programs that proactively assist admitted "at-risk" freshman students promote these students' ability to be successful.

Active and aggressive intervention is necessary for the retention of students experiencing academic difficulties.

Students often don't ask for help even when they know they need it. Most of these students know that help is available; they just don't ask for it. Advisors and faculty need to know the signals of students in need of help.

Signals that a student needs help include the following:

1. Student feels a sense of isolation from the rest of the college (signaled by no involvement in extracurricular activities, non-participation in study groups, and works alone).
2. Student shows an unwillingness to seek help.
3. Student has poor time management skills.
4. Student organizes his/her work in college the same way as he/she did in high school.

5. Student selects courses ineffectively. Good course selection mixes elective and general education, large and small class sizes for balance.

Recommendations

- At the University level, implement a program that requires freshmen in the Challenge Program, as part of their invitation for admission to the University, to attend a required summer institute, at least four weeks in duration. The mandatory institute includes courses on study skills, basic math, reading, writing, career exploration, basic computer skills, and public speaking.
- At the University level, implement a program where students that are placed on probation are required during their next semester (regardless of major) to participate in the Advising Center's Academic Advantage Plan (AAP). The AAP program should be expanded from its present criteria of those with fewer than 30 credits and an overall grade point average of less than 2.00, to those with fewer than 55 credits with an overall grade point average of below 2.00.
- At the department level, request that instructors include in all course syllabi descriptions for all relevant support programs, such as the Writing Center, the Library Research Instruction Program, Tutorial Services.
- At the department level, encourage advisors to make individual referrals for students needing any of the University's support programs.
- At the instructional level, use the Early Assessment Program (EAP), administered by the Academic Advising Center, to identify students (freshmen) who though not on academic probation, are experiencing academic difficulties in their first semester of attendance. The Academic Advising Center should invite these students to participate in the AAP.
- Faculty and staff advisors should encourage students having academic difficulty to get involved in study groups for support.
- Faculty and staff advisors should be encouraged to access students' academic records prior to advising meetings. Attention could then be given to special needs as part of their regular planning.

D. Assisting Students Experiencing Non-academic Concerns Resulting in Attrition

Findings

As outlined in Section III, "Research Findings and Recommendations," students do not persist for a variety of reasons, with many of such reasons being non-academic in nature. Data from Student Phone A-Thons, Disenrollment Forms, and the Committee on Student Concerns confirmed the role and impact of non-academic concerns on student attrition.

Recommendations

An ongoing dialogue with an advisor about degree requirements, scheduling of classes, and thoughtful career planning will familiarize students with University requirements and support their timely progress toward a degree. Closer communication will develop some level of understanding and rapport between advisor and student, supporting the student's persistence and level of comfort. Applying registration holds will assure each student receives advising that is focused on his or her individual needs and concerns.

Students who have not declared a major should be required to receive regular, timely advising in the Academic Advising Center. The Career Development Center also should be consulted when needed.

When a student declares a major, the Academic Advising Center should notify the department of the student's declaration to assure a seamless sequence of advising meetings. Departments may wish to require an initial meeting by placing a hold on registration.

Students with a declared major should be actively encouraged to receive regular, timely advising in their academic disciplines.

The following sequence is encouraged to be adapted by departments for use when acknowledging new majors.

- Students may be welcomed by their academic departments through a letter or email. This communication should contain introductory information the department deems essential and include an invitation to schedule a departmental advising appointment.
- Students should be encouraged to schedule regular appointments with an academic advisor to assure timely scheduling of required classes.

- Second semester juniors should be advised prior to scheduling for their spring, summer, and fall classes.
- Seniors should be reminded by their advisors to submit application for graduation (audit) and to consult with the Career Development Center as needed.

E. Encouraging Timely Graduation of Students

Findings

After 10 years of research at more than 90 colleges and universities, including small/large, private/public, four-year and two-year institutions, Dr. Light found that faculty and students rank “good academic advising as the #1” challenge of the college experience. (p. 85)

Data from the UM-FLINT academic department survey show the following:

- With the exception of one, all of the survey respondents offer individual advising with faculty department faculty (21 out of 22).
- 9 departments offer advising by a designated staff member, 12 do not, and 3 did not respond.
- 10 departments require advising before scheduling classes, 13 do not, and 1 did not respond.
- 9 departments apply registration holds to support required advising, 13 do not, and 2 did not respond.
- 5 departments require advising each semester, 13 do not, and 6 did not respond.

Academic departments vary in the frequency in which they see advisees, as well as the use of registration holds to promote advising and faculty/student contact outside of class, and whether advising is required before scheduling. First time freshmen are advised in the Advising Center during summer orientation. For the following winter semester, depending upon the major and departmental preferences, the files of some freshmen are sent to the appropriate academic department. This takes place in late September to early October in time for the winter registration period. For other freshmen, their files are not forwarded until meeting specific department admissions criteria. Students undecided on a major remain with the Advising Center. With the implementation of web-based registration has generated growing concern among faculty on its impact on faculty/student contact and advising. Closer communication with students about degree requirements, providing good advice about scheduling, and encouraging thoughtful planning of career and/or graduate program options make progress toward graduation timelier.

Recommendations

- The University should support the development of programs that may be completed entirely through alternative formats to serve students who cannot attend daytime classes. These formats may include online programs, Saturday programs, evening programs, and combinations of these three.
- A multi-year schedule of projected classes required for all degree programs should be made available for long-term planning through the Registrar's Office to assure our students continuity and timely progress toward graduation.
- SSEM should use e-mail to strongly encourage all undeclared students to be advised by the Academic Advising Center and all students with declared majors to be advised by their academic unit for their semester schedules. Getting such advice helps students maintain flexibility for the demands of their future majors and make wise class selections in the absence of specific program guides. It also offers opportunities for discussion of majors and careers with possible referrals to the Career Development Center, and maintains lines of communication for students whose ties to the University may be fragile.
- At the department level, departments should be encouraged to
 - Work with the Career Development Center to offer at least one workshop on careers and graduate programs to all majors (and minors).
 - Maintain a file of career information easily available to all students.
 - Maintain a website defining degree requirements, with prerequisites and detailed course descriptions included.
 - Maintain in the website full instructions for participating in independent study courses, as well as any other special projects of interest to majors.
 - Publicize through class announcements, bulletin board displays, and e-messages the availability of website information.

F. Developing Meaningful and Consistent Interactions between Faculty and Students, and Staff and Students

Findings

Excellence in teaching is vital to the students' academic experience (and retention). Eighty-nine percent (89%) of interviewed students identified a particular professor who made a strong impact on them. Sixty percent (60%) identified more than one professor, and only 8% could not identify one professor. Students interviewed recommend the following suggestions for excellence in teaching. (*Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* by Dr. Richard Light)

One of the necessary relationships for retention and satisfaction is the student-faculty relationship. Students say the single most helpful suggestion they received in their freshmen year was get to know one faculty member reasonably well and have that faculty member get to know you reasonably well.

Mentoring is a vital function for retention and satisfaction during the college experience. Senior students say their most memorable experience that made an impact on their academic development was working one-on-one, mentored research projects with a faculty supervisor. The best experiences came from projects not done for academic credit.

At UM-Flint, all of the academic departments surveyed offer students opportunities to engage in independent and/or joint research activities with faculty. The ways in which such opportunities are communicated to students vary by department. In some cases these opportunities only come about if student initiated, in others all students are made aware of such opportunities.

Some students seek the scheduling flexibility of independent study while earning additional credit. Others elect to do so because of interest in a certain topic and as a means to strengthen research skills; this is particularly important to students with plans to attend graduate or professional school.

Involvement in extracurricular activities leads to greater satisfaction with the college experience. Student clubs offer leadership opportunities, closer relationships with the students in the clubs, closer relationships with faculty, and stronger ties to the university.

No significant relationships were found between employment and grades, extracurricular activities and grades, and volunteering and grades.

Recommendations

- Advisors should help create relationships between students and faculty members. For example, advisors could tell students, “Your job is to get to know one faculty member reasonably well this semester and also have that faculty member get to know you reasonably well.” (Light, p. 86) Students say this assignment was “the single most helpful suggestion they got in their freshman year.” (Light, p. 87)
- Departments and faculty should create and support opportunities for faculty to work with students one-on-one.
- Units and departments should create mentoring programs encouraging professional student-faculty relationships.
- Units and departments should make all students aware of and encourage them to engage in independent or joint research opportunities with faculty, or fellow students.
- Units and departments should develop and encourage extracurricular activities related to their disciplines, thus offering students meaningful opportunities to extend their learning and to interact with students and faculty with similar interests.
 - Faculty should consider adopting teaching strategies to support student s success and persistence to graduation by fostering critical thinking and understanding of their disciplines. The following suggested strategies are derived from Dr. Light’s book.
 - Faculty should share intellectual responsibility with the student. The goal is to “get students to stretch a bit further.” (Light, p. 110) Students suggest the following ideas:
 - Provide one-to-one research projects or assignments where the students are actively involved in the planning and running of the project/ assignment.
 - Let students “teach” a little or be in charge of the assignment.
 - Ask students to build a reading list for classmates to read and discuss.

- Faculty may want to hone assignments and homework to represent the critical thinking skills of the discipline. Students say that “the design of homework and how we (faculty) ask students to do that homework matters a lot.” (Light, p. 51) Students suggest the following ideas:
 - Encourage students to complete homework and to study together in small groups. Students believe they learn more and become engaged in the subject when participating in study groups.
 - Don’t advocate group grading. Students want encouragement to collaborate but not tie grades to the group performance.
 - Connect assignments to students’ lives and interests. Invite and encourage students to support their ideas with educational and personal experiences to draw on diversity of the classroom.
 - Faculty should encourage students to participate in the classroom, even in large classes. Use short, in-class exercises emphasizing lecture points.
 - Faculty should teach small classes in “structured disagreement” around a controversial issue, pitting students against one another for discussion. (Light, p. 48) Students may also be encouraged to disagree constructively with the professor, holding them to a reasonable responsibility for shaping arguments. Students prefer professors who expect students to come prepared to make a case for one side or the other of a “carefully designed controversy.” (Light, p. 49)
 - Faculty should teach students to think like professionals in the discipline. Encourage debates and relate how the professional selects and uses information to settle debates or form decisions.
 - Faculty should teach students how to search, gather, and use evidence effectively to make decisions, resolve controversy, and create beliefs. More that statistical evidence is relevant to critical thinking. Students need to learn what evidence is effective and persuasive.
 - Faculty should be more open to student’s opinions. They should not be so predictable that students know what opinion is held on issues before discussion even begins. Faculty should encourage rigorous evaluation of issues on their own merits.
 - Faculty should integrate ideas from other disciplines when possible to provide the “big picture” for issues.

The University should support the recommendations listed above in this section by reactivating and assuring funding for the English Department's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. WAC was developed to disseminate to faculty successful strategies for incorporating scholarly/ professional reasoning and writing assignments into varied syllabi. During its existence WAC proved to be a successful and increasingly popular initiative, valued by faculty who benefited from its workshops. As an existing, though inactive program, it could offer strong support for the recommended faculty efforts to develop students' professional skills.

G. Conveying to Students the Importance and Benefits of Career and Educational Exploration

Findings

Getting students involved in activities other than class work is important for their retention and satisfaction. No significant relationships are found between employment and grades. Co-operative and internship experiences provide exposure to careers for the student to explore, confirm or disconfirm his/her academic choice of study.

Career oriented student clubs and honor societies provide career information, encourage mutual support and exploration among career interested students, create networking opportunities between students and alumni or other professionals in their career interest, and foster closer ties between students and the unit or department.

At some colleges, the career center gives students in a given major or with a given career goal a list of alumnae contacts in their field. They are encouraged to email or phone to get acquainted, creating possible networking possibilities.

Promoting positive, success stories to students helps encourage success.

The University community is largely unaware of the many talented students involved in Meeting of the Minds each May and other research, scholarly, and community service activities.

At UM-Flint the majority of the departments surveyed do not offer cooperative education, or internship opportunities. For those who do offer co-op or internships, they are usually requirements of the degree. Cooperative education and internship opportunities are more prevalent in the professional schools than in CAS.

Recommendations

- The Career Development Center should develop a file of our graduates and other motivated individuals who will serve as resource people for current students interested in certain careers and majors. These resource people agree to speak at meetings of interest groups or to meet with individuals to discuss matters relevant to professional criteria, graduate schools, employment opportunities, and other relevant matters. In some cases, perhaps, individual mentoring could be possible, but in all cases the networking possibilities will be a promising addition to the specific information that will be shared. (Additionally, current students will be made aware of the achievements of graduates.)
- The Career Development Center should initiate and actively promote additional methods to introduce students to career opportunities. More uniformity in the information offered and in the access to the information will better serve the needs of students.
- The Career Development Center, with the advice of departmental faculty, should prepare an introductory session specific to each major or career choice and market it for presentation in one required course for each department.
- The Career Development Center could offer meetings to discuss career opportunities and student interests for first year and second year "undecided" students. Service Learning could promote volunteer experiences as part of the program.
- Advisors need to ask students challenging questions. Students reported valuing that "at key points in their college years, an academic advisor asked questions, or posed a challenge, that forced them to think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives." (Light, p. 88) For example, "Why are you doing (studying) what you're doing (studying)?" "Why do you want to be a _____?" "Why are you studying _____?" "What is a 'good education'?" "How does your coursework relate to your personal interests?"
- All units and departments should sponsor career and interest centered clubs as well as honor societies for students. Career information can be disseminated when appropriate, graduate study can be explored, group research projects may be undertaken, group study opportunities may be developed, and, of course, comradeship and fun will develop through joining with others of similar interests.

- The University or departments should find means to announce regularly the “next steps” of our graduates, i.e. highlight achievements of teachers, accountants, dancers, singers, students attending graduate programs or medical or dental schools, etc., who graduate each term. Some ways to announce successes include a “Pride” column in the student newspaper or city newspaper, a feature of a Career Development Center publication, posters, or a special website.
- Departments should publish the names of undergraduates who are undertaking independent studies or special research projects, those who are reading or publishing their writing, those who have earned internships of note, etc. Academic accomplishments should be regularly recognized as a means for inspiring more of the same.
- Academic departments could consider working with the Career Development Center in seeking cooperative education and internship opportunities for students, particularly in the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Academic departments could sponsor, in conjunction with the Career Development Center, “What Can I Do with This Major?” workshops led by faculty and staff from the Career Development Center. Workshops such as these can assist students in affirming or reconsidering programs of study.

H. Other Important Areas - Diversity

Findings

Diversity is an extremely important aspect of the college education. The success of diversity in education begins with strong support from the top – Deans and administration.

Recommendations

- Administration at all levels should strengthen our culture of inclusion through projects and activities that develop and sustain campus-wide consciousness and support for inclusion, as well as our firm and unwavering commitment to diversity.

- Deans, advisors, faculty and staff should “convey to all incoming students that they have an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience, in their college years, a new set of people with new ideas that may challenge their own. [They should] encourage students to see these few precious years as a special chance to meet, work with, and get to know others who are unlike themselves.” (Light, p. 196)
- Advisors and/or the Office of Admissions should create for new students a booklet that contains selected essays conveying the theme that “finding common ground is often a challenge and requires continuing effort. It does not just happen.” (p. 197). During orientation, faculty members volunteer to discuss these essays and their meaning for the students’ collegiate experiences.

For guidance in establishing unit-wide diversity efforts, Academic Units should consider developing a “Diversity Council” similar the one established by the School of Education and Human Services in May of 2002. Dr. Traki Taylor is chair of the council.

IV. Conclusion

An abundance of research has concluded that inherent in a population of commuter students where a significant majority work and have diverse responsibilities, is the reality that a multiplicity of factors influence their ability and/or desire to persist. To address the many variables that impact student retention, a comprehensive and proactive plan of action is necessary.

Currently there is no central place on campus responsible for the integration and delivery of services to enhance student's transition to the University of Michigan-Flint, nor a coordinated effort to develop strategies and deliver services to enhance student retention. We have no campus-wide mechanisms to anticipate, monitor and work toward the resolution of the myriad issues many students encounter. To address the absence of a coordinated campus-wide approach to increasing student retention, we recommend that the Academic Advising Center expand its role and take on this task.

Such an expanded role necessitates changing the name of the Academic Advising Center to the **Center for Advising, Retention, and Transition Services (CARTS)**. This name is descriptive of the work and services currently provided by the Advising Center and will reflect the expanded role of the Advising Center in campus-wide retention and student success efforts. The AAC currently houses several student retention programs including the College Student Inventory, Early Assessment Plan, and Academic Advantage Plan. The Advising Center has sponsored advising workshops on and off-campus, implemented a Community College Outreach Advising Program, collaborated with The Center for Learning and Teaching on several occasions, and employs a developmental approach in the advising of students.

Student retention is a campus-wide effort. As such, critical to the success of CARTS will be collaborative student retention focused endeavors between Academic Affairs and Student Services and Enrollment Management. Central to such collaboration is an effective and efficient system of consistent and timely communication. A key component of CARTS will be liaisons that will assist in establishing and sustaining the communication link between SSEM, Academic Affairs and other areas of the university.

The strength of CARTS will be the ability, through the development and implementation of processes and mechanisms, to assist those students who "might fall through the cracks." These mechanisms will serve to link student services and academic affairs in a coordinated approach to serving the academic, social and personal needs of students. Evidence of students falling

through the cracks is apparent in the analysis of the freshman to sophomore continuation rate cited earlier in this report, as well as in feedback received from students during the phone-a-thons, and on the Disenrollment Exit Surveys.

The establishment of CARTS will not require additional staffing and resources. Concerning staffing, the Advising Center is well-positioned to serve in this capacity. An incremental approach to implementing CARTS might be the best approach initially. Such an approach would involve establishing a link with one academic unit or department, assessing the effectiveness of the partnership, and then adding links (additional schools or academic units).

While many details remain to be worked out before CARTS is fully implemented, the Advising Center under the direction of Dr. Allen and Dr. Sekelsky has been moving in this direction for several years. The fact that the AAC has the framework and many of the pieces already in place serves to make this recommendation all the more feasible. Our purpose in making this recommendation is to provide the broad framework of the purpose of such a center and the conceptual underpinnings of CARTS's contribution to campus-wide efforts in retaining our students and assisting them in reaching their academic goals and career aspirations.

Appendix A

**Analysis of Freshmen to Sophomore Year Retention Rate
1998 – 2001**

**Freshmen to Sophomore Continuation Rates
1995 – 2001**

Year	Continuation Rate
1995 - 1996	85.2%
1996 – 1997	79.9
1997 – 1998	76.0
1998 – 1999	76.0
1999 – 2000	69.5
2000 – 2001	73.3
2001 - 2002	71.8

Specific data for the time period 1995 – 1998 is not available for analysis.

Data for the time period 1998 – 2001 is summarized below.

- Approximately 2,593 freshmen enrolled at the University of Michigan-Flint.
- Of this number, 779 (30%) did not return for the next fall semester.
- Of the 779 students who did not return 60% were in good academic standing, and 38% were experiencing academic difficulties ranging from warning on transcript to dismissal from the university.
- By major, 19 of the seventy students under academic dismissal were undecided, followed by Biology, Engineering, pre-Education, and Business.
- Thirty-three (33) majors were represented by first term freshmen who did not return. Declared concentrations with 30 or more students that did not return were Psychology- 33, Pre-Nursing-39, Computer Science-48, Engineering-56, Biology-79, Pre-Education-90, Business-91, and Undecided-159.

- Of the students who did not return, in each of the years under study (1998 – 2001) the number of students uncertain of their major was greater than those with declared majors.

Some of the students who did not return may have transferred to other institutions. Listed below is a summarization of transcript requests.

- For the academic year 1998 – 1999, 133 (17%) of freshmen who did not return for fall 1999 requested official transcripts be sent to other institutions
- For the academic year 1999 – 2000, 109 (14%) of freshmen who did not return for fall 2000 requested official transcripts be sent to other institutions.
- For the academic year 2000 – 2001, 93 (10%) of freshmen who did not return for fall 2001 requested official transcripts be sent to other institutions.
- For the academic year 2001 – 2002, 136 (17%) of freshmen who did not return for fall 2002 requested official transcripts be sent to other institutions.

Appendix B

Dear «FirstName» «LastName»:

As you may be aware, Chancellor Mestas has established seven purpose groups to recommend strategies supporting student-centered excellence. The Retention Enhancement Group's charge is identifying and recommending measures to improve student retention and progress toward graduation (introduced in the Chancellor's Purpose and Direction message, Nov. 7, 2001 and in "Student Learning Task Force").

"To respond to this directive, the Retention Group is looking both outside the University for models to guide our improvement and inside our University to identify and share our "best practices."

Please take a few moments to complete the enclosed questionnaire or to direct it to the person(s) in your unit best suited to complete it. The responses will help identify current practices supporting student success. We hope to learn about the strengths of our current programs and practices in order to use them as the foundation for future planning.

We appreciate the time you take detailing the current practices in your unit in answer to the questions below. A committee member will call you on or near March 19 to check on your progress. We ask that your response be sent to Rosemarie Sholl on or before March 26.

Sincerely,

Rosemarie Sholl on behalf of the
Retention Enhancement Committee

Tracy Atkinson, Service Learning

Maryann Cardani, Biology

Gary Jones, UM-Flint student

Krista Hansen, Math

Cathy Miller, School of Management (Co-chair)

Aimi Moss, Academic Advisor

Elizabeth Sholl, Thompson Library

Rosemarie Sholl, English

Traki Taylor, Education

Johnny Young, Academic Advising (Co-chair)

Career Counseling of Undergraduate Students

Does your department/unit offer opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in

Independent study with a faculty member?	Yes	No
Service learning experiences?	Yes	No
Internships?	Yes	No
Co op?	Yes	No
Study abroad?	Yes	No
Joint research with a faculty member?	Yes	No
Other? Please name program_____	Yes	No

Please describe those programs marked "yes" (if you need more space, feel free to add sheets to the survey).

Does your department/unit provide career counseling through

Individual advising with faculty member?	Yes	No
Honoraries	Yes	No

organizations open for memberships to students achieving stated standards—the Eng. Dept has one and programs relate to student interests.--how about—

Student clubs or pre-professional clubs?	Yes	No
Career-centered workshops?	Yes	No
Pamphlets/Other Handouts?	Yes	No
Joint activities with Career Development Center?	Yes	No
Referral to Career Development Center?	Yes	No
Referral to Thompson Library resources?	Yes	No
Other? Please identify activity_____	Yes	No

Please describe career counseling undertaken by your department/unit.

How are students informed of career counseling any opportunities your department/unit offers?

Academic Advising of Undergraduate Students

Does your department/unit provide academic advising to its majors by

Offering academic advising by a faculty member? Yes No

Offering academic advising by a designated staff member? Yes No

Requiring advising before scheduling for each semester? Yes No

Applying registration holds to support required advising? Yes No

Offering, not requiring, faculty advising before registration? Yes No

Requiring advising, but not each semester? Yes No

How frequently? _____

Are your advisors aware of student grades before advising? Yes No

If a system is used to assign a student to a faculty advisor, please describe it.

Are departmental advisors aware of student grades before advising? Yes No

Does the department/unit have any process in place, however informal, for following up with students after they've been advised? If yes, please describe it.

Is long-term scheduling of requisite courses for majors guided by

Numerical rotation? Yes No

Faculty availability? Yes No

Yearly sequence? Yes No

Other? _____ Yes No

Please describe.

Does your department/unit regularly offer required classes during spring and/or summer terms? Yes No

Please describe the system used to schedule classes that include spring/summer sessions in students' efficient progress toward graduation.

Does your department/unit regularly offer classes On Saturdays? Yes No

In the evenings? Yes No

Off campus? Yes No

Online? Yes No

Other? Yes No

Please list "other" offerings.

Academic Support of Undergraduate Students

Does your department/unit provide academic help for students through

Supplemental instruction classes? Yes No

Scheduled tutorials? Yes No

Sponsored group study teams? Yes No

Clinics or workshops? Yes No

Specially developed introductory classes? Yes No

Other Yes No

Please describe "other."

To support students academic success, do department/unit faculty encourage the use

of The Library's Research Instruction Program? Yes No

The Writing Center? Yes No

Tutorial Services? Yes No

Other University programs? Yes No

Please identify programs.

Please describe academic and/or social opportunities, supported by your department/unit, for students and department/unit faculty to meet or work together (e. g. literary publications/readings, social service activities, holiday gatherings, colloquia, Meeting of Minds, research assistantships).

Are these opportunities made available by invitation, faculty recommendation, or open to all?

Please describe any mechanism your department/unit has in place for informing faculty about common campus information and services (e.g. Library services, CDC, Academic Advising, Women's Center, Writing Center, et al.)

Please describe any mechanism your department/unit has in place to ensure that all faculty function with the same information about the campus and that faculty make their knowledge available to students.

Support for Persistence to Degree of Undergraduate Students

Please describe any mechanism(s) your department/unit has in place for identifying students experiencing academic difficulty (weak GPA, scheduling overloads, personal problems that interfere with academic success, etc.).

Please describe any mechanism(s) your department/unit has in place to provide support for students experiencing academic difficulty.

Please describe any mechanism(s) your department/unit has in place for identifying and following up with students who are not meeting the necessary graduation requirements.

Please describe any retention programs or practices currently used by your department/unit to support student persistence and academic success.

Please describe any efforts in progress by your department/unit for creating possible retention programs or practices. Directly influenced by conversation with Comp Staff re: research instruction, writing center, freshman handbook>.