Conclusion

The “positive restlessness” in evidence on the UM-Flint campus calls for an ambitious, focused agenda that once and for all puts student needs first, and moves this campus forever beyond fracturing turf wars. We believe UM-Flint hungers for the bold initiative we are proposing: it was implicit in the CAS Task Force Report on Academic Advising in 2009; it is more explicit in UM-Flint’s 2011-16 Strategic Plan. It has been further reinforced through this Steering Committee’s process of information gathering, sub-committee reports, and Town Hall meetings.

Coordinating and integrating existing units that are now situated in Academic and Student Affairs will require historic strategic effort and good will. While it will be challenging to target programs for a diverse student body and a high proportion of non-traditional students presenting a wide range of needs, we have already learned much about best practices from successful initiatives undertaken at other colleges and universities nationwide—as well as here at UM-Flint.

Yet, the opportunities for measurable increases in student success—academic, personal, and professional achievement and retention—far outweigh the challenges. The Student Success Center will reduce duplication and overlap among departments providing similar student services. It will improve collaboration among academic and service departments, and strengthen local community and university partnerships.

The Steering Committee strongly believes this is a moment we cannot afford to squander. We have an opportunity to enact our three pillars of student centeredness, academic excellence, and civic engagement. Our message to students and all stakeholders is clear: through great decision-making and powerful implementation, we mean what we say. When our students succeed, UM-Flint succeeds. As do we as faculty, staff, and administrators. As does our community. That is what a Student Success Center is all about.

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**Introduction**

In October 2011, the offices of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs convened a group of faculty, staff, and administration and charged them with developing a student success initiative that “best fits the needs and mission of our campus in a manner that is both aspirational and achievable.” Inspired by that charge, the Steering Committee met, studied the literature, convened sub-committees, identified best practices, and held two lively Town Hall meetings that attracted a wide range of campus stakeholders. We believe we identified an effective strategy and series of tactics for fostering greater student success at UM-Flint over a multi-year period. We also believe our recommendations will be best achieved by establishing a Student Success Center housed in Academic Affairs, but functioning in close partnership with Student Affairs and other offices currently providing support to our students.

Our recommendation to establish a Student Success Center grows, in large part, out of UM-Flint’s 2011-2016 Strategic Plan. “Over the next five years,” the Strategic Plan stipulates, “we must take a more holistic view of increasing the student population and proactively prepare for the continued growth we believe is essential to our long-term health as a campus.” Responsible enrollment also means effective retention and degree completion: ensuring students have an educational experience that makes them want to stay, and giving them the support they need to complete their degrees in a timely manner. The plan calls for enrollment growth to nearly 10,000 from Fall 2011’s 8262 ten-day count. Also, full-time freshman to sophomore retention is mandated to move from the current 70% rate to 85%.

A Student Success Center will be a powerful and necessary institutional tool in achieving our goals, and can take UM-Flint to the next level academically. National higher education scholars offer a rich literature supporting our recommendations. In his 2011 article “Fostering Student Success in Hard Times,” George Kuh, et al., identifies four institutional conditions that must be present in order to foster a culture that supports student success: They are:

**Kuh’s Condition 1.** An ethic of positive responsibility permeates our faculty, staff and administration. “The ... institutions we study share a commitment to critical reflection. Rarely satisfied with their performance, they engage in ongoing efforts to improve. Most important, they are restless to be better in ways consistent with their mission and educational philosophy.”

We at UM-Flint are deeply committed to our students and their success. Enrollment has increased substantially over the past seven years, and is a justifiable source of institutional pride. During the same period, our full-time freshman to sophomore retention rates have remained at a stubbornly high 70%. There is an increasing recognition that the Academic Advising and Career Center report to the Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The University adopt the principle of a Student Success Center to work, we need, at a minimum, the unequivocal support of our Chancellor, Provost, Executive Officers, and Deans. How we define student success needs to be clearly articulated so as to be universally understood and widely supported by all faculty and staff. We also need to look at the role of Chairs, Program Directors, and their support staff to identify strategies that match the institutional and departmental programs’ requirements. We need to ask the right questions, and be willing to act on the answers we find.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** The University adopt the principle that since our work is centered on the academic success of our students, the Student Success Center be housed in Academic Affairs, reporting to the Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

**Recommendation 2:** Foster development and implementation of High Impact Practices across the university that are proven to promote student success.

**Recommendation 3:** Executive officers approve a revenue agreement based on documented improvement in FTIAC (and other) retention efforts. Funds would flow to the Student Success Center to provide a funding base and support a clearinghouse for both ongoing and innovative ideas and practices related to student success.

**Recommendation 4:** FTIAC retention should improve at the rate of 3% per year through 2016 to achieve the Strategic Plan’s goal of 85% persistence.

**Recommendation 5:** In year one (2012-13), the Academic Advising and Career Center report to the Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The reporting structure for additional offices is studied, and a national search be undertaken for a permanent Director of the Student Success Center. This individual should possess credentials that would lead him/her to be a tenured member of the faculty.

**Recommendation 6:** A Steering/Advisory Committee be appointed by the Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies. This Committee would include representatives from key offices that would work to ensure that high impact practices, applied throughout the university, result in enhanced student success, a fiscal plan for 2013-18 is developed, and exploration of a permanent physical location for the Center occurs.

**Recommendation 7:** We recommend the study of timely and effective coordination of services to students continue.

**Recommendation 8:** We recommend regular faculty and staff forums in which Student Success strategies are shared, discussed, and refined.