

Student Experience Strategy Group Report

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Submitted by: Devin Hagerty and Kim Leisey

- I. Primary Goal: Create vibrant, exceptional and comprehensive undergraduate and graduate student experiences that integrate in and out of classroom learning to prepare graduates for meaningful careers and civic and personal lives.

- II. Research Questions:
 - What roles do safety, sense of community and belonging, and campus pride play in students' experiences?
 - What are the student experiences that influence preparation for lifespan and the careers of undergraduate and graduate students? What roles do civic agency, academic support, health and fitness play in this preparation?
 - What is the current compositional diversity of UMBC? What is the impact of UMBC's compositional diversity and multiculturalism on undergraduate and graduate student experiences?
 - What are the experiences that influence students' learning about culture and preparation for participation in global citizenship?
 - What are the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students with interactions, delivery of service and care of campus offices, units, departments, faculty and staff?
 - How does faculty and staff infrastructure impact student experiences?

- III. Recommendations (see following pages)

Note: The term "students" means undergraduate and graduate students unless otherwise specified.

Recommendation 1

A. Expand the amount and type of space on campus that is available to students to socialize, study together, recreate, interact with faculty and staff, or just “hang out.”

These spaces create opportunities for informal peer to peer communication and relationships which increase sense of community, retention and graduation rates.

B. More specifically:

Create more spaces on and near campus that support informal gathering, large-scale common experiences, recreation (indoor and outdoor), and community.

Identify spaces in campus buildings that could be simply and inexpensively furnished with tables and chairs. As demonstrated by the PAHB lobby area, if we build it, they will come.

Expand coffee/tea/snack operations to informal gathering spaces, along the lines of the library lobby coffee model. Alternatively, increase vending machine and/or other “automatic” options.

C. Measures of success include:

Surveyed students report a higher level of social satisfaction with campus community and recreation.

Students, faculty, and staff report a higher level of satisfaction with the quantity and quality of public spaces for community gathering and informal interactions.

Students report higher levels of activity and social engagement on campus.

A higher percentage of surveyed students say that they are satisfied with food and beverage operations on campus, both during the week and on weekends.

Peer to peer interactions and faculty to student interactions increase as measured on the NSSE or other similar survey.

More alumni, visitors, families and other external community members visit campus and the surrounding community to partake in campus life and surrounding venues.

Recommendation 2

A. Energetically promote campus activities – athletic, social, cultural, performing arts, etc. – in a holistic, comprehensive, campus-wide fashion.

B. More specifically:

Circulate in thoughtful ways (flyers, Facebook, Twitter, myUMBC, listserves, etc.) a new missive entitled “This Week at UMBC.” This would highlight campus activities that students would be likely to attend.

Consider other ways to do internal “PR” regarding campus events and activities.

Make it a campus standard that students read their UMBC email and respond to incoming messages as appropriate.

Where appropriate build co-curricular experiences (including campus events) into course syllabi particularly for first year courses, for modest credit. Students might also be encouraged to reflect on the events they attend and how they have been affected by them.

As planning evolves on usage of the new activities center and the RAC, ensure that sufficient space is available for large-scale cultural and social programming, such as dances, concerts, and holiday events.

C. Measures of success include:

A higher percentage of surveyed students describe UMBC as a vibrant, lively campus with sufficient social, athletic, cultural, and performing arts activities.

On average, a higher percentage of surveyed students (particularly first and second year residents) remain on campus each weekend or return (off campus students) to participate in events.

More surveyed students describe UMBC as an active campus and are able to describe activities and events they have attended.

Surveyed students report that they “know what’s happening” on campus.

Recommendation 3

A. Systematically improve the quality and consistency of academic advising and mentoring of students.

B. More specifically:

Provide increased training opportunities for academic advisers, especially in the utilization of online advising tools.

Better define what is expected of academic advisers, most of whom are simply thrust into this role with little adequate preparation.

Better define what every UMBC student should receive every semester in terms of advising.

Carefully examine the iCubed program, the Gates transfer program, the Meyerhoff program, and other good models for advising and mentoring practices that might be replicated more broadly.

Promote enhanced academic security by devising new mechanisms for peer mentoring – for example, upper-level students in academic departments being available to counsel lower-level students.

C. Measures of success include:

A higher percentage of surveyed students expresses satisfaction with academic advising and mentoring in their home departments.

Surveyed students report higher levels of “academic safety.”

Recommendation 4

A. Adopt a more effective approach to course and classroom planning so as to improve the delivery of high-quality education and shorten students' "time to graduation."

B. More specifically:

Utilize classroom space more efficiently by moving to a true Monday-Friday schedule, instead of today's Monday-Thursday norm.

Provide academic departments with incentives to meet certain benchmarks for expanding the teaching week, both vertically (over the entire course of the day and evening) and horizontally (over the course of the entire work week).

If there is sufficient faculty and student interest, investigate the desirability and feasibility of creating weekend course scheduling options.

C. Measures of success include:

A higher percentage of surveyed students express satisfaction with their overall academic experience.

A higher percentage of surveyed students reports that they have been able to take required courses on a timely basis.

Retention rates improve.

Graduation rates improve.

Recommendation 5

A. Leverage the strength of UMBC's compositional diversity by increasing the cultural and global competencies of all students.

B. More specifically:

Add a fifth competency, cultural and global competency, to the major competency areas.

Develop communities of practice that deliberately focus on developing skills, attitudes and experiences which promote cultural competency.

C. Measures of success include:

Students report satisfaction with the frequency and quality of interactions and connections between themselves and others who are different than themselves, as well as interactions and connections between different groups and cultures.

Students imagine how their interactions and connections with different types of people can be operationalized in their careers and lives post-graduation.

Recommendation 6

A. Students Report a High Level of Well-Being and Pride

B. More specifically:

Decrease students' feelings of overwhelm and anxiety which result in academic and career insecurity, and poor emotional health.

Define a shared understanding of the role of athletics and recreation through a specific strategic plan for athletics and recreation.

Develop and promote messages of UMBC pride.

C. Measures of success include:

Students report lower levels of anxiety, stress and overwhelm associated with academic and career insecurity.

Campus community understands and supports the role of athletics and recreation at UMBC.

Students articulate and demonstrate pride for UMBC.

Recommendation 7

A. Develop a campus culture that creates, supports and expects applied learning experiences which accommodate all types of students in a wide variety of options, such as study abroad, internship/cooperative education, research, service-learning, civic engagement, performance, leadership, teaching assistants, creative projects (i.e. robotics, kinetic sculpture, Baja club) etc.

B. More specifically :

Each student engages in and reflects upon an applied learning experience prior to graduation.

Implement an “applied learning resource fair.”

Expand funding to support applied learning experiences, using the 50th anniversary to launch a campaign to encourage alumni and parent giving.

Provide more incentives for faculty working with students in applied learning experiences.

Develop a system to assist students in finding faculty research mentors.

Provide space for creative work and projects such as robotics, kinetic sculpture, and Baja Club.

C. Measures of success include:

Upon graduation students report meaningful applied experiences as an important part of their education at UMBC.

In graduate/professional school applications and hiring processes UMBC graduates will be able to identify and articulate skills and knowledge obtained through applied experiences.

Employer, internship/coop hosts, and graduate/professional school evaluations will report that UMBC graduates demonstrate effective applied skills and knowledge.

Recommendation 8

A. High levels of satisfaction with hours, availability and responsiveness of campus services

B. More specifically:

Increase availability of campus services apart from M-F 8:30am-4:30pm.

Create and implement “care and responsiveness training” for campus community.

Create retail and social opportunities adjacent to campus.

Expand the hours of operation for existing campus eateries and social spaces- i.e. in the Commons and the University Center, especially on the weekends.

Explore the possibility of creating additional retail dining options on campus.

C. Measures of success include:

Students report higher levels of satisfactions with service availability after 4:30pm and on weekends.

Students report higher levels of activity and social engagement on campus.

Students report consistent high levels of care and responsiveness across campus departments and services.

Students report that they can get to venues next to campus to access services and social opportunities.

Lower percentage of surveyed students say that they are dissatisfied with lack of variety of dining options- especially on the weekends.

IV. Narrative

A. Recommendation 1: Increase the sense of community by expanding the amount of space on campus that is available to students for socializing, studying together, interacting with faculty and staff, or just “hanging out.”

Stakeholders tell us that there is a dearth of informal gathering places on campus – areas where students can study, relax between classes, chat with faculty, etc. The spaces that are available, such as the University Center Starbucks/Chik-fil-A area, tend to be very crowded and loud from Monday through Thursday. At the same time, there are substantial empty spaces in various buildings that are utilized only sparingly. The lobby of the Public Policy Building is one example. Empty spaces like this could be furnished with tables and chairs, so that students would have more places to gather.

B. Recommendation 2: Energetically promote campus activities and events – athletic, social, cultural, performing arts, etc. – in a holistic, comprehensive, campus-wide fashion.

Although there is a lot going on at UMBC stakeholders report that they often “don’t know what’s going on” around campus. Many students seem not to get the word about athletic events; theater, dance, and musical performances; arts exhibits; speakers; cultural festivals; movie screenings; and other activities and events. Decentralized communication about events and activities, lack of big time athletics and a college town adjacent to campus lead to the perception that there is a “lack of things to do” especially on weekends.

C. Recommendation 3: Systematically improve the quality and consistency of academic advising and mentoring of students.

Stakeholders say that advising and mentoring of students is uneven. Some areas of the advising community get high marks, such as orientation advising. Some academic departments reportedly do an excellent job of curricular advising and mentoring of students headed to graduate school, into the job market or participating in research. However, other academic departments have a reputation for doing poorly in these vital areas. Not all units embrace and/or utilize online advising tools. In short, the quality of advising and mentoring seems to vary widely by unit, as well as by individual.

D. Recommendation 4: Adopt a more effective approach to course and classroom planning so as to improve the delivery of high-quality education and shorten students’ “time to graduation.”

Stakeholders observe that it can be difficult to meet curriculum requirements and make steady progress through their degree programs. Roughly 80% of students say that they have been unable to register for required courses because they are either full or not offered. About 40% of students have not been able to take a course because of the time it is offered. Some 20% of incoming students say they are neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with their academic schedule. Undergraduate program directors report problems scheduling classes because of the

interdependency of curricula, conflicts between required courses, and limited classroom availability. Graduate students report conflicts with timing of course registration, billing cycle and graduate student stipends as a deterrent to early registration. Lack of early registration numbers result in some required/needed courses to be cancelled.

E. Recommendation 5: Leverage the strength of UMBC's compositional diversity by increasing the cultural and global competencies of all students.

Students cite UMBC's compositional diversity as an attraction for recruitment and admission. Students report that there is a lack of meaningful interaction and learning that takes place between themselves and those who are different. Student have a hard time articulating and demonstrating how the compositional diversity adds to their experience at UMBC. An intentional campus-wide approach, through curriculum and out of classroom experiences would assist students to learn more from one of the untapped resource, compositional diversity, on campus. As well, an increase in cultural and global competence would enhance students' career and workforce skills.

F. Recommendation 6: Students report a high level of well-Being and pride

Compared to national college student health data, students at UMBC report high levels of stress, anxiety and overwhelm which impact their academic success, academic efficacy and career outlook. The emotional and behavioral health of the campus student population needs help. Campus-wide initiatives to enhance and support students' emotional and behavioral health need to be systematically studied and a comprehensive plan and resources developed and implemented.

G. Recommendation 7: Develop a campus culture that creates, supports and expects applied learning experiences which accommodate all types of students in a wide variety of options, such as internship/cooperative education, research, service-learning, civic engagement, performance, leadership, teaching assistants, etc.

The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report, applied research studies from the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the Campus Mental Health Primer from the American Council on Education all indicate that applied learning is a meaningful part of college students' education. Developing a campus culture that intentionally creates and supports applied learning experiences with a reflective component will likely enhance a student's overall experience in college. With appropriate craftsmanship these experiences create relationships between faculty, staff and students; enhance engagement; increase satisfaction and mentoring opportunities. These experiences often times lead to career opportunities.

H. Recommendation 8: High levels of satisfaction with hours, availability and responsiveness of campus services.

Students report inconsistent responsiveness from personnel in campus departments and services. Additionally, students report wanting expanded hours of operation for some campus

services, including but not limited to dining, Bookstore, the Commons and the RAC. Students who come to campus for evening classes or weekend research, etc. find it difficult to find services after 4:30pm and on the weekends (dining variety is limited). Students also suggested that dining retail should extend past the Commons and University Center into some classroom buildings (similar to what is housed in the library). Additionally, feedback from faculty, staff and students report frustration about the lack of social and retail opportunity next to campus (a college town). Development of these establishments next to campus would create an opportunity for people to gather locally near campus. The lack of retail (i.e. casual dining) next to campus does not promote the campus community and visitors to take advantage of campus events and athletics offerings in the evenings and on weekends.

V. Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders were engaged through focus groups, interviews, individual conversations, campus survey and meetings. The following is a list of the UMBC stakeholders that were engaged.

Admissions and Orientation

Advising office

Affiliated students

Alumni

Athletes and Athletics

Commuter students

Counseling Center

CWIT

Diversity Council

Employers (Fall 2014 Job Fair)

Facilities Management

Faculty

Full-time students

Graduate program directors

Graduate students

Graduate Student Association

International students

Office of Undergraduate Education

Meyerhoff Scholars Office

Mosaic Center staff

Phi Mu Sorority

Office for Academic and Pre-Professional Advising

Parents

Part-time students

Provost's office

Psychology Department's Ethnic & Cultural Diversity Committee

Registrar

Residential Life

Residential students

Shady Grove students

Student Government Association
Student Life
Student organizations
Transfer students
University Health Services
Undergraduate program directors
Undergraduate students
Vice President for Student Affairs
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Women's Center

VI. Members of the Student Experience Strategy Group are:

Ken Baron, Craig Berger, Jessica Carrick '10, Devin Hagerty, Tanvi Gadhia '09,
Keith Harmon, Bruce Herman, Romy Hubler '09, '11, William Klotz, '14,
Kim Leisey, Tahira Mahdi '10, '14, Michael Moubarek '15, Neil Rothman,
Christine Routzahn, Anne Rubin, Bryan Wilkinson '09, Ae Lim (Ally) Yang '17

VII. Appendices

A. Baseline Data in Box

Years Enrolled: advising (4), background info, campus facilities and services, gender ethnicity, innovative teaching and applied learning

Grad vs. Undergrad: advising (4), campus facilities and services

First Yr vs. Transfer: advising (4), background info, campus facilities and services, gender ethnicity, innovative teaching and applied learning, diversity

Know Advisor-Advising Correlation

Campus Outreach Discussion Notes

Student Experience report 2014 Strategic Planning Survey

Interactive Gallery Covision Data

Leadership Retreat

Mentoring and Advising

SGA Senate Meeting

Shady Grove Focus Group

Student Interactions Matrix

Retreat Report Covision

Student Experience Advising Focus Group Notes

Student Campus Experience Focus Group Notes

Applied Learning Focus Group Notes

Intercept Interviews with individuals

“Who Gets to Graduate” NY Times article

“Service: A Collision of Intentions, Thoughts and Avatars” (Pinhein)

“Life In College Matters”- Gallup Purdue Study

Gallup Purdue Index Report

Focus Groups (GSA, athletes, transfer students, commuters, alumni, athletes, residential students, affiliated students, Hillel students, staff)

Other data consulted that is not in BOX: focus groups with undergraduate and graduate program directors; IRADS data; REX data; UMBC *Progress Report on Institutional Programs of Cultural Diversity* (04/02/14); orientation advising evaluation (Summer 2014); Office of Institutional Research SCEQ data; Foundations Group data.; Clery Report, 2013; 2014 Student Involvement and Leadership Survey; 2012 Commuter and Off-Campus Student Experience Survey; 2013 National College Health Assessment; 2013 National Survey of Student Engagement; 2013-2014 Alcohol Edu Executive Summary 2014 Residential Life EBI data (in process); Shriver and Career Center practicum data on applied learning; UMBC's Sophomore Success Committee recommendations

B. Process Reflections

1. Did we really hear from the “average” UMBC community-member?

Inclusion of more and a wide variety of student voices would be helpful in the overall process- for all strategy groups.

Lots of time and energy were spent trying to include faculty “leadership” voices and it seemed that the same people tended to be involved. The effort yielded the ability to say they were included but the information garnered did not provide new insights and fresh perspectives.

Inclusion of more exempt and non-exempt staff voices (admin/finance, enrollment management and student affairs) would be helpful in the overall process-for all strategy groups.

2. The Student Experience Group captured a lot of information on issues that deserve attention and don't necessarily rise to the level of strategic planning. How do we get these items accounted for and attended to?
3. Having an enrollment context for the next strategic plan would be helpful to planning. Although this question was asked it has never been addressed.
4. One of the issues that was brought up early in the process was the whole question of secession planning. This was never addressed and is still very much out there and on people's minds.

5. Work groups, including foundations group, worked very independently from each other and there was never a time to share, discuss and integrate groups' work prior to the final reports being submitted.
6. Finding a way to provide meaningful recognition the people who served on work groups is important.
7. Initial idea of having people state whether or not they were willing to serve as a part of "focus groups" was a good one but it wasn't well utilized resulting in people feeling left out.