University of Minnesota, Crookston

First Year Seminar: Partial Retention Strategy for UMC

Project Summary: While at the 2006 Collaboration Summer Institute, the UMC team addressed the issue of retention. University data shows that only 61.8% of students return to UMC their second year and only 49.4% return for their third year, which is equivalent to a loss of $6.2 million! IPEDS data show that in comparison to surrounding schools’ six-year graduation data, UMC ranks seventeenth out of twenty schools in our region. During the first two days of the workshop the team identified potential issues associated with retention at the university and determined that a First Year Seminar (FYS) course would be the strategy with the most impact, but only the first of many major contributions toward improving retention that need to be implemented. Our team has also listed the key opportunities for departments to implement. The proposed course would address topics pertinent to first year students such as tutoring, alcohol awareness, study skills, career planning, campus activities, and library and computer services. Our vision for the seminar course is to create and foster a culture that encourages active learning, global citizenship, and a greater sense of community among UMC students. The team will present this information first to UMC’s Chancellor, then to the Executive Committee, and finally to the entire campus in August in order to garner commitment to our multi-faceted retention strategy. Collaboration core faculty presented that retention efforts take a minimum of five years to see change. UMC must start acting today to improve our tomorrow! The cost of implementing our retention effort suggestions will clearly be less than the financial impact of $6.2 million that is currently being lost due to the students who leave UMC.

Team Members:
Sue Brorson, Department Chair, Business Department
Pam Holsinger-Fuchs, Vice Chancellor for Student Services and Enrollment Management
Sara Kaiser, Student Experience/Parent Coordinator
Peg Sherven, IT Professional/Help Desk Director
Kevin Thompson, Assistant Professor of Communication
Five University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) faculty and staff members attended the 2006 Collaboration Summer Institute at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. The team’s mission focused on improving UMC’s retention rates, guided by research data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) data, Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP), Student Success in College: Creating conditions that matter (G. Kuh, J. Kinzie, J. Schuh, E. Whitt, 2005) and UMC’s institutional research (IR) website. Throughout the week, the Collaboration core faculty presented various workshops and offered consulting advice for the various groups as they completed their projects.

The week’s vision was to, “Create and foster a culture that encourages active learning, global citizenship, and a greater sense of community.” Clearly, UMC’s retention and graduation rates must improve. According to UMC’s Strategic Task Force Report Vision (p.4), “A new vision of UMC as an innovative, competitive, and culturally transformed campus known for its exceptional undergraduate experience and for the unparalleled value it creates for the region.” Data from NSSE & ACT prove that a number of intervention programs can improve retention. Finally, DEEP schools’ data cite six shared conditions that enhance student success: “Living” mission and “lived” education philosophy; unshakeable focus on student learning; environments adapted for educational enrichment; clearly marked pathways to student success; improvement-oriented ethos; shared responsibility for educational quality.

Teaching and Learning Needs

Literature shows that student engagement and retention of students can be increased through institutional characteristics such as: providing activities to celebrate institutions heritage and culture; articulating institutional goals and mission; purposefully connecting campus life and curriculum; and using assessment data to drive institutional change. Instructional Services and Programs can improve retention through: learning centers; tutoring programs; advising for selected student population, such as undeclared students; and supplemental instruction. Academic Programs/Services shows that freshman seminar courses and learning communities are instrumental in improving retention and student engagement.

Brainstorming by our team has produced the following opportunities for individual departments to address in order to meet the above retention and student engagement strategies (Appendix A). Teaching and learning is a very important need for UMC, since we currently only retain 64.3% of our freshman. Also, graduation rates for UMC are lower than surrounding schools. Based on IPEDS data, UMC ranks seventeenth out of the top twenty school schools in our region (Appendix B).

We would like to implement a campus wide retention effort. To help foster this effort the first project we would like to implement would be a First Year Seminar (FYS) course that is a mandatory one credit course for all new freshmen. The chosen instructors will be specially selected based on their interpersonal skills, nurturing relationship with students,
quality of their teaching based on student evaluations, and student-nominated teaching awards.

Some suggested topics to be included in FYS, as brainstormed by the Collaboration team include the following:

- Academic Advising
- Alcohol Abuse
- Computer Addiction, care & handling, policies
- Counseling Issues, such as suicide
- Credit Cards
- Educational Career Plans (54% asked for this)
- Home sickness
- Ice Breakers: making friends, how to get involved
- Library Skills
- Math Skills: go to AAC/SSS for help (55.9% asked for this)
- Study Abroad
- Study Skills (60% asked for this)
- “Your mother doesn’t live here”
- UMC traditions

The final curriculum will be researched and decided by the FYS project design team, focusing on best practices from the literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Timeline</th>
<th>Project Task Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>Project Task Description</strong></td>
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</table>
| August ’06        | Chancellor Information Meeting Concerning the Project Proposal  
|                   | - Ask for the Chancellor to approve this retention effort as a  
|                   |   campus priority for the 2006 – 2007 academic year (like HLC  
|                   |   focus of 2005-2006) |
|                   | Executive Committee – Presentation (Approval and Commitment)  
|                   | - Retention data shows 65% of current students do not graduate  
|                   | - Loss of revenue due to poor retention is over $6.2 million dollars  
|                   | - Equivalent of $9K to replace a student who has left UMC |
| October ’06       | Faculty/Department Supporters (Bill P., Dan S., others) |
|                   | Opening week presentation/activity – faculty  
|                   | Opening week presentation/activity – staff |
|                   | Establish Project Design Team |
| November ‘06      | Submit proposal to FA Curricula Committee |
| Dec. ’06-August ‘07 | Faculty Assembly (FA) Curriculum Committee submit to FA for approval |
| Fall ’07 ~        | Development of course materials  
|                   | Training session for chosen instructors |
|                   | Rollout final version of course |
Barriers/Addressing the Barriers

We expect to encounter barriers from a few faculty members and the registrar’s office. ETS’ academic data show that it takes a minimum of five years for a program to produce results. As a result of this week-long workshop, our team’s primary goals will be to present our goals to Chancellor Casey, then the UMC Executive committee in order to gain their support. At this point, the following ideas can be presented at the fall 2006 faculty/staff workshop since people support what they help create. We need the support of the entire campus to focus on retention to remain viable. We recognize that we do not have a lot of time to improve recruitment and retention.

Financial Implications

The University of Minnesota, Crookston currently has credit hours that are equivalent to 1,052 students. Based on the 2003 graduation data taken from IPEDS, National Center for Educational statistics, we currently graduate only 35.3% of our students in six years. This means that almost 65% of our students are not completing in six years, which correlates to 684 students that do not graduate.

Based on our 2006-07 tuition rates $7,200 (15 credits) per year, plus a student service fee of $368 and technology fee of $1000, this equates to a loss of $5,860,512 from tuition and fees revenue alone.

\[
\text{loss of tuition and fees revenue} = 7200 + 1000 + 368 = 8568/\text{year} \\
\text{loss of revenue} = 8568 \times 684 \text{ lost students} = \text{5,860,512 lost revenue (does not include room and board)}
\]

The cost to recruit each new student at UMC for the fall of 2005 was calculated at $519 per student. The total cost of replacing the 684 non-returning students is an additional expenditure of $354,996.

\[
\text{5,860,512 lost revenue plus 519 recruiting replacement cost} = 6,215,508
\]

Estimated Cost to implement initial Collaboration Team’s retention suggestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Estimations of UMC’s First Year Seminar Course</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NSSE membership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retention campaign marketing/operating costs (food, printing, misc)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Year Seminar development costs:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>textbooks (field research)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development time (ITC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructor time (12 sections @ 20 students/section)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hotel (for 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>add'l meals (for 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreConf workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc incidentals (trans)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total estimated budget for initial retention effort** $34,570.00
In comparison of the cost estimations, it clearly behooves UMC to retain the students they already have and use these funds to enhance the student experience rather than constantly recruiting replacements to offset the losses. ($6.2M > $35K)

**Assessment**

Part of our academic affairs’ opportunities are to enroll immediately in NSSE; thus giving us a baseline prior to the implementation of our First Year Seminar to track its impact. These results will allow us to track our goal of increasing retention by three percent from first year to second year students, beginning fall of 2008. The NSEE survey data will also look at other student engagement issues and lead us to improvement in other areas that will also impact retention. We plan on examining the course, the instructors, and content each year through student evaluations to measure impact and learning outcomes of the course.

**The Collaboration’s Summer Institute Contributions**

The Core Faculty at the Summer Institute helped immensely in giving us focus for the week by highlighting national statistics and playing devils advocate with ideas. They offered creative ideas such as:

- A one-minute paper forcing us to look critically at the true problem we were here to examine
- The final paper and poster project/presentation forced us to clearly enunciate our programming changes
- Discussing Bolman and Deal’s concept of examining issues through four lenses: political, structural, cultural/symbolic, and human resources.
- The plenary sessions were crafted to inspire thinking on our own campuses, especially for group buy-in and recognizing barriers such as groupthink.
- Helping us better understand how to prepare and plan for resistance rather than just reacting.
- Assessment, Assessment, Assessment!
- Oh, and the food wasn’t half bad either.

**Additional Assistance from the Collaboration**

We would appreciate it if the Collaboration would follow-up with Chancellor Casey to further reinforce the implementation of the FYS course, based on their knowledge of what works to improve retention. The Collaboration could also alert the UMC campus of upcoming workshops or seminars that may further enhance UMC’s expertise in retention.

Thank you for dedication and expert guidance throughout this past week in assisting us with our creation of the FYS course. We truly believe it will make a difference for UMC! Working together as a close-knit campus group with the input from other campuses has helped us to achieve a positive step in the right direction. Our brainstorming sessions have allowed us to identify not only opportunities and action
items for our campus, but also to realize our unique strengths. Also, other schools have similar issues. Retention in this region is an issue for all schools to be concerned with.
Appendix A

Academic Affairs Opportunities:

- Lacking an assessment model
- Implement a Teaching and Learning Center
- Place holds on all freshmen, requiring them to meet with faculty advisors in order to register. They should meet with the advisor at least once per semester.
- Advisors must send an e-mail outlining their pertinent information such as office/phone/website to all new students
- Work to address negative faculty attitudes
- A retention subcommittee deal specifically with the advising model
- Since being active in clubs and organizations leads to good retention, encourage these practices within each department
- Student evaluation forms need to be re-examined, not just physical environment, etc. Questions related to course difficulty and challenge should be asked as our students indicate they are not academically challenged
- Since over 50% of UMC students leave due to lack of majors, this area needs to be examined further
- Review all academic majors to incorporate a capstone course that includes a portfolio project including a final project, presentations, research, articles, papers, letters of recommendation
- Examine programs that have low enrollments and complete a cost-benefit analysis
- Early Alert system: advisors need to have copies, needs to be done earlier and more often. Faculty must be required to complete this! Also needs to be left open for a longer period of time.
- Midterm alerts need to be sent to advisor, not just student

Career Services Opportunities:

- Work with alumni and current clubs during evening sessions, focusing on undeclared students. This will help them realize what careers are available through our various majors.

Chancellor Requests:

- Support First Year Seminar course for Fall 2007, based on above report
- Appoint an official retention standing committee of campus assembly.
- Showcase opening week training session to include information from the Declining Degrees video and the Inventory of Contemporary Strategies to Increase Student Engagement and Retention of Students
- Raise retention as one of the most critical issues facing our institution—emphasize during the yearly opening all-campus breakfast in August
Communications/IT Needs:
- Intranet for faculty/staff to highlight accomplishments
- E-mail overload and abundance of spam must be reduced.
- Podcasting ideas: skits from orientation, computer-related “how-tos”
- Ability for students/faculty/staff to check out digital cameras, videocameras, IPODs, and other digital equipment

Culture:
- Formulate a committee to focus on the culture of UMC, providing activities to celebrate heritage and culture
- Create new traditions such as:
  - Provide seating like Adirondack chairs to better utilize the mall
  - Banners in Crookston
  - Pancake feeds
- Bring back former college traditions such as ice-skating on the mall
- Continue traditions such as UMC After Hours

Human Resources & Training Opportunities:
- Succession planning
- New employee handbook (faculty and staff)
- Advisor training
- Computer training: mid-term alert system (Tom Mulvaney)
- Send at least two attendees (Sara Kaiser being one) to the International Conference on the First Year Experience, July 24-27, Toronto, Canada. $655/person registration fee. There are additional pre-conference workshops available at additional cost.
- Mentoring programs for new faculty and staff
- Work to eliminate negative culture, example, “That’s not my job.” What can we do better? What are we doing wrong?

Institutional Research Opportunities:
- In order to improve the usefulness of our institutional research figures, we need to track individual students, not numbers. As an example, we do not know who drops from one program and enters another, or who transfers to other institutions and why. We also need to track athletes, undecided students, and departments separately.
- Set up a framework to gather information and disseminate throughout the campus in a timely fashion on an ongoing basis. Communication of the data is imperative.
**Student Affairs Opportunities:**

- Passport to success: Highlight topics of interest and have students required to attend items such as a sporting event, a club meeting, a musical, or a theater performance
- Implement a task force to focus on losing the “suitcase campus” mentality
- Improve student culture with weekend event programming: dance in the ballroom, foosball, old movie nights
- Get involved campaign, but not only for students, this includes faculty & staff
- Work with Chamber of Commerce to develop community programs, inviting UMC students and businesses to meet & greet
- Exit surveys need to be completed (possibly during financial aid exit loan counseling)
- Invite Margi Healy from UND to present her doctoral research on Tinto’s Retention Theory (free)

**Student Experience Office:**

- Implement student workshops during the 2006-2007 academic year during the interim development of the FYS course. The goal would be to have faculty offer points, extra credit, or some incentive to their students in their classes to attend these workshops. Workshop topics could include: library and computer usage, study skills, educational and career planning, note taking skills, and available tutoring on campus.
Appendix B

Table 1: 2003 Graduation Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>6 Year Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CARLETON COLLEGE</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAINT JOHNS UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MACALESTER COLLEGE</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAINT OLAF COLLEGE</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLEGE OF SAINT BENEDICT</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCORDIA COLLEGE AT MOORHEAD</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMESTOWN COLLEGE</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA-TWIN CITIES</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA-MAIN CAMPUS</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY-MAIN CAMPUS</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF MARY</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>PR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY-MOORHEAD</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALLEY CITY STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAINT CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEMIDJI STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA-CROOKSTON</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAYVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINOT STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DICKINSON STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, IPEDS

Sector – PR are private, non-profit; P are public.
References

