

Student Success Task Force (SSTF)
Minutes
September 11, 2009

Present: Mary Adams, Brent Bennett, James Boldin, Brian Bramstedt, Jeffrey Cass, Ricky Fiorillo, Seth Hall, Patti Roshto, Mary Elizabeth Sewell, Ann Smith, Susan Diggins (guest), Tasha Fisher (guest)

Absent: John Anderson (excused), Wendy Brown (excused), Hannah Livingston (excused), and Elizabeth Smith (excused)

1. Jeffrey Cass called the meeting to order, asked attendees to introduce themselves, and then invited people to eat their lunches while he informed them of activities and discussions completed thus far by the subcommittee of the University Planning Council. He passed out the notes from that subcommittee meeting, which reported during the Planning Council's two-day retreat. In particular, Cass explained the local and State contexts that are pushing for action on this task force, up to and including the University's budget, formular funding, and the Tucker Commission report, which will be out in February. Notably, Cass touched upon issues related to students in their first and second years, non-traditional and commuter students, online students, potential students from the military, athletes and other student involvement in campus organizations, the possibility of focus groups for juniors and seniors. Other potential issues for the SSTF to interrogate include: an evaluation of advising (especially summer advising); increased use of Flightpath; retention, completion, and graduation rates; and communications problems among all campus constituencies.
2. Cass also suggested that the committee essentially have short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals and objectives. Some of the work of the task force would have to be completed by January in order to provide the Administration with plans for addressing institutional issues for possible implementation during the following academic cycle. By the end of the meeting, subcommittees would have to be formed, their initial meetings scheduled, and the next Task Force meeting planned. Susan Diggins and Tash Fisher reiterated the importance of the work of this task force and were glad that the committee would be taking its task seriously.
3. Cass asked whether or not the group had any issue with his coordination and facilitation of meetings and activities of the SSTF. All agreed that Cass should continue as head of the large group.
4. Cass invited initial comments from the group. Bramstedt noted that we must ensure that research in the area of student success be understood in terms of the various student groups (e.g. commuters, non-traditional students). The SSTF should not make decisions that treated all the students in the same way. We must look at the research as it breaks down into different student constituencies. Bennett concurred, suggesting that we get statistical information from the Student Success Center (Hereafter, SSC). Sewell agreed,

- as did Duggins, with Sewell suggesting that the SSTF bring in instructors and hear them discuss both statistical results and personal experiences, particularly in the University Seminar. The principal issue for Sewell was not getting results but answering the following question: "How do we use the results?" For her part, A. Smith remained concerned about information on students who don't avail themselves of Career Connections (hereafter, CC). Since most of the students CC saw were self-selected students, A. Smith worried about the larger picture that CC might be missing.
5. Fiorillo wondered about the personal connections that he missed, given the large sizes of his biology classes, and he contended that one of the most pressing issues, as he saw it, was retention from the first to second year. Sewell responded that this year seemed a bit different from previous ones because the basic problems she was seeing with student retention lay in transitioning to college. She saw a lot of students who were homesick and unable to cope emotionally with the new experience of intellectual and life independence. Fiorillo also hinted that a more extensive PREP might be useful.
 6. Seth Hall said that from his student's perspective (and from that of a peer leader) he wished for three things: a) better professors for first- and second-year courses, b) a second University seminar for the Spring semester, and c) tying academic activities to Student Life. Cass agreed, urging greater integration among Student Life and academics. Adams responded that English is doing this with a research assignment, in which students must research a student group or activity, an assignment that eases them toward the demands of more formal research.
 7. Boldin was interested in why students drop courses in the first place. He was deeply concerned about how off track such students get, extending their stay at the institution and thus affecting the graduation rates of majors and the University as a whole. He also wondered about the role of advising, particularly since the students' ability to drop courses seemed disconnected from actual advising or their advisors. Other committee members agreed. Roshto had two suggestions, both from the ways in which her department had treated accounting students. First, that there be some recognition of student achievement in introductory courses. Second, and perhaps more importantly, that the institution develop alternate ways of looking at graduation rates, that the current way of looking at incoming freshmen and then tracking through the senior year was misleading. Perhaps students shouldn't be tracked quite so early in terms of declaring their majors. Bramstedt wanted to know if there were any institutional postmortem on why student drop? Sewell responded, saying that there were some efforts in this area, including Early Alert, which was replaced by the GA's contacting students. This year the SSC developed a peer leader program, in which peer leaders were placed into University seminars.
 8. At this point, Cass thanked committee members for their initial input. At that point, he told the committee that based on their comments, there should be three subcommittees charged with evaluating and making recommendations

for Student Success. Members of the SSTF not present would select their subcommittee assignment according to interest although Cass suggested that John Anderson be placed on the Research Subcommittee (contingent upon acceptance). They are as follows:

RESEARCH SUBCOMMITTEE

Committee Charge: To conduct preliminary and then more extensive investigations into issues related to Student Success

John Anderson
Brent Bennett
Mary Sewell, chair

ACADEMIC PROCESSES AND POLICIES

Committee Charge: To investigate strategies and tactics for identifying and addressing processes and policies related to advising, majors, retention, DFW rates, and other issues connected with student success

James Boldin
Ricky Fiorillo
Patti Roshto, chair

ACADEMIC INTEGRATION

Committee Charge: To confront issues related to the integration of academics into other areas of the institution, including Student Life and Career Connections.

Mary Adams, chair
Brian Bramstedt
Seth Hall
Ann Smith

Cass said that he would come up with a list of addresses and email accounts for the SSTF and that members not currently on a subcommittee would write the subcommittee head directly for placement. The group's next meeting would be September 25, 2009 at noon in the Dean's Conference Room (Admin 1-45) and that in the intervening week all subcommittees would meet at least once to discuss their plans.

Cass finally directed them to the Foundations of Excellence site in order to make some long-term suggestions to the Administration about doing a complete self-study of the first and second year experience of college students on campus. He had already been in touch with John Gardner at the Policy Center, and he had agreed that ULM wished it could become part of the next cohort. Cass urged members to look at the information, which they could discuss at the next meeting. Meeting Adjourned.

