University-Wide Undergraduate Retention Committee

Report to the Chancellor

January 2008

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In January 2007, Mel Tyler, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, and Dr. Bruce Bubacz, then Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, took the leadership to co-chair UMKC's first ever University-Wide Undergraduate Retention Committee. Dr. Betty Drees, Interim Provost and Dean of the School of Medicine, continued to support this committee.

The University-Wide Undergraduate Retention Committee was formed to address and improve retention rates and student learning at UMKC, which are important factors to meeting the University's goals of increasing enrollment and improving the quality of UMKC's educational and campus life experiences.

The members of this committee are:

Marita Barkis	Director, Counseling, Health & Testing Center
Becky Bergman	Director, A&S Advising
Larry Bunce	Institutional Research
Jan Brandow	Director, Financial Aid and Scholarships
Chris Brown	Faculty, School of Education
Bibie Chronwall	Vice Provost; School of Medicine, School of Biological Sciences
Karen Dace	Deputy Chancellor for Diversity, Access, and Equity
Jennifer DeHaemers	Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Director, Office of Admissions
Jim Falls	Faculty, College of Arts & Sciences; principal History undergrad adviser
Mary Lou Hines Fritts	Vice Provost and Chief Information Officer
Glen Jacobs	Director, Center for Academic Development
Kathleen Kilway	Faculty, College of Arts & Sciences; principal Chem. undergrad adviser
Eve McGee	Research Associate, School of Nursing
Lynda Plamann	Faculty, School of Biological Sciences Student Services
Kami Thomas	Assistant Dean, Bloch School Student Services
Mel Tyler	Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management
Nancy Weatherholt	Faculty, Bloch School

Committee charge:
The charge of this committee is to develop recommendations that, when implemented, will increase our first-to-second year retention rate to at least 80%; increase the six-year graduation rate to 50.1%; and increase student success and satisfaction as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI). The purpose of this committee is to examine current activities, look for best practices, and develop strategies to improve both the retention and graduation rates of our students.

Why should we be concerned about retention?
Business Approach: about two-thirds of the university budget comes from student tuition. There are two choices to increase this revenue—either we raise tuition or we increase student credit hour production.

- Increase tuition: already expensive and we have a high discount rate which comes from operations.
- Increase student credit hour production: will affect faculty the most, changing the focus from research/publishing to increased teaching loads.
    - In the Urban 21, UMKC ranks third highest in the number of students who attend part time (42.3%). Increasing credit hours will increase graduation rates (students progressing toward their degrees faster/on time); also leads to greater interaction with the campus and positively affects retention. Additionally, it is cheaper to retain students than to recruit them.
    - Issues affecting a student's decision to attend part-time include: cost, family responsibilities, job demands, class scheduling issues, too few spaces available in the current res halls, lack of student spaces and programming/activities.

Community Approach: Benefit to students to get them through their degree programs faster (saving money and time); benefit to Kansas City by educating the workforce and contributing to the economic impact of the region. Kansas City currently ranks 12th in the percentage of adults over 25 with a high school diploma and 43rd in the percentage of adults over 25 with a college degree. UMKC is Kansas City's university and should be providing the opportunities for higher education. Plus, a commitment to retention is a commitment to our students—it's the right thing to do.

Why should we be concerned about undergraduate students and programs?
A strong and vibrant undergraduate population contributes to the overall health of the university. Most universities will have a mix of 80% undergraduate and 20% graduate/professional students; where the more expensive programs are supported by the sheer bulk of the undergraduates. At UMKC, excluding dual high school students, our students are 60% undergrads and 40% grads/professionals.

Review of our current retention rates:
For the 2004 cohort of all first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen, the retention rate is 71%. Broken down, however, we find that the retention rate for the same cohort of African American students is 63% and for Hispanic students the rate is 73%. For the 2003 cohort, the overall retention rate is 74%; for African American students, the retention rate is 75%; for Hispanics, 65%. For the 2002 cohort, overall retention is 70%; for African Americans, 54%; for Hispanics, 72%.

Review of our current graduation rates:
Our six-year graduation rates rank among the upper half of our peer institutions. For students who entered as first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen in 1997, 45.1% graduated in six years; for those who entered in 1998, 40.8% graduated in six years; and for those who entered in 1999, 44.3% graduated. Of our minority students who entered as freshmen in 1997, 31.8% graduated in six years; for those who entered in 1998, 39.7% graduated in six years; and for those who entered in 1999, 36.6% graduated.

Committee Process:
The committee brainstormed several ideas on what strategies could immediately affect retention and what types of data we still need in order to make appropriate recommendations.

- Complete recommendations in the **First Year Experience** report that are not already implemented (Bibie Chronwall, Glen Jacobs)
    1. Expand and adapt the current Coaching and APP Programs for greater numbers of new students, especially historically underrepresented students.
    2. Create a Tutorial Center for the Sciences and increase the number of courses and sections supported by Supplemental Instruction. Center is being piloted this Spring with 20 hours per week in the Math Resource Center.

- **Academic Advising** (Mel Tyler, Becky Bergman, Kami Thomas)
  Recommendations to enhance academic advising include re-establishing the campus-wide Advisers Forum: the Forum could include the Registrar's Office on the agenda to bring topical items for adviser discussion; enrollment in the NACADA webinar series for professional development opportunities; development of a student survey of their advising experiences; development a centralized advising website to include an adviser's handbook. Other recommendations include supporting DARS implementation on campus, creating a joint fund (Student Affairs and Provost) for advisers to apply for travel expenses to attend professional development conferences, and continuing these conversations on how to enhance advising with the new provost.

- Pilot an **Early Warning System** (Mary Lou Hines Fritts, Marita Barkis, Eve McGee, Kami Thomas, Lynda Plamann, Nancy Weatherholt, Larry Bunce)
  The sub-committee recommends that UMKC adopt a "social-work model" to help ensure every new student receives the support they need while at UMKC to be successful. This model involves three inter-related parts: 1) identification of students' needs and likelihood of leaving school; 2) early-warning of academic problems; and 3) counseling support to help students with academic and non-academic problems. To help UMKC accomplish this, it is recommended that the University purchase the FastTrack software system, which is a learner experience management software tool that enables an institution to create personalized partnerships for learning with every new student. Using this model, faculty teaching specific entry-level courses, often characterized as "gateway" courses, will work with coordinators when a student has missed multiple consecutive classes and/or scored poorly on early exams. The coordinator can then follow-up with the student to identify potential interventions if necessary.

- Administer **Student Satisfaction Inventory** in the spring every other year with National Survey of Student Engagement (Paul Shang, Larry Bunce). This survey will be implemented in February 2008.

- **Faculty Survey** or focus groups on student issues (Nancy Weatherholt, Larry Bunce)
  It is recommended that we focus on what current data we have on students and not overload faculty at this point.

- Implement DARWIN **Degree Audit Program** (Jennifer DeHaemers)
  All DARS encoding from legacy has been converted to PeopleSoft; meeting with EAS (System Technical Support) to discuss how we move forward in testing and configuring the encoding in the DARS client. UMKC is working with EAS to have access to Darwin (web based version of DARS) to run degree audits and where exceptions to individual student records will be made. Implementation of DARS across the campus will require each AU to designate a staff member for testing and making exceptions for individual degree audits. Degree audits will be developed for all academic units; testing will be available for units that previously had degree audits in November. Following the completion of the degree program encoding, the DARs Team will work on implementing the online degree audit with added functionally that includes the web based graph and GPA components.

- **Assess Walk-In Review Days** [WIRD] (Jennifer DeHaemers, Larry Bunce)
  Initial data analysis begun: comparing retention and success of students who apply before, during and after WIRD for Fall 05 and 06. Retention appears to be more of a concern than the success of these students. Other questions to ask: is there a difference in students who enroll during the actual week and those who've waited until late enrollment and have missed some class periods? What are the common denominators for those not retained/successful? Do we continue to offer WIRD? Still seems helpful to students to have this option.

- Administer **Exit Surveys** (Chris Brown, Mel Tyler)
  Piloted a total withdrawal form for Fall 2007; 149 forms received. Overwhelmingly, students cited conflict between school and work as the reason why they are completely withdrawing. After personal/home responsibilities, students indicated that attending school was too costly. The survey is now on-line for Spring 2008 for both domestic and international students. However, there is still no conversation with the student to intervene before he or she completely drops. An early alert system would help; but currently, once a student decides to drop, that student fills out the withdrawal form to drop without ever having to come in and talk to someone.

- **Assess Transfer Process** (Jennifer DeHaemers, Nancy Weatherholt)
  Creating a team approach to entering transfer work to increase workflow. Currently looking at how each AU works with their transfer students to acclimate them to their new program/UMKC. Sending a survey out to the Units to ask about how they handle transfer students from inquiry to advising. Best practices will be compiled from the survey to assist

Implementation:
The next phase of this report is implementation of the recommendations. The committee members who have served are now at the end of their term; we will need to identify new members or ask current members to continue to oversee the implementation and assessment.

The next phase will also focus on curricular support for students, including:

- Increasing Faculty/Student Interactions – according to Dr. Richard Light, in his book *Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds*, faculty/student interactions are some of the most important experiences students will have in college. In fact, he says that "faculty members who had an especially big impact are those who helped students make connections between a serious curriculum, on the one hand, and the students' personal lives, values, and experiences, on the other." In addition, he says the "students who get the most out of college, who grow the most academically, and who are happiest organize their time to include activities with faculty members, or with several other students, focused around accomplishing substantive academic work."
    - Some examples include increasing participation in SEARCH and faculty collaboration with the Activity and Program Council.
- Utilizing ACT scores and placement tests to enhance Academic Advising
- Working with other institutions to ensure Curriculum Alignment
- Partnering with MCC to address academic developmental issues