

BOARD OF REGENTS
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

RECOMMENDATION

MONTHLY REPORT
FACULTY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ACTION REQUESTED

It is requested that the Faculty Affairs Committee Agenda for October 20, 2009 be received and placed on file and the Minutes of the September 22, 2009 meeting be received and placed on file.

STAFF SUMMARY

The topic for the October 20, 2009 Faculty Affairs Committee meeting will focus on student success approaches under consideration.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no fiscal impact.

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION

The proposed action has been reviewed and is recommended for Board approval.

University Executive Officer
Provost and Executive Vice President

10-5-09

Date

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Board of Regents
Faculty Affairs Committee

October 20, 2009
12:45 – 1:30 p.m.
205 Welch Hall

AGENDA

Regular Agenda

Section 7 Monthly Report and Minutes (*Regent Parker, Chair*)

Status Report

Open Discussion: “Student Success Approaches Under Consideration”

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF REGENTS

FACULTY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MINUTES

September 22, 2009
12:45-1:40 p.m., 205 Welch Hall

Attendees (seated at tables): R. Bullard, M. Evett, M. Higbee, Provost and Executive Vice President Kay, S. Moeller, R. Neely, Regent Parker (Chair), M. Rahman, K. Rusiniak, D. Selman, Regent Sidlik (Vice Chair)

Guests (as signed in): A. Alvarez, P. Becker, M. Boone, J. Boyless, B. Brown-Chappell, M. Byrd, J. Carroll, A. Chan, T. Dallas, D. deLaski-Smith, J. Dockham, A. Dow, J. Dunn, C. Foreman, R. George, E. Gold, S. Gonzales, R. Hanna, S. Kersey Otto, M. Jackson, M. Laporte, R. Larson, J. Mack, M. Marz, A. Meyer, D. Mielke, G. Miller, M. Nair, L. Nybell, M. Peters, P. Sanchez, C. Shell, W. Shell, W. Tornquist, T. Venner, G. Ward, B. Warren, R. Woody, M. Zdrojowski

Open Discussion: “Student Success Including Probation, Retention and Graduation Rates”

Regent Parker, introduced the discussion—originating from a dialogue on probation rates in April—requesting input and suggestions as to what we can do as a university to come up with a plan that will have a meaningful impact.

Mark Higbee, Professor, History and Philosophy, stated that there are problems with the data. Students who register for classes at Fast Track, but who never attend Eastern (approximately 50 students per year over the last ten years) are not culled from the statistics, accounting for a 3% dropout rate. This underscores managerial failure and that historically these issues have not been taken seriously enough. If these matters are addressed effectively, we can move the needle on our attrition rates.

Dr. Higbee commented that while faculty members are very good at running their own programs, these classes are not aimed at first and second year students. *Susan Moeller, President of the AAUP*, pointed out that beginning classes are often taught by adjuncts and lecturers, and that it is not the job of faculty to report on students who register, but never take a class—this is an administrative function. She commented that Athletics has a required attendance policy and mandated advising. Dr. Higbee stated that while the measures taken by Athletics are commendable, they may not translate to the general population. He stated that the literature on retention agrees that students who are socially engaged with their peers and intellectually engaged with the subjects they are pursuing stay in college and succeed. Eastern does not have a tradition of building this academic and peer engagement. In his opinion, the best way to achieve this is through a first year seminar, which would be a required class for all non-transfer students.

Bob Neely, Associate Provost and AVP for Research, stated that if change is to be effected, this has to become an institutional priority and permeate the culture of the University. He commended Regent Parker and Regent Sidlik for their attention to this matter. There are many examples of schools that have moved their graduation rates one to two percent a year over a five to six year period. St. Mary’s College requires every freshman and sophomore to go through an orientation for every class and activity. Florida State has a program where low income, first year students have to go through an intensive orientation, comprising study skills, safety tips, money management, health, career management, etc. We can adopt these strategies, but there has to be a commitment across the board from all sectors of the University to make any strategy work.

John Dunn, Associate Director of First-Year Writing Program, stated that it is important to contextualize the discussion in relation to the nature of American higher education. The mission of a campus like Eastern, with the population it serves, brings with it challenges that any school would be hard pressed to address. Many of the issues clearly relate to factors that go beyond the control of faculty, such as financial aid. However, what differentiates our students from campuses with higher graduation rates is the additional challenges our students face in figuring out their commitment to college, their sense of their future, and where education fits into their complex lives. In terms of the First-Year Writing Program, an initiative has been developed for the coming year to raise the enrollment in required writing courses. These are small classes with themes dealing with college life and the adjustment process through writing and literacy. Students get individual attention and are actively engaged. It is important to recognize that, in terms of the work we are doing and the mission of this institution, we have viable accomplishments to build upon going into the future. Funding, however, is an issue. The Academic Projects Center has sustained substantial budget cuts and has been maintained through the efforts of faculty and staff going above their responsibilities, a situation that should not have to continue in the long term. The issues we are experiencing are part of a national trend that many campuses are faced with and we should recognize that we are doing work upon which future success can be built.

Mark Jackson, Director, Holman Learning Center, stated that while a lot of issues play into student success, for some, lack of preparation for the challenges of the college environment is an important factor. The Holman Learning Center has instituted a strategy this fall of reaching out to all students enrolled in UNIV courses. Over half of these students attended an orientation the day before classes and 94% have now met with, or scheduled an appointment with, an academic consultant.

Mahmud Rahman, Professor, Accounting and Finance, commented that students have a lot of learning to do personally, socially, and academically. We should focus, not on what they need to do to succeed, but on what we can do. He suggested that freshmen not be given letter grades (with courses being taken as pass/fail) and that credit hours in the first year should be capped. These strategies would decrease stress and make for an easier adjustment to college life. Dr. Higbee commented that there is a lot of merit to capping credit hours—especially given students work schedules--though perhaps not for all freshmen. *Tom Venner, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences*, commented that there is a trend of students taking less credit hours, but spending more hours at work and this needs to be reversed.

Dr. Venner stated, given that attendance is one of the best predictors of freshman success, CAS is following the example of Mississippi State University's Pathfinder program, which takes action after a student is absent two or more times within the first four to six weeks of freshman year. Six departments (English, Biology, Math, Economics, Psychology, and Geography & Geology), all of which have freshmen only sections, have volunteered to take part in a pilot study on the effect of attendance on student success. Faculty have agreed to take attendance and report results to the Holman Learning Center, through which students can be contacted to find out why they are not attending and given assistance. After eleven years of this program at MSU, the percentage of freshmen on probation after the first year has gone down by 7%, from 26% to 19%. The percentage of freshmen with absence problems by midterm of their first semester has dropped from 16% to 8%, and the percentage retention from freshman to sophomore year has risen from 76% to 84%. While Eastern has important difference from MSU (e.g. MSU is substantially more residential), and does not have all the apparatus and interventions of that university, CAS has the support of its department heads and will report back in a few months on the results.

David Mielke, Dean, College of Business, stated that personal responsibility and the need to challenge students are important issues to student success. High-end students also transfer out and lower expectations will deter such students. Raising expectations, effective interventions, and advising are all

important factors. Allowing students to drop courses repeatedly (sometimes the same course up to nine times) has an impact, not just on our statistics, but with financial aid.

Matt Evett, Faculty Council President, stated that advising has been discussed frequently at Faculty Council meetings, with an acknowledgement that advising is not as good as it could be. Some faculty want to become more involved in advising and want a requirement that students see an advisor within their own discipline. In some other institutions students are required to have the signature of their instructor before they can drop, which allows the instructor to find out the reason for dropping and offer help.

Regent Parker asked that information be gathered on where advisors are located, how many there are, the ratio of advisors to students, and the ratio of advisors to students at comparable institutions.

Melvin Peters, Associate Professor of African American Studies, stated that many of the students who leave have GPAs of over 2.5 and even over 3.5. Many feel they aren't academically challenged and feel that Eastern is a means to easily attaining a good GPA to use in transferring elsewhere. Regent Parker asked if we do disenrollment research, and if we could engage one of our departments to research this topic. *Lynette Findley, Assistant Vice President for Retention and Student Success*, stated that surveys are sent to students who exit, asking their reasons for leaving. Regent Parker wondered if surveys are the most effective means to ascertain this information. Dr. Findley stated that she also accesses data from a national clearing house which shows where students transfer and if they are earning degrees.

Betty Brown-Chappell, Director of the McNair Scholars Program, stated that high-end students are leaving Eastern disproportionately. In terms of retention and recruitment, we are about where we were fifteen years ago. While there are programs on campus that can speak to this issue, the institution must have the will to succeed.

Lynn Nybell, Professor, School of Social Work, agreed with Dr. Rahman that we need to talk about what we can do, rather than what the students must be made to do. We need to ally with our students. We should disaggregate the data and focus on the different trajectories involved in the statistics. There are excellent students who are leaving, students in good standing who are not able to continue here or elsewhere, average students, and students who are failing. We should also pull the data apart college by college and program by program.

Joanna Scott, Professor, Political Science, referred to the problem of enrollment versus success. Budget is often driven by headcount, but we now need to shift to the quality discussion. We might need to be more rigorous in our admission standards and we need to make it clear that graduation is not guaranteed if benchmark skills are not achieved. Dr. Scott came from California State University, Long Beach, where the best instructors were encouraged to teach the introductory course for freshmen with stipends and a reduction in teaching load.

Ellen Gold, Executive Director, University Health Services, commented on the work of the Retention Council in looking at the totality of the student in terms of acquiring the first year student, retaining the student during the second and third years, and graduating the student in the fourth year. Students' problems vary depending on their year in college, there is no one fit for all, and no student comes here to fail.

Adam Meyer, Director, Students with Disabilities Office, discussed the concept of universal design and encouraged the use of different methods of assessment in the classroom for different types of learners as well as looking at policies and procedures in offices across campus that impact students.

James Carroll, Interim Department Head, Physics and Astronomy, commented on students with 3.7 GPAs who successfully transfer to engineering programs and the University of Michigan, but who are counted as failures in our data. The rates are flawed, in both the numerator and the denominator. He advocated tapping into the 75% of students who are not failing and suggested that in helping them, we would help half of the remaining 25%, and start to look more favorable in relation to universities to which we are being unfairly compared.

Regent Parker thanked all who contributed and stated that this item will be on the next agenda. She charged Dr. Kay and the Retention Committee with coming back with four or five ideas to which it will commit to pursuing and which will be tracked. Eastern has great programs and great faculty; we need to figure out how to keep people in these programs and how we can make everyone succeed. She thanked all assembled, and adjourned the meeting at 1:40.

Respectfully submitted,

Winifred Martin, Administrative Secretary
Academic Affairs