

January 23, 2015

**STRATEGY GROUP MID-YEAR REPORT**

**STRATEGY GROUP:**

**The Student Experience**

**CO-CHAIRS:**

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**MEMBERS:**

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**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.

**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 the 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?

**RESEARCH PROCESS:**

Internal: Interviews with campus stakeholders; faculty and staff strategic planning survey (awaiting data and analysis); 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 Work 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; Focus groups with transfers, commuters, alumni, Shady Grove students, residential students, athletes, affiliated students, UMBC staff; UMBC Hillel, graduate students; 2014 Residential Life EBI data (in process); Shriver and Career Center practicum data on applied learning; UMBC's Sophomore Success Committee recommendations; focus groups on applied learning, advising and mentoring, and the campus experience.

External: Interviews with off-campus stakeholders; National Survey of Student Engagement (2013); annual "Diversity in Academe" insert from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (10/31/14); 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.

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:**

Advising office  
Alumni  
Athletes  
Commuter students  
Counseling Center  
Diversity Council  
Employers (Fall 2014 Job Fair)  
Facilities Management  
Faculty  
Full-time students  
Graduate program directors  
Graduate Student Association  
Graduate students  
International students  
Meyerhoff Scholars Office  
Mosaic Center staff  
Office for Academic and Pre-Professional Advising  
Parents  
Part-time students  
Phi Mu Sorority  
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  
Students affiliated with particular campus communities  
Transfer students  
Undergraduate program directors  
Undergraduate students  
University Health Services  
Vice President for Student Affairs  
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs  
Women's Center

#### **NOTABLE FINDINGS:**

(NOTE: As of the writing of this report the Fall 2014 Campus Strategic Planning Survey data was not yet available. This data will influence some of the findings shared in this report.)

- Ethnic/racial diversity is a fact of campus life and an embedded part of our culture. Enrollment percentages: African American 16%, Asian American 20%, Hispanic 6%, international students 7%.
- Students understand that diversity is important, and they value the fact that UMBC is a diverse institution.
- Alumni feel that their experiences at UMBC help them work effectively with people from different backgrounds.
- There is less gender diversity than racial/ethnic diversity: 54% -- 46%.
- Some people expressed the view that there seems to be more mingling of diverse students in the classroom and other academic spaces, but less in social spaces. "Isolation within diversity." "Micro-communities." Students and staff would like to see more cohesion among different groups on campus, more working on common initiatives, and more institutional encouragement for interaction among diverse groups of people. Students requested that UMBC make a greater effort to publicize social events on campus and promote the idea that we should all mingle outside of our social circles. Community members also suggested the need for faculty and staff sensitivity training.
- Some students commented that they do not feel engaged by diversity initiatives. For example, non-traditional students and students in the arts said they felt left out of promoted activities and programs.
- UMBC has diversity initiatives for transfer students, women and minorities in STEM, and faculty hiring and retention. However, almost all of the diversity initiatives that impact students are for undergraduates, and most come from the same departments: Student Affairs; Undergraduate Education; the English Language Institute; the Language, Literacy and Culture program; International Education Services; the Shriver Center; and some departments within CAHSS.
- Another concern we have heard is that there is less diversity among faculty than students. Students do not see many role models who look like they do. African-American tenure-track faculty are just under 6% of the total. Hispanic: 3.4%. 23% female faculty in STEM fields.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that we are getting better at preparing students for their future roles as global citizens: Study Abroad, more international students, new Global Studies program, Peace Corps Prep, huge range of student organizations, talks/events on campus, etc.
- The diversity and global citizenship workgroup found the research questions to be generally productive; however, challenges arose as we sought information from some sources. To thoroughly answer questions about preparation for global citizenship, access to more UMBC alumni would have been helpful. Also, in

searching IRADS and REX data for information on compositional diversity, graduate student data was not as readily accessible as undergraduate data.

- Increasing enrollment across the university (especially in STEM fields) is straining undergraduate programs. In growing numbers, students are unable to take required courses and complete their degree programs in 4 years because of course unavailability. Some incoming freshman cannot register for any required courses because they are full. Program quality and UMBC's reputation may be affected, if they are not already.
- 20 percent of incoming students said they were neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the academic schedule they were able to get.
- There are extensive course scheduling issues related to insufficient classrooms of adequate size, availability of instructors, etc. Historical offerings are typically used to plan future courses, but limited data make projection of course demand difficult.
- Graduate course scheduling is easier because class sizes are smaller, but graduate students tend to register as late as possible to delay paying fees. This makes assessment of actual course demand impossible until the start of each semester and often results in canceled courses after the start of classes because of insufficient enrollment.
- The interdependence of course offerings (i.e., potential conflicts with other required courses and departments) eliminates the flexibility to shift classes to times when more rooms might be available (although rooms are generally booked from 8-4:30 daily).
- Large courses are outgrowing lecture halls, and splitting them is not possible because other lecture halls and instructors are not available. Department-controlled rooms are used extensively to try and meet course demands.
- Delays in course transfer evaluation appear to be primarily related to faculty workload in reviewing requests through the Transfer Evaluation System and/or difficulties in obtaining sufficient information about courses taken elsewhere (e.g., accurate syllabi, etc.), especially from international institutions.
- Regarding advising, while each department has developed its own system, there are few training programs or assessments used to ensure quality and there is significant variability among advisors. Not all departments embrace and utilize UMBC online advising tools.
- Many people pointed out the lack of campus spaces for students to meet either socially or academically. Communal spaces in academic buildings for informal student meetings are not maintained or controlled by the university; it is left to the departments/offices adjacent to those spaces. However, there does not seem to be a process to ensure that these spaces are maintained, supported, or improved.
- Lowest area of satisfaction on EBI survey centered on feeling of safety walking on campus at night, especially in areas that are not well-lighted. Only 12% of students report feeling comfortable in the community surrounding UMBC at night (NCHA).
- Concerns about not knowing what to do on campus in the event of an emergency or crisis (EBI and focus groups).
- Ice on campus and particularly The Commons garage were cited as a safety concern.
- NCHA data supports a small but important number of students reporting stalking, assaults (physical and sexual) and emotionally abusive relationships.
- NCHA data reports almost half of students surveyed reporting negative consequences as a result of their drinking.
- Focus group data (students and faculty) discussed "academic safety" and the inability of students to create balance in their lives. Intellectual selves are tied to overall wellness and academic success. Student concerns about academics is the number two related problem reported in the counseling center.
- Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, self-esteem, body image, shyness, adjustment) are inter-correlated along with decisions about careers and academics.
- Other problems associated with academic success include stress, sleep problems, depression, and internet use and games as well as concern for a troubled friend or family member.

- Staff and faculty highlighted a need for more spaces on or near campus that support community- more public spaces around campus and longer hours for The Commons on the weekends.
- Commuter students report that event schedules, class and other competing demands keep them from participating in campus activities.
- Almost half of commuter students disagree that they feel connected to student life at UMBC.
- Students generally report being proud that the campus was “quirky and nerdy” and diverse.
- Athletes expressed frustration that there is not more spirit and support of athletics.
- Pride is also associated with strong academics, engineering and technology, supportive faculty and students, lots of learning outside of the classroom.
- Alumni are proud of their majors, the academics, UMBC’s reputation, having UMBC on their resumé’s when job hunting or going into new jobs.
- Students report that the following would support more pride: big sports events, more advertising or sporting events, more things on campus saying “UMBC” branding.
- Alumni believe that more research opportunities for undergrads would assist with pride.
- Additional applied learning experiences for all students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Faculty report being stretched thin and increased attention to advising may be detrimental to other areas that need faculty attention.
- No academic training is provided to staff.
- Undergraduate experiences with advising varies greatly across departments.
- Positive advising experiences in the iCubed program, Gates transfer program, and Meyerhoff program need to be examined for potential replication elements.
- Long graduation time for part-time students can be detrimental to student success. Sometimes this delay is due to erroneous academic advice.
- Students like faculty advising overall and do not want to replace it but rather improve some areas. Graduate students advising process works well most of the time. International students who are not accustomed to American relationships/customs feel uneasy and less satisfied.
- Formalize mentoring relationships for students.
- “Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates.” (Gallup)
- Overwhelming majority of affiliated students feel like they belong at UMBC.
- Overwhelming majority of residential students stay on campus at least two weekends per month.

#### **EMERGING THEMES:**

- Students and staff would like to see more cohesion in diversity initiatives across campus. Community members would also like to receive public encouragement to interact with different types of people rather than to simply be around them.
- Much of the work that UMBC staff and faculty are doing to improve the diversity experience occurs outside of their job descriptions, so the university might allocate resources specifically to diversity work.
- Diversity initiatives should also include education and awareness building for majority populations, as well as information on the full definition of “diversity.”
- Orientation advising gets high marks from students and may offer opportunities for improving the quality and consistency of departmental academic and career advising practices.
- There are opportunities to increase the space available to students for socializing and studying together. For example, the lobby of the Public Policy Building is largely wasted space; putting tables and chairs there would create a new area to congregate. It would also provide a place where students and faculty can interact.
- There are opportunities to “find” additional classroom availability with current resources (e.g., moving to a M-W-F and T-Th course schedule).

- Lighting in remote and parking areas.
- Safety related to students' academic security, sense of security about the future (career) and ability to manage stress and anxiety.
- Creating a good balance and student well-being.
- Creating connections between UMBC's diverse groups. More opportunities for the diverse UMBC community to come together and feel more connected. Experiential activities that would help diverse groups to come together for a common goal.
- More public spaces for students, faculty and staff to create community.
- Students are proud of UMBC's being a serious and supportive academic place.
- Having athletic events and recreation play a more central role in bringing students together and promoting health and fitness.
- Providing more incentives for faculty involved in working with students in applied experiences is critical to the quality of internship courses.
- Making research opportunities more accessible.
- Create a collaborative communications plan to improve the means of letting student know about applied learning and their benefits.
- Expand available funding mechanisms to support applied learning experiences and hidden costs such as transportation/credits.
- Train faculty and academic advisors on the importance of applied learning.
- Institutionalize applied learning to accommodate all types of students in a wide variety of options (internship/cooperative education, services learning, civic engagement, performance, student abroad, student leadership, etc.)
- Incorporate a greater number of credited career courses for all majors.
- Increase number of trained peer mentors.
- Focus on specific demographics within student body and provide special advising attention early and often.
- Expand iCubed, Gates transfer program style advising.
- Involve more faculty to help share the advising load in some departments.
- Academic advising- training, etc.
- Change advising relationship between advisor and student to include "advising orientation"
- Create more shared experiences between faculty/staff and students.
- Weekend activity and engagement of students impacts services made available on weekends.
- ADA accessibility, more timely maintenance and quality of construction.
- More deliberate discussions about the role of athletics and recreation at UMBC.
- Course scheduling issues- undergraduate and graduate, interdependence of course offerings and problems related.
- Course transfer evaluation delays, especially for International students.