

Committee on Communicating the Importance of Student Success

Final Report

Members:

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Background, Committee Charge and Process

Background: Everyone in the University of Iowa community is involved in some way in student success. Although the Student Success Team, the Office of the Provost, and others have highlighted the importance of undergraduate student success at UI, it's time to generate strategies to bring the entire community into the conversation by communicating widely (1) what matters for student success and (2) the roles that everyone can play in fostering conditions for student success.

Charge to the Committee: The Committee was asked to develop a plan to communicate the importance of student success in ways that foster conversations about, commitment to, and engagement in fostering undergraduate student success.

Process: The Committee's first meeting was on 11/2/2007, with guests Vice Provost Rocklin and Professor Elizabeth Whitt, who gave the committee our charge. We met a total of 4 times between 11/12/2007 and 3/19/2008. Since we are a small committee, we were able to effectively communicate via e-mail on several occasions.

The committee discussed the charge and began brainstorming potential target audiences: faculty, staff, parents, students, donors, alumni, employers who hire students, and area teachers. The committee also began to discuss ways that we might make contact with target audiences. We soon realized that we needed to focus on one group and go from there. After reviewing the charges of the other SST action committees, we decided to focus on frontline staff since other committees were working more closely with faculty and students.

The committee's task now was how to communicate to frontline staff that they are integral to student success and central to a quality educational experience for all students.

Recommendations:

Promotion/Awareness

Sponsor a “Kick off campaign” beginning coinciding with orientation activities and going into the fall semester. Central to this campaign is a slogan that would appear on signage in offices/departments, on buttons worn by staff, banners, and so forth. Our committee likes the slogan: **You Matter!** but we are open to any and all suggestions. We suggest having a graphic to go along with the slogan - one idea is an image of a tipped graduation cap on the Old Capitol Dome. IMU Marketing staff would need to be involved in these initiatives.

The slogan would also appear on the bookmarks that will be created for the “One Community One Book” initiatives.

Publish short articles in various campus publications and on websites that talk about how everyone on campus is part of the same team that contributes to student success. Put short videos on department websites (that could also be podcast) - Career Center videos, for example.

Invite more frontline staff to join SST.

Performance Expectations

Staff should have specific orientation and training that goes beyond the basics of benefits - it should include information about the campus, expectations on working with students, and how their jobs contribute to student success. Orientation should include supervisors so a consistent message is heard by supervisor and employee.

Position descriptions should include specific language on student success. This should be at or near the top of the position description (may even want to include a category on student success).

Staff should be included in creating department values, goals, etc.

Staff Development

Have “staff development days” to reinforce the importance of staff in student success; communicate regularly to staff that they matter to student success.

Learning and development classes that include content that focus solely on helping staff learn how to help students.

Staff should be included in departmental training, retreats, workshops (e.g. student success workshops).

Offer presentations to staff by local, regional, and state experts in the field of student success initiatives, etc.

Survey frontline staff on what they feel they would need to be able to do accomplish these goals.

Acknowledge and Reward Service Excellence

Departments/offices could have some sort of “thank you” program where staff is recognized for going over and above for students.

Create an “appreciation” website where students could give feedback, thank staff, etc. There are several models already in place (Tippie College of Business, for example).

Communication

Establish an overarching “Key Communicators Group” of frontline staff members and/or administrative assistants that will meet regularly to enhance communication among departments/offices; this group could also help inform policy-making. Along these lines, have a Communication Committee with someone from each college represented.