Results from the USA Faculty Survey on Undergraduate Student Retention and Academic Success USA Office of Academic Program Assessment

USA Office of Academic Program Assessment Rick Axelson, Ph.D. April 28, 2005

I. Background:

The academic success of undergraduate students has long been reterning poal at USA

Question3. Strategies for Improving Graduation Rates

Of the strategies listed in the survey, faculty responded that the followoin be "very effective" for improving USA's graduation rates

Advising interventions with highisk students (63%)

Raising admission standards for fitisthe freshmen (61%)

Requiring developmental studies for highsk students (57%)

Implementing an early warning system (56%)

Strengtheing the class attendance policy for freshmen (55%)

Placing greater emphasis on the importance of teaching excellence (53%)

Improving the effectiveness of supplemental instruction (51%)

Establishing an Academic Advising Center (50%)

Comments to OperEndedQuestions

The openended comments in the survey help to clarify and extend the above findings. Comments for all three opærnded questions about ways of increasing student success were codedwith minor editing into the following categories

- I. Specific Program Recommendations
- II. General Approaches for Improving Student Success
 - a. Raising Admission Standards
 - Raising Expectations about Academic Performance and Students' Responsibilities
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remediating students who are name addemically prepared for college work. The following approaches were offered to improve the academic preparation levels of USA students:

Raisingadmission standards

Expandingremediation efforts in basic skillparticularlyfor freshmen
Expanding use of course prerequisited placement tests ensure that
students have the needed skills and knowledge for successful course completion
Working with high schools to improve preparation for college

Closely related to this, was concern with students' readimeds willingnes to put forth the needed effort to succeed in college. Below are some illustrative sample comments

The biggest challenge right now is overcoming poor attitudes about learning by students, especially when faced with simple mathematics (general math and basic algebra) and science courses.

I would like to be able to notify a student's faculty advisor when he/she is in trouble in a class, particularly for first-year students. Conversely, if someone in another dept. warned me that one of my advisees was in trouble, I would definitely address the issue with the student. Of course, I can do this now, but there is not a simple mechanism in place and I'm not always sure that in the larger departments it would do any good for me to contact an advisor.

Student effortin addition to being fueled by finding suitable career and academic interests is the object of much attention within the classroom. Faculty provided a number of suggestions about making classes more engaging and motivating. Some of the major recommendations were to:

Reduce class size

Strengtherthe classattendance policy (although some expressed concern that punitive approaches to this might actually retention)

Place

Although the majority of comments focused on students' academic preparation and performance, some respondents mentioned that social networks among student, graduate students, and faculty offered valuable support for students. They steed to availability of casual meeting areas would supplice to development of more social interaction.

Lastly, faculty identified a number of specific program/sich should be considered in the development of USA's plans to improve retention and unation rates.

USA Programs/Practices that appear to be working:

- o Essence
- o USA Honors Program
- o StudySkills seminars in History Department
- o Supplemental Instruction

Programs/Practices at Other Institutions that appear to be effective:

- Columbus State Univeity's Advising/Placement Center (SAFE Office)
 very good
- University of Southern Mississippi has an outstanding Orientation day for incoming freshmen
- LSU had a whole division dedicated to remediation (don't know how successful it was)
- Spring Hill College ad an attendance policy > after second absence, students were sent a warning notice; after the third absence, they were dropped from the class by the instructor
- o Georgia Southern Universityfreshmen required to take two eheur courses study skills, seurces available on campus.
- o University of Texas at Austin's Gateway Program assists incoming atrisk freshmen by offering them smaller classes with extra tutoring.
- o University of Texas at Austin's Freshmen Interest Groups (FIGs) small, one credit hour seminars designed to help freshmen integrate into the University heard many enthusiastic comments about them.
- o Ohio State University has a otherm course that introduces students to