UNM REDESIGN
TASK FORCE 4

Trends in higher education and best practices of peer institutions with respect to student services that align with UNM’s strengths and mission.

DESCRIPTION

In response to changing demographics and future trends in higher education, it is critical that universities examine and adapt their approach to student services and educational practices. Task Force 4 should consider student outreach and recruitment, advising, course scheduling, methods of demonstrating academic competence and satisfying curricular requirements, optimal use of summer sessions, community internships, financial aid, campus environment, extracurricular activities, etc. Several universities have successfully adopted a service blueprinting or “customer’s perspective” approach to student services in an effort to better align those services with student needs. The purpose of this task force is to review trends in higher education and best practices of our peer institutions with respect to student services and to propose recommendations within a service blueprinting model that best align with UNM’s strengths and mission.

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Executive Summary

Student services at a major research university constitute a broad range of centralized and decentralized support from peers, faculty and staff who may assist students in a facile, transient manner; as an embedded professional whose life’s work and calling is to help students; or as is most often the case, support that lies somewhere in between. This support has never been more critical as emphasis on student success has intensified to the point where every institution is laboring to improve their retention and completion rates. The rhetoric of describing one half of all higher education students as failures due to not completing a degree in a specified time frame has resonated with a public who simultaneously ingests broadcasts of tuition increases exponentially higher than the rate of inflation. The so-called “bubble” grows as observations of runaway costs conflate with data of poor outcomes. As a result, institutions of all types scramble to launch a barrage of efforts focused on student support.

The University of New Mexico has participated in this same effort with primary emphasis on improving graduation rates. Entrance requirements, course restructure, academic support and co-curricular programming have all experienced revisions aimed at improving student time to degree. Results speak for themselves as UNM has more than doubled the four-year graduation rate, set records of student outcomes in various metrics and has performed among the very top peers in improvement rates. There is much work to be done and the university redesign could present a path for actionable activities to support students. For our deliberations, we categorize support into three different themes by order of student encounter: enrollment services where all students touch the system of entering the ecosystem, registering and paying; student learning which is the most important aspect of our deliverables and primarily includes what takes place in the academic environment; and co-curricular that encompasses many aspects of the student experience outside the classroom and instructional interaction. The graphic below illustrates these categories with specific initiatives grouped accordingly.
These are expansive categories when considering all of the possible touches of the student body. Task Force 4 narrowed the scope to emphasize strategies that could be implemented in relatively short notice and timeframe so multiple items discussed in more detail have a functional presence with nascent planning details.

Emphasis on enrollment services would normally include technological upgrades such as the institutional student information system (SIS) and corresponding self-service components that would improve the student experience. The move to Banner 9 in the Ellucian enterprise resource planning (ERP) system represents our current progress in this arena. There is nothing extraordinary about this upgrade and it does not represent next-generation thinking in the rather mundane world of college and university ERP applications but it is the next step in upgrading the SIS experience for all users. The short term does not offer financial or visionary opportunities for major changes in the way UNM thinks about these systems but attention is on what the next iteration should provide.

The student learning component is championed by the faculty who have created or embraced enhancements to the learning environment through redesigning curriculum, implementing adaptive course technology, changing program requirements and revising placement standards among other things.
The co-curricular backdrop on campus is extensive and includes a vast number of entities that are also part of the academic core in addition to a large cadre of staff and programming that originate from both on-campus and the larger community.

Our initial recommendations include an improved method to assist students encountering difficulty; a Student Affairs structure that cohesively and efficiently supports student success in the co-curricular ethos; and a consideration of enhancing course scheduling where students can take a full load of classes in conjunction with enrichment opportunities in the same week-long period.

Recommendation 1 is that a new students.unm.edu website be launched with a revised look and feel designed to appeal to students searching for answers to some of the most common problems they encounter at UNM. This tool can serve as a one-source, easy-to-remember support structure for everyone to access when in need of help.

We believe a focus of assisting students who run into challenges during the enrollment services phases of the student lifecycle as well as other periods should be a one-stop information portal that can guide them, as well as faculty and staff who are also providing direction, to support resources for a long and diverse range of possible issues that students face.

The revision and maintenance of this resource should be aligned with an organizational unit working closely on centralized student success initiatives.

Recommendation 2 is to consider reorganization of the Division of Student Affairs. This division is the primary conduit for co-curricular programming on campus. The services are very broad with depth in some areas but a lack thereof in most, resulting in wide-ranging goals and objectives that may or may not be aligned with institutional academic and student success priorities. Duplication of effort, isolated focus and unilateral communication often result within division activities and initiatives. There is much good work and many great personnel in Student Affairs but a structural reorganization will benefit all including the staff and students they serve.

Recommendation 3 is to evaluate the benefits of a scheduling model that allows students to achieve a fifteen credit hour load schedule on a Monday-Wednesday, Tuesday-Thursday pattern. This would standardize a tendency to creep in this direction that has been underway for some time and afford true enhancements to classroom work that would benefit students in career preparation and community engagement.
Several universities are contemplating this change or have already committed to this scheduling paradigm. Institutions are recognizing the need to do more for their students than just transcripting 120 hours of credit and mailing a diploma. Accountability and workforce expectations are higher than ever and students would greatly benefit from additional experience related to their degrees through internships, global experiences, cultural immersion or community service. There could be concern that conducting traditional structured courses only Monday through Thursday would create the appearance of a casual 4-day week which may embolden those who already question the university’s work ethic. There would need to be required intentionality and accountability in the enrichment activities designed to benefit students during Friday events. The template for this project is constructed and it could be implemented on fairly short notice.

Students.unm.edu

Many institutions attempt to capture the majority of student concerns through “one-stop” services designed around a physical and/or virtual space. The challenge with physical spaces is that it is impossible to co-locate every service and support resource a student might need at one physical location. Ultimately, successful efforts include identifying the most common needs students encounter and physically organizing these services at a convenient, single stop facility. UNM incorporates this model into its Enrollment Services One-Stop that affords students a centralized area to address financial aid and registration issues at one office. Several other support services administered by other units are proximate to this facility on the same floor and building.

The virtual support network for UNM students requires vision and investment. This space should provide a vast amount of information to assist students and document usage and results. Previous editions of this site had good intentions but comprehensive strategy, follow through and sustainability have detracted from functionality and effectiveness. We propose a revised vision to utilize this tool to provide immediate resource information for students and those assisting them and to accumulate quantitative data that illuminates the volume and characteristics of challenges faced by UNM students.

The page to be deployed below represents a modern look with meaningful terminology.
The “Life Help” category is an example of how we marshal resources for the large number of possible difficulties students may face that cover many facets of their world. The information currently displayed is relevant for addressing the needs of our students but these categories evolve and resource circumstances change so it is critical to manage this information in a structured manner. Site traffic data should be analyzed, support networks enhanced where needed, information should be updated and look and feel should be kept fresh.
UNM-specific information should continuously be part of the content to maintain the unique aspects of our campus and community. This reinforces to those utilizing the resource that these are not cookie cutter solutions or services and suggested support reflect our local values but will require attention to sustain.
Student Affairs Reorganization

Across higher education campuses of all types and sizes, student affairs, student services and student support divisions have been the mainstay for providing co-curricular experiences for college students including residential programming, Greek life, student activities, cultural enrichment and more. At UNM, the Division of Student Affairs has been a traditional student services unit with nationally recognized leadership and dedicated staff. However, a nationally renowned student affairs professional was asked to evaluate the organizational goals and structure of UNM Student Affairs and provided feedback that we should align our efforts more directly with student learning outcomes.
The current organization does not clearly align with student learning objectives and the broad number of reporting units with similar but disconnected goals perpetuates duplication and isolation. The result is a less than optimum effort to leverage all of the division’s resources toward co-curricular experiences that positively influence student learning. The current Student Affairs organization chart is below.

Reorganizing the division into a unit that can easily align itself with Academic Affairs activities, where student learning is centered, could look like a more streamlined structure with less administrative resources, deeper core entities and fewer groups that duplicate services in isolation. Principles to guide this activity should include:

- A goal to re-design the division to meet the changing environment of student needs through a more engaging and holistic learning environment
- Transparent and seamless alignment with academic goals and units across campus where possible to increase the learning opportunities for students
- Continue to provide and support student life and experience on campus
- Alignment of programs/departments with similar missions and operational needs
- Creation of a model to encourage greater opportunity for collaboration and partnership
• Efficiency gains through reduction of administrative costs where possible (leverage resources and utilize shared services)
• Consider department and/or program moves where appropriate to better meet the improvement of student learning mission

Procedurally, the activity should follow a structured mechanism to execute:

• Evaluate purpose, goals and desired mission for the division
• Review current organizational chart
• Establish prioritization of what can be accomplished
• Re-align department/programs to increase impact on student learning through engagement
• Consider areas within the division and outside the division
• Reduce administrative cost and utilize shared services where possible
• Implement an efficient and effective management structure.
• Develop an implementation with timeline

The task force applied these principles to draft how Student Affairs reorganization could look during an initial phase of a review as seen below. There are unanswered items to point out including implications of internal and external changes when units are moved within, to or from the division; best fit for academic oriented programs that could remain within Student Affairs or locate within schools and colleges; and placement of services that have close ties to equity and inclusion communities on and off campus.
Enhanced Scheduling Initiative

Something to be considered in conjunction with co-curricular opportunities that support learning outcomes is the Enhanced Scheduling Initiative (ESI). This model incorporates the Monday-Wednesday, Tuesday-Thursday scheduling pattern for three credit courses instead of the Monday-Wednesday-Friday meetings in an effort to augment the student learning experience with a wide variety of enhancements to classroom content. This strategy is often casually but erroneously referred to as the four day week.

At UNM, faculty and students are gradually moving in the direction of a predominant two day schedule for three credit hour courses. This began over ten years ago at the Anderson School of Management and continues with other schools and colleges today where 47% of all sections are on the Tuesday-Thursday schedule compared to 22% on Monday-Wednesday-Friday. Essentially, UNM needs to embrace one model or the other since the hybrid inflicts difficulty for students to attain full schedules due to overlapping patterns that are not synchronous.
Ultimately, ESI strategy works for students and faculty if implemented with accountability and expectations that structured enhancements will take place on Fridays. The concern of appearances that UNM has reverted to a lazier-than-usual pattern of working only four days is invalid because if this perception is based on when classes are being taught then a shrinking minority is holding up the banner of “we have classes on Friday so we’re not slacking.”

Institutions are being drawn to this model for multiple reasons. Some are citing a competitive advantage when promoting full course load availability over a four day period. The appeal may be so students can work, address family commitments or just have an extra day away from the classroom. The most compelling arguments are colleges and universities who are using the enhancement to increase their value proposition. It is no longer good enough to produce a paper that indicates 120+ hours of credit to demonstrate what a student has learned to make them competitive in the work place. Schools who do this right will be able to point toward student learning outcomes that include internships, enhanced work experience, community engagement, real world project completion, social justice commitment and more that Friday enhancement provided for their students.

**Additional Opportunities**

There are several other ideas included in the graphic on page three that the task force discussed in various detail and many additional possibilities that do not get mentioned in this report. Omission or limited attention to an idea does not indicate importance or perception of limited impact – it just means that time constraints did not allow development or introduction of the litany of concepts. Two prominent suggestions in the student learning domain are use of co-requisite instruction for certain classes and introductory UNIV courses as a requirement. Co-requisite instruction is a form of required supplemental instruction or recitation where time is dedicated to smaller group emphasis on content. This strategy has been empirically proven effective and has a record of success at urban institutions serving diverse populations. Required UNIV orientation courses are classes required most often for traditional new students as an introduction to post-secondary education and the individual institution. The most effective models combine discipline-specific content, rigor and general skills for first-year students that will be useful throughout their college experience.

Blended learning, adaptive curriculum, cohort analytics, artificial intelligence and mobile responsiveness will continue to grow in prominence in support of student success. Technology plays a prominent role in these items but functional application is the key to successful utilization. Learning and curriculum are driven by faculty innovation and UNM has introduced many effective initiatives in the areas of blended
learning and adaptive curriculum but must continue to innovate. Cohort analytics apply modern data warehousing capabilities with traditional and newer machine learning techniques to inform strategy based on disconnected data sources. Artificial intelligence is being developed at the teaching assistant level and in advising applications to provide prescriptive, intrusive and developmental student support. It is important to also mention prior learning assessment and competency based education as areas UNM needs to evaluate to determine where they fit in strategic direction. These are even more critical when considering the populations UNM hopes to reach in higher numbers such as adult students and military veterans.

Institutional policies that impact students must be evaluated for effectiveness and unintended consequences. The national push for students to take 15 credit hours per term has caught on to every institution, system and state but optimum course load is not necessarily a one-size-fits-all scenario so data-driven benefits and deficiencies should be documented to assess where tweaks or retractions make sense. Affordability should remain a priority for UNM strategic thinking and this requires analysis of a set of metrics that guide quantitative assessment of where segmented student populations are positioned in their ability to pay for a UNM education. Decisions on tuition, fee and other cost of attendance structure and strategy should always have affordability implications heavily weighted.

Students today expect outcomes that are different than past generations. This isn’t saying they are all the same. Not all students want primarily a high paying job to achieve material wealth and not all want to work toward preservation and sustainability of the planet but their expectations are higher regardless because of the cost and sacrifice required to successfully complete a higher education credential. Student segments are different particularly in the adult and traditional demographics. Traditional students want the latest technologies and experiences that are life changing. Adult students want convenience and credentials that are life changing. Demographic transformation, evolving workforce demands, continuous engagement and political influences all will dictate emerging support needs to maintain and improve student success outcomes.