

A Message from President Sally Mason

Following is the final report on a study of the Division of Student Services.

I want to first thank the study's committee, chaired by Lee Anna Clark, for its excellent and timely work in preparing this report. Students are the center of the University of Iowa, and their success and well-being are of the highest concern to me and everyone at the UI.

The Division of Student Services and its entire staff are critical to the needs of our students. This report looks to best practices around the country and contains a series of recommendations for ways to better improve the Division of Student Services.

I will be working with Interim Vice President Tom Rocklin and his staff to move forward with addressing the report's recommendations over the next 12 months.



Sally Mason
President

Final Report
on a Study of the
Division of Student Services

April 2, 2009

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Executive Summary

In April, 2008, President Mason charged our committee with conducting a standard administrative review of the Division of Student Services (DSS). Because of leadership changes in the Division, in September 2008, our charge was revised to a forward-looking examination of the unit, and this report focuses on a review of the division structure, activities, and processes rather than its leadership. From October 2008 to February 2009, our committee interviewed employees inside and outside of the division; consulted experts in student affairs; surveyed faculty, staff, and students; and held open forums for feedback from staff and students. Based on the data we collected, we confirmed that in recent years, DSS has become marginalized and is not serving students in the best possible manner. To reestablish a robust and fully integrated Division, focused on meeting the needs of *all* students now and in the future, **the Division should be returned to a position of central influence within the University.** To this end, we offer the following key recommendations:

- Make an explicit commitment to transform the Division into one with a national reputation for its use of best practices in student affairs.
- Maintain the current direct reporting relationship between the Vice-President for Student Services (VPSS) and the President.
- Create a new Dean of Students position, with a dual reporting relationship to the VPSS and Provost. Simultaneously, add a reporting line from the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education (APUE) to the VPSS.
- The VPSS and Dean of Students should be qualified academically for tenured positions and actively involved professionally in student affairs.
- Rename DSS the Division of Student Life; rename the current Office of Student Life to avoid confusion.
- Follow through on moving Hancher and the Alumni Association out of DSS and into the new Division of Strategic Communications.
- Determine how best to create a student-oriented Student Union.
- Determine how best to use the IMU facility.
- Improve the Division culture, including focusing it more on student success.
- Consider seriously relocating student academic services into the Division.
- Integrate the activities of the academic and non-academic support offices via mechanisms determined collaboratively by the Division and Provost's Office, and the Dean of the Graduate College where appropriate.
- Integrate in- and out-of-classroom activities and programming via mechanisms determined collaboratively by the Division and Provost's Office.
- Increase the academic legitimacy, and staffing levels, of the Division by increasing the number of graduate assistants hired from the Iowa Graduate Program in Student Affairs/Higher Education.
- Encourage a collaborative effort between the VPSS and Chief Diversity Officer who will determine jointly how to support, where to place, and how to reconceptualize the Cultural Houses with a University-wide vision of diversity and multiculturalism.

Introduction

In April, 2008, President Mason charged the committee with conducting a standard administrative review of the Division of Student Services (hereafter “the Division” or “DSS”): Evaluate the effectiveness of the unit and its leadership. For these purposes, the committee was expected to gather and summarize information about the leadership and the functionality of the Division’s current structure and operations. President Mason posed such specific questions to the committee as: Is the Division positioned correctly within the University in terms of its reporting structure? Are the right services included in the Division or are there some that should be moved out and/or others that should be moved in? She indicated that she had asked the Division leadership to prepare a self-study over the summer, so that the committee could complete its work by the end of the Fall, 2008 semester. By mid-June, the committee had prepared and provided to DSS a set of questions that it hoped would guide the unit’s self-study.

Also in mid-June, however, the University—including the home of the Division, the Iowa Memorial Union—suffered extensive damage due to the flooding of the Iowa River, and the entire Division staff was engaged in dealing with flood-related matters for some time thereafter. Moreover, a series of events led to a change in the Division’s leadership, and an Interim Vice-President for Students Services (hereafter VPSS), Tom Rocklin, was appointed in September, 2008.

As a result of these events, President Mason revised her original charge to the committee, asking the group to shift its focus from a standard review to a forward-looking examination of the unit, using the past and present as relevant context for recommending ways to improve the Division. In brief, she asked the committee to advise her on how the Division might best serve students at the University of Iowa. To this end, the committee developed a plan for fulfilling its charge that centered on two activities:

- (1) Studying the Division to learn about its (a) mission and goals, (b) structure and organization, (c) programs, activities, and processes, and (d) financial, physical, and human resources. A fifth element—the Division’s culture, both internally and in relation to other University entities—emerged as an important element to be considered as well.
- (2) Gathering information from and about programs at other institutions, both peer institutions (e.g., other CIC schools; the Regents’ comparison group of Universities) and those that are regarded as utilizing ‘best practices’ in student affairs that might serve as models for positive changes in the Division at the University of Iowa.

The Committee decided to gather information—or utilize data already collected—not only from those within DSS, but also from faculty, students, and staff around the University who interfaced with Division staff and/or participated in DSS programming. It was not our intent to survey all Division programs and departments, but rather to listen to, and learn from, key constituents as they discussed their aspirations and concerns for the Division. We also decided that our focus would be on key issues—challenges and opportunities facing the Division—and not on individual personnel.

Over the course of 5 months of data gathering, in our conversations with individuals and groups, and through a website provided for submission of anonymous comments, we heard both praise and criticism for the full range of the Division’s units, activities, and staff, both individually and collectively. Very importantly, we found a University community—both within and outside the

Division—that cares deeply about the experience of students at the University of Iowa and is eager for positive change.

Gradually, a set of major issues emerged that we believe need to be addressed for the Division to move forward. For some of these issues, the committee has a clear consensus regarding their resolution, and in these cases we make strong recommendations. Other issues involve considerations that fall beyond our charge; for these, we provide an analysis of the key concerns that need to be addressed in resolving them.

Background Context

In addition to the leadership change in DSS, two related Provost's Office initiatives deserve mention as providing important context for this report. First, in AY 2005-06, at the request of then-Vice Provost Tom Rocklin, the Center for Research on Undergraduate Education (CRUE) in the College of Education conducted a study known as [RISE \(Research on Iowa Student Experiences\)](http://www.uiowa.edu/~success/documents/RISE.Report.9-06.COMPLETE.pdf), that examined the experiences and outcomes of first-year and senior students at the University of Iowa. The findings indicated that UI students: (1) spend too little time in academic pursuits, (2) engage in high levels of binge drinking, (3) learn and mature over their 4-year student career, and (4) benefited most from participating in (a) research with a faculty member, (b) a racial or cultural awareness workshop, and (c) career exploration activities (for full results, see <http://www.uiowa.edu/~success/documents/RISE.Report.9-06.COMPLETE.pdf>).

Second, to build on the RISE report findings, Vice Provost Rocklin created the Student Success Team (SST) in the fall of 2006. The actively ongoing SST now includes representation from most DSS units as well as many others across campus that deal directly with undergraduates. In February, 2008, the then-128 SST members (22% faculty, 37% staff, 36% administrators, and 5% students) were surveyed, and 60-80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they personally, their unit, and the University in general benefited from SST and their involvement in it (for full results, see <http://www.uiowa.edu/~success/documents/SSTSurveySP08SummaryReport.pdf>).

Hereafter, we present our committee's methods, findings, and recommendations, the last of which draws not only on our own work, but also on that of the RISE study and of SST initiatives.

Study Methods

The DSS is a large division whose many and diverse activities overlap with those of various offices across campus, and also exist—or should exist—in the context of the academic discipline of Student Affairs. Accordingly, we gathered information from *stakeholders* or informants both inside and outside DSS, including non-UI Student Affairs professionals. Specifically, we met with campus leadership and staff both in and outside DSS, considered the Student Affairs best-practices literature, and interviewed Student Affairs leaders from other institutions. Further, we organized our information-gathering by a consideration of four sets of *key questions* focused on:

- mission and goals
- structure and responsibilities
- programs and activities
- resources and infrastructure

We distributed these activities across committee members, and then collectively compiled the

information gathered for this report. Below, we summarize our data-gathering activities.

University of Iowa Information Sources

DSS Leadership. We met twice with the DSS Leadership, first in the very early stages of our committee's work, in the context of their regular meeting with Interim Vice-President for Student Service Tom Rocklin to share with them our initial plan for studying the Division, and also to get their feedback on, and answer their questions about, this plan. The second meeting was held without VP Rocklin.

Senior UI Leader Interviews. We met individually with the following: Vice Presidents Wallace Loh, Tom Rocklin, and Doug True; Special Assistant to the President for Equal Opportunity and Diversity and Associate Provost for Diversity Marcella David; Director of Public Safety Chuck Green (in Finance and Operations); Provost's Office faculty/staff: Liz Whitt (SST), Michael Barron (Admissions), Pat Folsom (Academic Advising), Mark Warner (Financial Aid), and Larry Lockwood (Registrar).

Faculty Leadership. We met with the Faculty Council to hear their views on how DSS might better serve the academic mission of the University.

Staff Open Forums. Four open forums were held in two different locations, at different times of the day to accommodate a range of staff schedules. These were advertised by mass e-mail and by e-mail communications from Interim VP Rocklin and the various Division Directors. Attendance ranged from 1 to 20, totaling approximately 40 staff from most DSS units.

Student Open Forum. A single open forum was held for students. It was advertised via an email sent to all students enrolled in Spring 2009. Four students attended.

Faculty, Staff, and Student Website. A mass e-mail was sent to all UI students, faculty, and staff with an open invitation to comment on the division anonymously via a secure website. This website remained open for nearly 2 months, and we received over 100 comments, the majority of comments from staff and students.

Student Government Focus Group. We met with the current UISG leaders to learn about their interaction with Division leadership and staff and hear their views on what the Division should provide for students.

External Information Sources

Student Affairs Administrators. After consultation with DSS leadership, and consideration of the 2005 report from the Documenting Effective Educational Practice (DEEP) project, we selected four institutions—including both peers and those with a reputation for their successful student-affairs organizations—that represented a range of student-affairs models. We conducted videoconferences of approximately 1 hour with the chief student affairs officers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Oregon State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Bowling Green State University. Our goal in these conversations was to develop a better understanding of how successful student-affairs divisions worked at other institutions so as to be better informed regarding what practices might be implemented successfully at UI. Additional specific reasons for our particular selections were as follows:

Oregon State University. In 2008, Vice Provost for Student Affairs Larry Roper led an assessment for the Provost's office at UI related to diversity matters. Because of his familiarity with our campus, we thought his perspective might be especially useful.

University Madison-Wisconsin and *University of Nebraska-Lincoln* were selected because

they were both peer, research-oriented, universities but also offered contrasting configurations of the student-affairs division, including the location of the division in the organizational structure of the university. Specifically, University of Wisconsin-Madison is larger than UI, but is newly reorganized and is becoming known as an institution where student success is central to the mission. Its student affairs division is located under the Provost's Office. University of Nebraska-Lincoln: UNL's student-affairs division is located in the Chancellor's office and includes separate Vice Chancellor and Dean of Students positions. It has had notable success in reducing alcohol consumption and binge drinking on their campus.

Bowling Green State University has a long-standing reputation for being at the top of all institutions in best practices in student affairs.

Web-based Survey. With the help of Debora Liddell, Associate Professor of Counseling, Rehabilitation, and Student Development, we prepared a brief web-based survey on practicum placements of student-affairs/higher education program graduate students in student-affairs administrative offices, and distributed a request for information about this practice on the listserv College Student Personnel discussion (csptalk@listserv.louisville.edu), sponsored by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and a part of the Commission XII: Professional Preparation, a faculty group focused recruitment, preparation and continuing education of student affairs professionals for practice. The listserv includes over 300 faculty across the country. Faculty from 40 programs responded, 13 of whom were from public, high or very high research-intensive doctoral-granting institutions, which by Carnegie Classification makes them peer institutions.

Study Findings

Two broad types of issues emerged that may be labeled Structures and Processes, that is, those that concern structures—organizational and literal—and those that concern activities and functional processes, including organizational culture. We organize our report into these two overarching categories with an overall theme of how best to serve the University's students.

Structures

Leadership: Positions and Reporting Structure

Positions. Currently, a single person holds the dual titles of Vice-President for Student Services (hereafter VPSS) and Dean of Students, but we found no other institutions with this pairing, and we heard virtual unanimity both from within and outside the University that these positions were distinct and should be separated. Specifically, the Vice President is the administrative leader of the unit; has primary responsibility for charting its vision, setting priorities, and coordinating its units, programs, and activities; and oversees its financial, physical, and human resources. In contrast, the Dean of Students is the “face” of the Division to and for the students, represents and is the primary advocate for students, and oversees student programs and activities, as well as disciplinary matters.

We strongly recommend dividing these positions and distributing the duties between two senior leaders as described above for two primary reasons. (1) Both jobs are sufficiently demanding and complex that one person attempting to do both leads inevitably to “cutting corners” qualitatively and/or quantitatively. Even more importantly, (2) role conflicts necessarily arise when one person attempts to do both jobs. Specifically, the VP sometimes must make decisions—due, for example, to budgetary limitations or considerations affecting the broader University community—that may not be “ideal” from the student perspective. A separate Dean

of Students is free to champion student causes and, regardless of the outcome, can be seen by them as unequivocally their promoter, whereas a joint VP-Dean cannot, being constrained by other factors.

Reporting Structure. Currently, the VPSS reports directly to the President, a common structure in peer and “benchmark” institutions. Also common is for the VPSS to report to the Provost/Executive Vice-President, often having a seat on the President’s Council as well. Both structures have advantages and disadvantages; for example, having those in charge of curricular and co-curricular activities, respectively (e.g., an APUE and a VPSS), both report to the Provost enhances coordination across these two broad domains of student life. On the other hand, because the student body is the largest single constituent on any campus, having direct representation of all the non-academic aspects of their lives to the President better reflects the importance of this vital constituency. The common practice of the VPSS sitting on the President’s Council even when the direct report is to the Provost recognizes this fact.

The committee believes that the advantages of both these structures can be maximized by implementing the following two strong recommendations:

(1) That the VPSS continue to report directly to the President, that the newly created Dean of Students be a dual report to the VPSS as an Associate VP and to the Provost as a Dean, including sitting on the Deans’ Council, and that an additional reporting line be drawn from the APUE to the VPSS. This would both achieve high-level representation of students and serve the goal of coordination across the academic and co-curricular aspects of student life. It also would acknowledge that the interaction between these two offices is not hierarchical, but a fully cooperative and integrated venture between the University’s two most important units with regards to students.

(2) That both the VPSS and the Dean of Students be individuals who are qualified and experienced not only in student affairs administration but also for tenured faculty positions. We make the latter recommendation for two reasons: because (a) having this dual background will ensure expert and informed coordination across the two broad domains of students’ lives—curricular and co-curricular activities—which is critical for student success and (b) to underscore that the Division is co-equal partner, fully aligned with the primary mission of the University.

The Committee’s deliberations on the issue of which specific Division offices should report to the Vice President and which to the Dean, led us to recognize that there are many viable internal structures, each with advantages and disadvantages. Further, our interviews with student-affairs professionals revealed no single, dominant model, and one of our interviewees shared that reporting relationships were driven in part by the relative interests and expertise of the VP and the Dean. Thus, we concluded that the structure should be determined by the VPSS in preparation for hiring a new Dean of Students, perhaps with some room for revisions depending on the strengths and predilections of the individual hired.

Unit Boundaries: What’s In? What’s Out?

Hancher and Alumni Affairs. We strongly support the President’s decision to move Hancher and Alumni Affairs (UIAA) out of DSS to report to the to-be-created Office for Strategic Communication. Hancher clearly has a role to play in students’ lives and we urge coordination between Hancher, the Division, and the Provost’s Office on behalf of the students, but the much broader role that Hancher plays in the University community and the State of Iowa underscore the validity of the President’s decision. Similarly, cooperation between UIAA and other University offices, including athletics and the registrar, is important, but UIAA is not directly involved in the lives of current students, so removal from the Division is eminently reasonable.

Student Academic Services. The reporting structure of this group of offices, which at UI

includes admissions, academic advising, registrar, evaluation and exam services, and financial aid, varies across U. S. institutions. In some, these offices report—as they do currently at the University of Iowa—to the Provost’s Office because they administer important academically related services. In others, they are a part of Student Affairs—as they have been in the past at UI—because their services are intertwined with student housing, dining, new student orientation and so forth.

As with the VPSS’ reporting structure, there are advantages and disadvantages to both organizational schemes: Having those in charge of these interrelated services all report to a single office would enhance their coordination (e.g., between new-student orientation—a service of the student academic services units—and Weeks of Welcome, which is run by the Division). On the other hand, the services do differ in the degree to which they concern more academic (e.g., advising) or non-academic (e.g., dining) aspects of students’ lives. The unanimous view of the staff in these units with whom we spoke is that they should remain in the Provost’s Office, whereas those in DSS favored their reintegration into DSS.

In addition, the placement of the Career Center in the College of Business is an historical anomaly, given that its functions overlap with those of academic advising, as students transition from the University to the broader community. However, we did not include the Career Center in our review, so we recommend simply that the issue of how to integrate this unit’s activities, if not the unit itself, with other student academic services be given serious consideration.

Serious consideration should be given to relocating these student academic services to the office of the VPSS, which simultaneously would (1) expedite coordination efforts across the full spectrum of student services, (2) broaden the reach of student-focused initiatives, and (3) send a strong signal throughout the University of the intent to revitalize the renamed Division by giving it the breadth and depth of influence necessary to effect substantial change beneficial to students. We recognize that the staff in these support units may resist this move. Nevertheless, we believe that a dramatic relocation of these offices provides the greatest potential for changing both the perception of the Division as marginalized and the reality of the Division’s ability to serve students most effectively.

Importantly, whether or not these offices are moved, a spirit of cooperative collaboration must be (re)built between the Division and the Provost’s Office, as the most critical issue from the viewpoint of serving students is the integration of the *activities* of academic and co-curricular student services offices. Assuming that our other structural recommendations are followed, the close cooperation of the APUE and new Dean of Students, as well as the VPSS and Provost themselves, clearly will further this goal as well.

Cultural Houses (formally: Cultural and Resource Centers). Currently the three historical Cultural Centers (Afro-American, Asian Pacific American, and Latino Native American) and the new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Resource Center are units in the Office of Student Life. However, current national trends as well as a recent external review of these units on the UI campus indicate that the original mission of such centers to serve underrepresented groups has progressed to include provision of campus- and community-wide educational programs regarding diversity, and to emphasize broad and inclusive multiculturalism integrating multiple smaller units. From this perspective, the Cultural Houses currently are underfunded, understaffed, and “underplaced” as one of many students groups in the current Office of Student Life, rendering them unable to offer more than a limited range of programming focused primarily on students and not also the broader University and Iowa City communities.

Moreover, the Cultural Houses’ activities must align with an overall University vision and plan regarding diversity and multiculturalism, the development of which has been a major challenge at UI over the past decade, to the detriment of student success generally speaking and particularly with regard to recruitment and retention of students of color. The development of such a vision should be a primary charge of the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), in collaboration

with the VPSS and/or Dean of Students for student-focused activities within our broader vision. Thus, we strongly recommend that support for the Cultural Houses and their placement relative to the Center for Diversity and Enrichment (CDE) be a high priority conversation between the VPSS and the CDO. We strongly recommend consideration of consolidating the Cultural houses and CDE in the collaborative portfolio of the new Dean of Students and APUE.

IMU vs. Student Union

The IMU was arguably the aspect of the review that generated the most comment, particularly from students. It became quite clear that the “mixed” business model under which the IMU currently operates is simply not working. Specifically, the IMU is neither successful as a profit-generating unit nor does it serve students well. From the student’s perspective, the IMU emphasizes its profit-generating functions over student service, whereas from the business perspective, an external business review conducted in 2006 concluded that there was room for improvement in the IMU’s overall financial performance.

Notably, the students favorably contrasted the current placement of the bookstore in the University Capital Center (UCC) with its former location in the IMU, pleased with the more central location, and with the ready accessibility of inexpensive “brand-name” restaurant food as well as other college-student staples (e.g., drugstore, music store, bank, post office). They lamented the lack of recreational activities in the IMU (a bowling alley was mentioned frequently) and the difficulty of parking near the IMU for commuting students. They noted that it was difficult to schedule rooms even when they were not otherwise being used, and that holding student-organized activities and events in the IMU was hampered by excessive bureaucracy.

The committee lacks the expertise to make a specific recommendation about the direction that ought to be taken with the IMU, other than to underscore that the status quo is unacceptable. Possibilities include moving many current IMU functions (e.g., its use as a conference center) to the newly acquired Athletic Club and refashioning the IMU for student use, or using the IMU for business and other purposes, and turning the UCC into a Student Union. Our “bottom line” is that we strongly recommend that the University use the opportunity afforded by the flood to begin a conversation immediately regarding how to create a place where students *want* to congregate because it meets *their* needs.

A New Name

An issue that emerged unexpectedly from our conversations within and outside the University was that DSS should be renamed and we strongly concur, for several reasons: (1) The current title does not communicate well the diverse scope of the unit; (2) the current title is somewhat unusual; indeed, the Division often was referred to by the “industry standard” term, Student Affairs, even by individuals at the University of Iowa and, most importantly, (3) a name change would signal to the DSS staff and the broader University community that the Division has a mandate for major changes and is heading in new directions.

The committee strongly recommends that DSS be renamed and we propose as its new title the *Division of Student Life*. We offer this name for several reasons: (1) the term Student Life is broad and all-encompassing, and would communicate that the office is rededicating itself to a holistic, student-centered focus; (2) a change to this name would mark the beginning of a new era of cooperation and integration across the curricular and co-curricular aspects of students’ lives at the University, and (3) the most common title nationally, Student Affairs, could have negative associations on the UI campus. Another title for the Division that we considered was

the Office of Student Experience (or Experiences), but we emphasize that, whereas the title that is ultimately chosen is very important, even more critical is the name change itself.

We acknowledge that a reasonable argument against this title is that it currently is the name of a subdivision within DSS, so that its adoption could be temporarily confusing. We propose that the current OSL can be renamed as well, and discussed such possibilities as the Office of Student Co-Curricular Activities (OSCA) or simply the Office of Student Activities (OSA).

Processes

The Status Quo

The DSS perspective. Our conversations revealed considerable demoralization among DSS staff. In some offices, particularly, there was little support for staff development or participation in national student-affairs organizations. Division leadership appeared not to be active even within the group of student-affairs leaders in the CIC. Even more pervasive sentiments were that there was a large gap between DSS activities and the academic side of students' lives, that DSS was not widely respected on campus, and that the opinions of Division staff were devalued. There was wide-spread frustration that funding had not kept pace with expectations for both quantitative and qualitative increases in DSS-run activities and programming. There also appeared to be internal strife, perhaps due to competition for limited resources.

It is worth noting that, despite this general sentiment, there was also considerable optimism about the future of the Division. One office director, in an open forum, noted that staff in the division were, "...hungry to be a world class organization." And positive steps in that direction were offered at each open forum.

The campus perspective. The internal DSS culture described above was confirmed by campus constituencies outside of DSS. Many students described Division staff as not student friendly, and we heard from a number of quarters of a bureaucracy mired in tradition, with a negativistic, "can't do" attitude. Moreover, the internal strife appeared to have repercussions beyond the Division, such as requests (e.g., re: funding for student organizations) being shuffled from office to office leading to long delays or no resolution at all.

Also repeated by external constituencies of the Division were the possibilities created by collaborations like the Student Success Team (SST). The SST appears to be a positive development because it has led to the creation of teams with employees from inside and outside the Division that are helping to create or expand student-focused initiatives such as One Community, One Book; the Iowa Challenge; and Living and Learning Communities.

Best Practices

Student affairs experts recognize seven "best-practices guidelines" for student success whose purpose is to create and support environments where student learning and personal development can occur:

1. Engage students in active learning.
2. Help students develop coherent values and ethical standards.
3. Set and communicate high expectations for student learning.
4. Use systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance.
5. Use resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.

6. Forge educational partnerships that advance student learning.
7. Build supportive and inclusive communities.

The ongoing work of the Student Success Team mentioned earlier clearly is framed within these guidelines, our Committee considered them in our deliberations, and we recommend that, going forward, the Division utilize the professional discipline of student affairs more fully to serve students better, both in general and specifically with regard to the student-affairs educational units on our own campus. Our specific recommendations in this regard are below. We also view our recommendation that the VPSS and Dean of Students be both academically qualified for a tenured position and actively involved professionally in student affairs as another way to strengthen the connection between the Division and the discipline.

Integration of in-class and out-of-classroom activities. A repeated theme of our conversations both on and off campus was that close co-ordination between the academic/curricular and non-academic/student life administrations was essential for the highest quality student programming. There are multiple ways in which this may be effected, but most important are the co-creation of a common vision to enhance student learning, and ongoing communication and cooperation between the Provost's Office and the Division to develop and implement programming to realize that vision. In recent years at UI, both a common vision and ongoing cooperative communication have been lacking, but we heard considerable desire and will to move forward collaboratively to re-create a vibrant, student-oriented organization. We believe that the structural changes described above will facilitate this process, but that the most important ingredient is having strong, confident, cooperative, non-defensive, and non-territorial leaders in these offices who are invested in the same successful student outcomes.

Integration of student-affairs administration and the academic discipline of student affairs. Collaboration between student-affairs administration and the academic discipline of student affairs was common on the campuses of the student affairs administrators we interviewed, particularly through practicum placements of student-affairs/higher education program graduate students. Further, data from the 40 respondents to our web-based survey indicated that 94% of graduate students enrolled in higher education programs on these campuses worked in a student affairs office on or near their campus. In addition, the 13 respondents from high or very high research activity doctoral institutions reported an average of 27 out of 30 graduate assistants employed by the university per year (range = 13 to 65). Currently, the program at the University of Iowa is on the smaller end of this range, with 19 students, all of whom do have graduate assistantships in DSS.

The benefits of this practice go beyond the obvious of providing valuable hands-on experience to graduate students which, in turn, strengthens the academic program. It also connects student-affairs staff with current research and newly developing trends in the discipline which, in its turn, fosters both staff development and the development of better programming for students. Thus, we see this as an excellent opportunity for an academic partnership at UI that currently is underutilized relative to our peers. We recommend strongly that the Division work with the relevant programs in the College of Education to help the UI programs grow by expanding the number of graduate assistantships within DSS. This would benefit not only the faculty and students in these programs, but also DSS, as described above, and ultimately the University student body would be served better by a Division that epitomized the cutting edge of the profession.

Meeting the non-academic needs of students. Students in general, and those involved in student organizations in particular, expressed considerable frustration with working with DSS. Their experience is that the DSS "bureaucracy" hampers formation of new student organizations

and development of existing ones, and felt there was a general lack of support for a wide range of activities that they believe would enhance their college experience. They noted that there was a paucity of university-promoted “traditions” and insufficient student-centered activity, particularly during the late-night hours as an alternative to drinking at the many downtown bars. The University’s problem with student binge drinking will not be solved until there are sufficient, varied activities that students find attractive, to otherwise engage them in their leisure hours.

Dealing with violence. The issues of violence, sexual assault, harassment and student safety on and off campus came up in several of our conversations. These are critical issues that go beyond our charge, but support the need for broad and long-range campus conversations involving key constituents, including the VPSS and new Dean of Students. We endorse continued emphasis and focus on developing comprehensive programs to prevent violence, establish and communicate clear procedures for reporting violence and threatening situations, and strong and widely distributed education around diversity, civility, and respect.

Cultural change. The most difficult change to effect in any organization is in its culture but, if needed, it also is the most essential, because everything an organization does flows from its culture. It would be presumptuous of us, and we are not in a position to recommend any particular plan of action or strategy for cultural change within the Division, but we strongly recommend that this issue be addressed openly and boldly, through professional facilitation, to change the way that things are done within the Division and the way in which the Division interacts with UI students and rest of campus.

Summary of Recommendations

The committee views the continuation of Interim Vice-President Rocklin as an opportunity to begin to effect change immediately, rather than as a signal to continue in the status quo pending new leadership. There are many things that can and should be done now to enhance the Division, which will have the first and foremost benefit of improving the quality of student life at the University of Iowa.

We are confident that any changes made in the next 2 years would not hamstring a new VP, a common reason cited for not moving forward during an interim period. On the contrary, we firmly believe that a strengthened Division will be more likely to attract a dynamic, highly qualified leader. Therefore, we strongly urge that the President consider the following recommendations for implementation as soon as feasible.

Structures

Positions and Reporting Structure

- New Dean of Students position. Create a new Dean of Students position to serve as the “face” of the Division to and for the students, to represent and be the primary advocate for students, and to oversee student programs and activities, as well as disciplinary matters.
- Dual-report for Dean of Students and APUE. Make the Dean of Students position a dual report to the VPSS as an Associate VP and to the Provost as a Dean, including sitting on the Deans’ Council. Simultaneously, add a reporting line for the APUE to the VPSS as an Associate VP. The goal of these actions is to effect the integration of academic and non-academic student services for the betterment of both.
- Qualifications of VPSS and Dean of Students. Both the VPSS and the Dean of Students should be individuals who are qualified for tenured faculty positions as well as experienced and professionally active in student affairs administration.
- VPSS report. Maintain the direct reporting relationship of the VPSS to the President.

Unit Boundaries

- Hancher and Alumni Association (UIAA). Follow through on the President’s decision to move Hancher and Alumni Association (UIAA) out of DSS and into the new Office for Strategic Communication.
- Student Academic Services. Give serious consideration to relocating these offices (admissions, academic advising, registrar, evaluation and exam services, and financial aid) into the Division. Regardless of their placement, the VPSS, Provost, Dean of Students and APUE, and the Graduate College Dean where appropriate, should develop cooperative collaborations regarding the activities of student academic services and those of student housing, dining, and so forth, so that the students’ experience is one of seamless integration. Integration of the Career Center’s activities, and perhaps the Center itself, with the other student academic services should be a high priority conversation.
- Cultural Houses/CDE. Support for, and placement of, the Cultural Houses and CDE—as part of their reconceptualization in terms of multiculturalism as well as diversity—should be a high priority conversation between the VPSS/new Dean of Students and the University’s Chief Diversity Officer.

- IMU / Student Union. Use the opportunity afforded by the flood to consider immediately the (1) best way to use the IMU and (2) creation of a “true” *Student Union*, recognizing that these may be a single conversation or separate ones.
- New names. Rename DSS the Division of Student Life and rename the current Office of Student Life to avoid confusion.

Processes

Best Practices

- Integrate in-class and out-of-classroom activities. To enhance both the academic and co-curricular aspects of student life, the Division and Provost’s Office should work together to:
 - create a common vision
 - develop and implement programming
 - develop a system for ongoing communication and cooperation
 - develop educational partnerships focused on student learning and success.
- Enhance both the Division and relevant UI graduate programs by integrating administrative and academic aspects of student affairs. Begin a conversation between the Division and the relevant departments in the College of Education to grow our graduate programs in student affairs/higher ed administration and take more advantage of the student-affairs expertise on our own campus by increasing the number of graduate assistantships in the Division.
- Cultural change. Address the issue of improving the Division culture openly and boldly, through professional facilitation, changing the way that things are done within the Division and the way in which the Division interacts with UI students and rest of campus.

In conclusion, we reiterate that we believe the University should make an explicit commitment to providing its students with the same high quality in its co-curricular offerings as it currently does academically, and that deliberate and strategic efforts should be made to transform the Division into one with a national reputation for its use of best practices in student affairs. As part of our study, we contacted institutions that have that reputation. Five years from now, we would like other institutions to be contacting the University of Iowa for that same reason.