

Response of the Division of Student Services to the
Final Report on a Study of the Division of Student Services (April 2, 2009)

The Division of Student Services is grateful for the good work of the committee that prepared the study of our division submitted in April 2009. The committee's study has provided valuable guidance as the Division continues its work to support the success of students at The University of Iowa. Recent changes in leadership and structure within the Division provide an opportunity to examine our structure, practices, and processes.

The Division's leadership appreciates the opportunity to lend our perspectives on the issues raised by the committee.

Responses to specific recommendations.

- Make an explicit commitment to transform the Division into one with a national reputation for its use of best practices in student affairs.

The current leadership of the Division is committed to strengthening the Division's national reputation by demonstrating excellence in its support of student success. Accomplishing this goal will require continuing professional development throughout the Division, strategic reallocation of resources within the Division, expanded collaboration with academic affairs in general and with faculty members in particular, and identification of new resources to support the Division's work.

- Maintain the current direct reporting relationship between the Vice-President for Student Services (VPSS) and the President.

The senior leadership team of the Division strongly supports this recommendation.

- 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 new Dean of Students position is essential, and close collaboration between the Dean of Students and the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education will strengthen the University's efforts to support student success. The particular reporting relationships deserve closer study, but the senior leadership team of the Division believes that the reporting relationships should not undermine the strength of the relationship between the Dean of Students and the VPSS.

- The VPSS and Dean of Students should be qualified academically for tenured positions and actively involved professionally in student affairs.

The senior leadership team agrees that being qualified for appointment as a tenured faculty member is highly desirable for the VPSS. Having the same requirement for the Dean of Students is problematic. Presumably, a faculty appointment for this person would be at the rank of tenured professor. The ideal Dean of Students will have extensive experience as a student affairs professional. His or her career path will have progressed from front line work with students to management of an area to a position with significant leadership responsibilities. While there are professionals with that career path who have records of scholarship extensive enough to merit appointment as a tenured professor, they

are very rare.

- Rename DSS the Division of Student Life; rename the current Office of Student Life to avoid confusion.

The Division recognizes the committee's rationale for suggesting a name change. The particular recommended name deserves further study. "Student life" on most campuses, as on ours, refers to a subset of the functions currently performed by the Division. Renaming the Division as suggested is likely to cause confusion externally.

- Follow through on moving Hancher and the Alumni Association out of DSS and into the new Division of Strategic Communications.

The move will be completed on July 1, 2009.

- Determine how best to create a student-oriented Student Union *and*
- Determine how best to use the IMU facility.

The Division is committed to having a vibrant and relevant Iowa Memorial Union. As staff plan for recovery from the flood, students will be involved (as they have in the past) in planning changes to the ground floor and throughout the building. Among the possibilities being studied are:

- *Branded food concepts.*
- *Return of a bowling alley to the IMU.*
- *Twenty-four hour access to at least a portion of the IMU.*
- *Expansion of the Student Organization Office Suite.*
- *Addition of a plaza overlooking the river and linking indoor spaces to the river.*

The Office of Student Life has convened a group of students to identify bureaucratic barriers to planning events and spending allocated funds. This group expects to quickly produce specific recommendations.

Recent changes in the IMU's financial model (which recognized the uses of the building that are appropriately assigned to the General Education Fund) have improved the ability of IMU to function as a student union. Further refinements to the model may be necessary.

- Improve the Division culture, including focusing it more on student success.

The Division is committed to whatever changes are necessary to allow it to take a leadership role in supporting student success at The University of Iowa.

- Consider seriously relocating student academic services into the Division.

The senior leadership team of the Division supports this recommendation. Integrating some or all of the student academic service units with existing units in the Division has the potential to improve the student experience and to identify operational efficiencies. In the Division's view, relocation of the following units holds the most potential for improving student success.

- *Academic Advising*
- *Admissions (or the Orientation Services portion of Admission)*
- *Center for Diversity and Enrichment*
- *Pomerantz Career Center*

- *Student Financial Aid*
- 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.

The Division is committed to continuing its efforts to integrate the activities of all offices supporting student success.
- Integrate in- and out-of-classroom activities and programming via mechanisms determined collaboratively by the Division and Provost's Office.

The Division is committed to continuing its efforts to create a holistic student experience. In addition to collaboration with the Provost's Office, success will depend on collaboration with the undergraduate colleges, especially the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.
- 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.

The Division is committed to the challenge of helping to prepare the student affairs professionals of the future. To this end, division leadership, in discussion with the faculty of the Student Development and Student Affairs programs, has identified a strategy to dramatically increase (perhaps double) the number of graduate assistants in the Division, beginning in FY 11. During FY 10, the division plans to identify approaches to assuring the quality of the learning experiences of the graduate assistants.
- 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.

Finding a strategy for making the cultural centers central to the experiences of all students is a high priority for the Division leadership, and discussions with the CDO are welcome and likely to be useful.

Clarifications

- "...turning the UCC into a Student Union" (p. 9).

IMU leadership proposed moving at least some functions of the Union to Old Capitol Mall as early as 1997. Ultimately, the University chose to use space there for other purposes. Turning the UCC into a Student Union at this point would require a plan to relocate current UI functions.

While some students may report that the location is convenient, traffic in the IMU bookstore is dramatically less than when it was on the ground floor of the IMU. The bookstore is operating in approximately forty percent of the space that was available in IMU. In that space, it is impossible to sell virtually anything other than textbooks during the pre-semester rush. Given the low margins on textbooks, as opposed to general merchandise, that is not a tenable business model.

- “...leadership appeared not to be active even within the group of student-affairs leaders in the CIC” (p. 10)

Division leadership recognizes the importance of professional development for the Division’s staff. As in other units, we struggle to provide opportunities in the face of budget constraints. The Division’s directors do all regularly attend meetings of the relevant CIC (or Big 10 in some cases) groups. In addition, members of the Division regularly attend national meetings (e.g., ACPA and NASPA) and state and regional meetings.

Additionally, this year, the Division co-sponsored and participated in the visits of two outside speakers, George Kuh and Mary Howard Hamilton. Division attendance at events associated with each was very good.

A Final Note

Reviewing and discussing the committee’s report has been a healthy exercise for the Division’s leadership, and has fit into and supported ongoing conversations. The Division is committed to reaching its full potential and continuously improving its ability to support student success. As mentioned earlier, continuing professional development throughout the Division, strategic reallocation of resources within the Division, expanded collaboration with academic affairs in general and with faculty members in particular, and identification of new resources to support the Division’s work. The FY 10 budget will reflect both internal reallocations and new resources to support our work. In order to reach the Division’s potential, both of those will need to continue.