



President's **FOCUS**

Monthly Report to the Board

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Integrated Strategic Planning: Student Affairs Planning

Last month's *President's Focus* on the Academic Master Plan demonstrated how Academic Affairs has successfully created ambitious academic goals for the College. Increasing rates of graduation and transfer, reducing time and cost to completion, and improving alignment with transfer institutions and industries are all goals of the Academic Master Plan that rely closely on the work of Student Affairs. As the Division of Student Affairs finalizes its Student Affairs Master Plan, it has identified partnerships with other divisions that are essential for their work to be successful. Student Affairs' parallel approach to integrated planning taken in the Student Affairs Master Plan contains several productive, mission-driven strategies to support student needs so that they can advance academically and professionally.

Student Affairs' recent reorganization has included thorough assessments by external professionals, the realignment of several internal student services departments, and their rebranding as "Student Affairs" (the division's former name was "Student Services"). It has also brought together new teams of people to serve on taskforces and committees to forge consensus about next steps and to research national best practices. These processes have laid the foundation to improve Student Affairs' supports, programs, services, and opportunities to maximize its impact on student success. The division has also established a cooperative basis for planning around Student Affairs, which will root it firmly in the academic priorities of the College.



As in the Academic Master Plan (AMP), each of the initiatives contained in the Student Affairs Master Plan (StAMP) relies on close collaborations with other divisions. The development of an enrollment management plan by the Collegewide Enrollment Management Team, for example, is rooted in tight collaboration with Academic Affairs. By assigning specific components of the enrollment process—the onboarding process, recruitment plan, and scheduling plan, among others—to specific cross-functional teams, the areas work collaboratively on detailed adjustments to these vital processes. To advance the initiatives outlined in StAMP, committees composed of representatives from Students Affairs and other divisions will work collaboratively to implement the plans. Improvements to the frontline activities of student services that create more homogeneity across services and strengthen the One College model in support of the Seven Truths for a Common Student Experience are goals that also require partnerships with all other divisions—Academic Affairs, Advancement and Community Engagement, Administration and Fiscal Services (AFS), as well as with the Office of Information Technology, which is a part of AFS.

Collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to strengthen recruitment efforts and information services is a critical goal of the StAMP. Such teams will combine the strengths of academic expertise with the knowledge of recruitment, enrollment, and assessment staffs. By better aligning human resources and processes, the College will accomplish more effective recruitment activities.

Assessment has long been an important part of the enrollment process. By providing students with improved resources to prepare for the Accuplacer test, as well as advising on how their scores on the exam impact time-to-degree and cost-of-degree, the StAMP envisions helping students place more accurately and avoid the pitfalls of improper placement. Through the partnership of Student Affairs, OIT, the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE), and the Collegewide Assessment, Placement and Developmental Issues Steering Committee (CAPDI), improved placement should directly impact retention and completion. Ultimately, Student Affairs will provide the assessment centers with resources to help students prepare for the Accuplacer test, create a new online site that elaborates the contents of the test, and create an informational video about the testing process.

Obtaining financial aid is a central part of the enrollment process. Transitioning several paper forms to online versions in order to reduce wait times is another strategy for more successful



enrollment. Collaboration between the Office of Financial Aid and the Office of Information Technology is already advancing this process. Because forms required to verify FAFSA currently have to be signed by hand and mailed, this disadvantages students without access to the appropriate technologies. It also slows the processing and the delivery of funds, and introduces the risk that forms do not arrive at their destination. The Office of Financial Aid is currently working with a document imaging systems to re-create online versions of financial aid forms that can interact with Banner and allow students faster, more reliable access to the funds that enable them to cover personal expenses and continue with their education.

Orientation to the College is another a vital part of the student experience. Newly enrolled students have reportedly been confused by the multiplicity of orientation programs with slightly different content. To clarify this, Student Affairs plans to streamline three of them—the New Student Orientation, academic orientation, and the First Year Experience program into a single program with both online and in-person options. In addition, because of their special status, new ACES students will be required to participate in the First Year Experience program the summer before their fall enrollment.

The role of counseling and advising in retention and completion is emphasized throughout the literature on student success. Thus, StAMP includes a requirement that certain students—namely, first-time, degree-seeking students, those who test into developmental classes, and students on academic alert, restriction or suspension—to attend mandatory sessions with counselors. All of these groups will meet with counselors for their first 12 credit hours and then meet with academic program faculty beyond that. This move also allows the College to comply with the Maryland College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act (CCRCCA). Finalizing these processes, which has included delineation of job responsibilities, has required the work of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs working in seamless partnership.

The StAMP includes plans for a number of other improvements to existing student support programs. One is establishing a formal collegewide mentoring network to provide a single point of access to the multiple mentoring options on campuses—in addition to scaling up already existing programs that have shown successful outcomes. Another is proposing a revision to the Board of Trustees' scholarship to cover a second year of county tuition and fees, plus a book allowance, in the hopes of promoting retention and completion.



The StAMP also includes some entirely new initiatives that require the work of diverse divisions. Establishing a Student Health and Wellness Center to help students whose academic success depends on meeting additional basic needs such as nutrition, mental health, and housing. Financial aid coaching by part-time faculty who are trained in academic program compliance and academic progress is also planned. The coaches will work with students who are at risk of not meeting federal satisfactory academic progress due to improper enrollment or inadequate academic performance. By helping these students to correct errors, improve academic performance, and appeal any terminations status, the College will help a student population that is composed disproportionately of students of color. Finally, in an initiative to improve customer service, Student Affairs will combine existing qualitative and quantitative assessment tools and add any additional necessary ones. By centralizing the collection of customer service data from all units in the division, the College can more easily identify successes, as well as areas in need of performance improvement.

The StAMP is a working document that has created a detailed roadmap to maximize the impact that Student Affairs can have on student success. Since this success is ultimately measured primarily in metrics connected to Academic Affairs (such as retention, progression, and completion), it is essential that the goals and strategies of both divisions are tightly integrated. Ultimately, both divisions are responsible for several shared aims that answer to the College's broader mission: ongoing support for diversity in academic achievement; compliance with regulations to which the College is beholden (CCRCCA, Middle States' standards, the Maryland Higher Education Commission, etc.); deepening engagement with MCPS to prepare students for college; and provision of services and programs that meet national best practices. All of this work depends, additionally, upon the best use of partners in all the divisions as well as the Offices of Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management, Workforce Development & Continuing Education, Information Technology to ensure complementary efforts. The final Student Affairs Master Plan has captured these alliances well, and demonstrated how highly attuned Student Affairs is to the best practices of integrated planning for student success. As the College begins to plan for the next strategic plan, the careful work of Student Affairs will be essential.

