

Student Retention and Diversity Study (SRDS)
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
June 2009

Major Findings and Recommendations Summary

Students come to UTC primarily because of its smaller size, its location, affordability, and the fact that it has majors of interest to the student. Experiences at UTC are largely positive in terms of student/faculty interaction and peer relationships. University services, advisors, and social organizations also contribute to a positive experience. Students expressed a range of reasons for why some students leave UTC, and what factors are problematic for them. Students were especially interested in ways to bridge between college and careers, and felt internships and other forms of experiential learning are valuable.

Key Findings:

1. UTC's location and affordability are key positive factors attracting students to this institution.
2. Most students became interested in UTC due to high school recruitment, receipt of recruitment packages, sports recruitment, and academic recruitment. Relatively few students indicated coming to UTC as a result of knowing someone at UTC.
3. Most students have had positive advisement experiences; however, some students feel there is not sufficient time for advisement.
4. The majority of students felt strongly that professors should help students to build their intellectual abilities, make courses interesting, and provide additional information apart from the text in lectures. Many students also wanted help in finding a career niche.
5. Students expressed an interest in having courses with more open discussion, and class activities that make the class more interesting and engaging.
6. Some students expressed concern with courses that lacked sufficient structure, and many students were concerned about the high cost of textbooks.
7. Students felt internships and service learning options were important for preparing them for the world of work. Students also felt that offering more of these opportunities would make UTC especially attractive as an institution to attend. The biggest challenges to internships and service learning were time and transportation to project sites.
8. The opportunity to participate in a study abroad course was valued by most students, but the cost and time to participate were seen as prohibitive for many.
9. Less than a third of students indicated involvement in campus organizations, and a sizable majority indicated that having more diverse options for campus involvement would make UTC more attractive to attend. Students indicated wanting more ways to become involved on campus.
10. A majority of students stated they favored having a specific time designated for campus organization meetings, when no classes would meet, to facilitate organization involvement especially for commuter students.
11. Greater campus involvement would be aided by more diverse activities and advertisement of activities.
12. Most students had positive views of the level of multiculturalism and diversity at UTC, and believe that diversity improves the quality of education at UTC.
13. Students were unsure about a number of issues related to diversity, indicating a lack of information and communication about these issues.

14. Most students did not know of faculty or administrators who made prejudicial or disparaging remarks about individuals based on race, gender or sexual orientation. However, they were aware of students who had made such remarks.
15. Roughly a fourth of students reported being harassed at UTC, but they rarely reported these incidents.
16. The main diversity issues acknowledged at UTC were segregation in the cafeteria, and the lack of diversity in the sororities and fraternities. Students also felt diversity would be aided by more multicultural events on campus and a broader international student representation at UTC.
17. While over half of the respondents knew someone who had dropped out of UTC, most did not feel that they would do so.
18. The major reasons given for why individuals drop out of UTC were poor study habits, poor time management, academic difficulties, and lack of motivation.
19. Things students felt they would most like to change at UTC included parking and limited housing. They also felt students should have more information on how UTC spends funds.
20. Major strengths of the university were viewed as the tuition, small campus size, and the faculty and staff.

Recommendations:

- Continue and enhance study skills training and assistance to students.
- Offer tutorial programs in math at the university level, versus at the departmental level.
- Provide information on university services with registration each semester.
- Encourage organizational involvement by adopting a one-hour meeting time each week to facilitate participation by off-campus as well as on-campus students.
- Explore workable approaches for increasing the number of internship opportunities for students.
- Explore service learning as one approach for engaging students in experiential learning opportunities.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary task force to work on student engagement issues.
- Provide faculty development workshops on innovative teaching methods that are available and convenient for most faculty to attend.
- Review the time issues related to advising and student-professor meetings, and identify ways to improve the options for addressing student needs in this area.
- Increase the diversity of student organizations. This might be an issue referred to Student Government as well as other applicable offices.
- Increase the number of social activities and opportunities for student interaction on campus.
- Investigate the problems noted regarding diversity and harassment and identify how these can be best addressed at UTC.